The Trinity and Ecumenical Church Thought

The Church-Event

William C. Ingle-Gillis

THE TRINITY AND ECUMENICAL CHURCH THOUGHT

Some hundred years from inception, the ecumenical movement is stagnating. William C. Ingle-Gillis argues that the problem lies in modern ecumenism's treatment of denominational Churches as provisional entities requiring reunion to be more fully Christ's Body. In a work unique both to ecumenical studies and to trinitarian theology, the author redefines ecclesial life from the premise that God's essence is personhood-in-communion and that the ultimate calling of human persons is to share as fully in the divine life as Christ himself.

Concluding that the Churches are, by the Spirit's action, a tangible, dynamic event, wherein God makes visible his on-going reconciliation of the world to himself, Ingle-Gillis argues that the Churches' true life lies in coming-together, rather than being-together. This conclusion places ecumenism at the heart of Church life and witness.

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The Trinity and Ecumenical Church Thought

The Church-Event

WILLIAM C. INGLE-GILLIS
The Church in Wales, UK

ASHGATE

For Heidi and Mum,
who were always there.
And for Isaac,
who mostly just sat in my lap
and grabbed at the telephone.

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List of abbreviations

ALC	Anglican-Lutheran Commission
ALJC	Anglican-Lutheran Joint Commission
AOJDC	Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission
ARCIC-I	[First] Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission
ARIC	Anglican-Reformed International Commission
BC	John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*
BEM	Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*
BTR	Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*
BWA	*Baptist World Alliance*
BYMQ	Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain
C&S	Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*
CD[vol.]	Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [vol.]
'ChE'	Colin E. Gunton, 'The Church on Earth'
CiC	Paul Avis, *Christians in Communion*
CoE	Church of England
D&C	The Doctrine and Covenants
D&CO	Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*
'DHT'	John D. Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity'
DeIncar	Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*
DeSpS	Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*
ECG	Evangelical Church in Germany
EcuPatr	Ecumenical Patriarchate
FC	Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church*
F&O	Faith and Order Commission
ECF/NPN	*Early Church Fathers*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
JWG	Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches
LC[year]	Lambeth Conference [year]
MC	Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*
MCGB	Methodist Church of Great Britain
Members	World Council of Churches, *World Council of Churches Member Churches, Associate Member Churches and National Council Bodies*
n.d.	no date of publication given
n.p.	no place of publication given
NPC	Faith and Order Commission, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*
n.v.	no volume number given

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'OBP'	John D. Zizioulas, 'On Being a Person'
OORD	Oriental Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue
OT&M	Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*
PGP	The Pearl of Great Price
'PrCh'	John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, 'Primacy in the Church'
PTT	Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*
QFP(UK)	Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, *Quaker Faith and Practice*
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
RCLJC	Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission
ST&I	Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*
TrCr	Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator*
TrinF	Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*
'TrinFdn'	Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Trinitarian Foundation and Character of Faith and of Authority in the Church'
TTT	Christoph Schwöbel, ed., *Trinitarian Theology Today*
u.e.d.	unpaginated electronic document
U&UC	United and Uniting Churches Consultation
Vat. II	Second Vatican Council
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCC-EO-OOC	World Council of Churches-Eastern Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox Consultation
Y&T	Colin E. Gunton, *Yesterday and Today*

PART 1

The provisionalist ecclesiology of modern ecumenism

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Chapter 1

Ecumenism and ecclesiology

Introduction: the modern ecumenical challenge

Gathered at the Lambeth Conference of 1920 the diocesan bishops of the Anglican Communion issued *An Appeal to All Christian People*. The encyclical's prophetic tone embodied a profound hope, not uncommon amongst modern ecumenism's earliest advocates, that the Churches of Christ then stood at the cusp of a new era in Christian history. The twentieth century like none other before was to be an ecumenical century: one in which the bitter disputes of the past would finally give way to the reunion of all believers into one common flock united within a single fold. 'The times', proclaimed the bishops,

> call us to a new outlook and new measure. The Faith cannot be adequately apprehended and the battle of the Kingdom cannot be worthily fought while the body is divided, and is thus unable to grow up into the fulness of the life of Christ. The time has come, we believe, for all the separated groups of Christians to agree in forgetting the things which are behind and reaching out towards the goal of a reunited Catholic Church … .

> The vision which rises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all 'who profess and call themselves Christians', within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ.[1]

History would suggest that, despite the bishops' belief in the novelty of their appeal, the Lambeth proposal did not so much herald a unique development as a modern expression of Christianity's age-old struggle for unity. 'Is Christ divided?', demands the Apostle Paul himself to his feuding flock in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:13, AV).[2] 'Was Paul crucified for you?', he laments, this self-same Paul whose quarrels with the Judaisers of Antioch had required for resolution a full apostolic council (Acts 15, Gal. 2:1–14) – convened by the same disciples who once had bickered over seats in the coming Kingdom before Christ ended the matter on his own cryptic terms (Matt. 20:20–8, Luke 22:24–30). The contradictory realities of fractious humanity and the Gospel's communion-imperative have plagued Christian society from its inception.

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1 Lambeth Conference 1920, *An Appeal to All Christian People*, in 'Resolutions Formally Adopted by the Conference of 1920', in *Encyclical Letter from the Bishops, with the Resolutions and Reports*, 2d edn (London, 1920), §IV, res. 9.

2 Biblical quotations are taken from the New Jerusalem Bible unless otherwise indicated.

Indeed throughout the course of two Christian millennia, wherever dissension has been found the ecumenical challenge has appeared as a constant imperative. Despite generation after generation of religious war and persecution, bitterness and recrimination, anathema and propaganda, the 'heretic' has rarely been classified in precisely the same category as the 'infidel'. Even in the most polemic of times separated Nicene communities have often recognized a common bond, however tenuous. Time and again the Churches have undertaken to explore the theology of that bond and to give it more visible expression.

A smattering of illustrations might include Augustine's laborious efforts to restore communion with the Donatists, the sporadic bargains struck from the fifth to the seventeenth centuries between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians, the short-lived restorations of Orthodox-Catholic communion at the Councils of Lyons and Florence, doctrinal bargaining amongst Lutheran and Reformed communities during the Reformation's formative period, the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement's overtures to Rome and Constantinople.

Yet if the drive for reunion is not unique to modern times, the Anglican bishops' sense of urgency, seen in retrospect, was not out of place. The twentieth century was to be marked by staggering political, social and religious turbulence which altered all Churches' involvement with the world and with one another on the deepest levels. In the century's first half the collapse of the 'old world' European empires, punctuated by two world wars, spelled the end of the political protection under which the western Churches' missions had spread. The second half, dominated by Cold War ideological battles, saw in the West the marked rise of secularism that rapidly marginalized Christianity's societal influence and in the East produced outright persecution of all religions under state-sponsored atheism.

The present day has brought new challenges. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse many Eastern Churches struggle, with severely limited resources, to respond to massive social changes and new religious equilibria in their homelands. In historical trouble-spots the world over the decay of Cold War alliances has revived militant nationalism, which often has co-opted religious belief into its service. In the West free-market triumphalism offers up the Cult of the Almighty Dollar for 'all times and all places' – even times of economic recession – with the stock market as the temple for adoration. Throughout the world increasingly sophisticated transport systems have facilitated extensive migrations of large populations, whilst advancing communication and information technology has created an ever-freer global exchange of ideas. Together these trends have fostered the growth of multi-cultural, multi-ethical societies – no bad development in itself, but nonetheless one in which the Churches often struggle to find a meaningful voice.

Few of these dramatic upheavals had transpired when the Lambeth *Appeal* was issued, nor could many have been accurately predicted. But significant societal transformations were already evident in seminal form, and modern ecumenism constituted a notable aspect of the Churches' response. 'About the ecumenical movement, there is a certain historical inevitability'; so argue Anthony and Richard

Hanson.[3] The familiar 'truths' of Victorian-era empires, philosophies and ideologies were fast fading. In fact the Hansons argue that some 'truths', such as the intimate Church-state bond forged during the Reformation, had actually begun to atrophy decades before.[4] If the twentieth century yet held many a surprise in store, the Churches already had some premonition of challenges forthcoming, not least from a growing indifference to theism in Europe and the failure of traditional denominational polemics to excite in non-European societies the same passions or sense of identity that they aroused in their lands of origin.

The Churches of the early 1900s began to recognize that denominational isolationism and factional infighting were a liability to fulfilling Christ's mandate to engage the world and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). They began to discern the need to enhance whatever recognition of common faith and ministry already existed amongst them, to overcome doctrinal disputes and excommunicate status and to look towards one another for support rather than competition. By the close of the twentieth century's first decade, three world mission conferences – in London (1888), New York (1900) and Edinburgh (1910) – had begun to lay the foundations of a new phase of ecumenism in large part by challenging the credible witness and practical efficacy of separated, bickering faith-communities whose core proclamation was the Gospel's healing power, the restoration of the sinner and the unity of God and humanity in the Lord Jesus Christ.[5] 'It can be said', writes John Paul II,

> that the ecumenical movement in a certain sense was born out of the negative experience of each one of those who, in proclaiming the one Gospel, appealed to his own Church or Ecclesial Community. This was a contradiction which could not escape those who listened to the message of salvation and found in this fact an obstacle to acceptance of the Gospel.[6]

Thus, out of a certain practical necessity was born modern ecumenism.

Development and characteristics of modern ecumenism

From these pragmatic beginnings the process of *rapprochement*, although by no means complete, has been remarkably swift, given the depth of Christianity's divisions. The

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3   A.T. and R.P.C. Hanson, *The Identity of the Church: A Guide to Recognizing the Contemporary Church* (London, 1987), p. 39.

4   Ibid.

5   Mary Tanner, *What is Faith and Order*, paper prepared for Faith and Order Consultation with Younger Theologians, Turku, Finland, 1995, online edn, par. 4. See Thomas A. Askew, 'The 1888 London Centenary Missions Conference: Ecumenical Disappointment or American Missions Coming of Age?', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18 (July 1994): 113–18; the 1888 Conference, Askew argues, represented an intermediate stage in the Churches' transition from paternalistic religious wings of colonial empires to modern ecumenical communities.

6   John Paul II, *Christian Unity: Encyclical Letter* Ut unum sint *of the Holy Father John Paul II on Commitment to Ecumenism* (Sherbrooke, Québec, 1995), par. 23.

initial flurry of letters and encyclicals such as the Lambeth *Appeal*, meant both to test the ecumenical waters and to propose terms of engagement, were quickly followed by resolutions committing Churches to ecumenical work, preliminary theological investigations, prototypical intercommunion proposals and a handful of actual agreements amongst like-minded Churches.[7] With the advent of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921, the first Life and Work Conference (L&W) in 1925 and the Faith and Order Conference (F&O) of 1927, modern ecumenism gained its first permanent institutions which, given the participation not only of the major Protestant denominations and Anglicans but also of Orthodox and Old Catholics, began to assume universal proportions, incorporating as it did elements of all major Christian traditions, although not yet the Church of Rome itself. By 1948 the latter two structures had coalesced into the World Council of Churches (WCC), which at its Delhi Assembly of 1961 would incorporate the IMC as well. Finally in the mid-1960s the Second Vatican Council committed Rome 'irrevocably', in John Paul's words, to the ecumenical project and culminated in the December 1965 retraction of the excommunications in force since 1054 between Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.[8] These developments together with increasing local involvement in ecumenical projects have helped to establish amongst mainstream Christianity the goal of reunion and the imperative of common mission as critical fixtures of modern Church life.

Today the WCC remains the most visible and central institutional expression of the ecumenical project. Counting its denominational membership at around 340, it includes many Churches from the mainstream Protestant traditions, a majority of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, a growing number of conservative evangelicals and pentecostals, many of the 'new' Churches now exploding out of Africa and of course the 'United and Uniting' Churches, the movement's most conspicuous fruit.[9] (Notably, many in the last two categories arose in the same missionary venues in which Church division had proven a hindrance.) Although the Roman Catholic Church has never formally sought membership, it too has become critical to Council policy, programmes and studies through its Joint Working Group and full, lively membership in the Faith and Order Commission. Statistics aside, the ecumenical spirit has come far from the days in 1920 when the Lambeth bishops could see their vision only far in the distance. Today the ecumenical proclamations

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7   G.K.A. Bell, ed., *Documents on Christian Unity: 1920-4* (Oxford, 1924) offers a broad collection of early ecumenical correspondence, statements, encyclicals and agreements.

8   John Paul II, par. 3; see Edward Yarnold, *They Are in Earnest: Christian Unity in the Statements of Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II* (Slough, 1982), p. 67; Methodios Fouyas, *Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism* (London, 1972), pp. 214ff.

9   Note that the WCC, although of pivotal importance, represents only one stream of the movement; some evangelicals and pentecostals, wary of the WCC's 'liberal' methodology, have employed parallel structures since 1974; see ch. 1, n. 20, below. Additionally Eastern and Oriental Orthodox have lately expressed deep disquiet about their perception of a prevailing Protestant ethos in the Council; see [World Council of Churches-Eastern Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox Consultation], *Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC: WCC Consultation with Its Orthodox Member Churches* [*Chambésy Statement 1995*], in *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (Apr. 1996), online edn: u.e.d., especially par. 7.

are much more confident, as F&O's Fifth World Conference message illustrates: 'We say to the churches: *there is no turning back*, either from the goal of visible unity or from the single ecumenical movement that unites concern for the unity of the Church and concern for engagement in the struggles of the world'.[10]

However heartening such signs of hope may be, wisdom would counsel against drawing conclusions too rapidly, for more than eight decades after the Lambeth *Appeal*'s unambiguous cry for transformation in the Churches' manner of co-existence the transformation is incomplete. In the final analysis tenacity cannot by itself suffice to reunite the world's diverse Christian populations – nor can mere containment efforts in response to secular challenges. The 'new outlook' to which the bishops refer demands the creation of a clean heart and renewal of a right spirit (Ps. 51:10) that goes well beyond interdependence based mainly on damage control. The 'new measure' underscores the Churches' need to treat division and unity not simply by reacting to the problems of a new age, but by embarking on a theological and pastoral journey of much further-reaching and longer-lasting consequence. Ultimately the *Appeal* reminds us that any successful ecumenism must embrace theological expression and pastoral dynamics that surpass not only the historical causes of division, but historical reunion efforts too, insofar as those efforts have not finally borne fruit.

The beginning of the twenty-first century, roughly a hundred years removed from the earliest chapters of modern ecumenism, provides a suitable moment to reflect on the movement's impact on the Churches of Christ; to evaluate its success in meeting its aims and facing its challenges; and, through an exploration of its theological basis, to offer suggestions for its long-term viability and direction in the years to come. Ultimately successful ecumenism must involve *sustainable* convergence in communion amongst the Christian peoples. Were modern ecumenism's early proponents truly justified in proclaiming the advent of a new era in ecclesial life, and have their successors lived up to the task of forging the convergence envisioned? At the end of the twentieth century, conclusions were mixed.

On the one hand, Aram I, Armenian Orthodox Catholicos of Cilicia and Moderator of the WCC's Eighth World Assembly in Harare, points to a consensus developed in the last decade that the ecumenical movement has arrived at a crossroads: 'Some refer to the present period as one of "transition"; others speak of "uncertainty" and "stagnation"; still others would go so far as to say that the movement is in the process of "losing its integrity"'.[11] Theories abound to account for the situation: human impatience with a slower reunion dynamic than was predicted, internal denominational struggles over both issues and power, lack of visionaries to succeed the movement's originators, protectionism over confessional distinctives, the institutionalization of the ecumenical spirit and lack of ecumenical education amongst local communities and ministers. Perhaps most damning is a growing belief

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10 Faith and Order Commission, *Message from the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, statement prepared at Faith and Order World Conference, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 13–14 Aug. 1993, online edn, par. 3.

11 Aram I, 'The Ecumenical Movement at a Crossroads', *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (Oct. 1995), online edn: u.e.d.

that bilateral dialogue commissions have become theologically repetitive – too timid to face the most divisive issues.[12] Yet however the root causes of this crisis are conceived, those committed to the ecumenical project have been forced, like their forebears, to search first 'for a new identity, a new self-expression, a new orientation' in a rapidly changing world and then to consider what risks they may soon need to take for the sake of unity.[13]

On the other hand, despite recent uncertainty about the movement's direction and speed, modern ecumenism has produced substantial positive changes in the overall character and customs of interdenominational relations.

First and foremost, a general emphasis on theological convergence rather than concession has kept the Churches talking amicably. This simple fact of modern inter-Church relations stands in sharp contrast with much in the historical record and is a testament to the methods and perseverance of those who forged the present movement. Earlier reunion efforts were often significant in their day, but generally short-lived and only marginally successful. In some cases they even split previously-unified local or regional Churches amongst the larger world communions.[14] Without non-threatening means of ecumenical involvement we can easily envision a scenario in which modern efforts might have fallen apart under the weight of historical divisions. Instead the Churches have thus far stayed the course, no doubt in part because of the sheer doggedness of the movement's idealists, but also surely because an atmosphere has developed in which confessional distinctives are offered to the larger community as gifts rather than weapons, in which 'mutual conversion' is stressed rather than compromise and in which Churches remain free to hold to their unique characteristics without having their ecumenical commitment challenged.[15] As a result the last century has spawned a near-universal reunion dialogue which for the first time in history lies consistently at the heart of day-to-day ecclesiastical operations.

Second, patience in dialogue has nurtured amongst the separated communities an increasing degree of mutual understanding and recognition of one another's ecclesial status. Even though sustained sacramental communion, the ultimate mark

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12 Ibid.; [United and Uniting Churches Consultation], *Built Together: The Present Vocation of United and Uniting Churches (Ephesians 2:22): Report of the Sixth International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches*, statement prepared by Consultation of United and Uniting Churches, Ocho Rios, Jamaica, Mar. 1995, online edn, pars. 33–5, 49; Konrad Raiser, 'Fifty Years of Ecumenical Formation: Where Are We? Where Are We Going?', *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (Oct. 1996): 448–9; Konrad Raiser, 'Report of the General Secretary', in *Together on the Way: The Official Report of the Eighth Assembly* [*Harare Report*], ed. World Council of Churches (1998), online edn, §3.2, par. 6; contrast Michael Kinnamon, *Truth and Community: Diversity and its Limits in the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, 1988), p. 31.

13 Aram I, u.e.d.

14 For example,, the split between the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches or the divisions within certain historically non-Chalcedonian traditions such as the Syrian.

15 Raiser, 'Report', §3.2, par. 17; U&UC, par. 55; cf. David Bird et al., *Receiving the Vision: The Anglican-Roman Catholic Reality Today* (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1995), p. 146.

of success, remains some way off for Churches of the three major Christian traditions (Catholic, Orthodox and Reformation), the modern ecumenical movement is unique in the extent to which it induces Churches collectively, congregations locally and Christians individually to recognize the genuine connection of 'foreign' believers to the life of the Church universal. Even during past periods of ecumenical activity such recognition has often been severely limited, observed primarily amongst Churches most similar and frequently applied somewhat arbitrarily. Today, by providing space for believers to explore in their own time the extent to which they already hold a common faith and communion, modern ecumenism has enabled mutual recognition amongst the mainstream traditions to grow increasingly explicit and consistent.[16] Many Reformation Churches now translate mutual recognition directly into sacramental practice through open eucharistic hospitality even prior to full doctrinal agreement or structural reunion.[17]

The recognition phenomenon may be due in part to the vast institutional fragmentation of modern Christianity; for in practice the existence of hundreds of sects renders suspect any claim that participation in the life of Christ is limited to one Nicene Church only or a select few. More importantly, however, establishing a pattern of consistent ecclesiological exploration, re-examination of ancient disputes in a new generation and practical co-operation in mission and prayer has caused the Churches increasingly to recognize and actualize their common life. The kernel of widespread mutual recognition present from modern ecumenism's outset has been carefully nurtured these many decades and to all appearances has grown into a very stable structure.

Third, the wide proliferation of multi- and bilateral dialogues has enabled the Churches gradually to develop a common diplomatic language and common methods of exploring ecclesial life (for example, the WCC's thematic studies on *koinonia*).[18] Of course, diplomatic language by definition invites the risk of semantic games – wordplay that may turn deceptive or vague at critical junctures, creating an illusion of greater harmony than actually exists.[19] Moreover, joint committees

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16 This is not to say that all Churches recognize one other as participating *equally* in ecclesial life and ministry; see pp. 16ff., 19ff., below.

17 Additionally many now treat reunion as a goal best accomplished in stages; increasingly common are intercommunion agreements that declare participants' ministries fully interchangeable without integrating Church infrastructures – for example, Anglican-Lutheran Joint Commission, *The Porvoo Common Statement* (London, 1993), online edn – and indeed covenant agreements that establish only systematic work *towards* visible unity and interchangeability of ministries – for example, Methodist Church of Great Britain and Church of England, *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations Between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (London, 2001).

18 Ans J. van der Bent, ed., *Major Studies and Themes in the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, 1981), provides an exceptionally comprehensive listing and history of thematic studies undertaken by the WCC and its subordinate bodies since its founding in 1948.

19 For example, see Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Final Report 1981*, in *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (Geneva, 1984); Anglican-Roman

and ecumenical writers must be careful not to absolutize particular verbal formulae which, without clear exposition of underlying realities, may circumscribe the rich nuances of the Gospel revelation. Nonetheless, with these caveats, common modes of discourse do encourage Churches to embrace deeper exploration of common religious themes, re-open avenues of mutual understanding long closed and re-visit certain disputes in which semantic distinctions may have played as important a role as real theological differences.

Finally, the practical imperatives motivating the modern unity movement have never been forgotten nor have they abated. Although defensive reaction to harsh circumstance cannot provide the sole foundation of a stable movement, it can become a springboard to deeper awareness of human need and the will to respond. Throughout the last century ecumenical work has largely continued to take its cue from the Churches' perception of an urgent need in the dynamics of a postmodern world to develop their sense of interdependence into a viable, consistent witness to the unity that Christ wills for his creation (John 17:11–23). This realization finds specific focus in the movement's creation of a common healing mission in which the Churches meet the world's peoples in their own element according to their own particular needs.[20] Accordingly the WCC in particular, with close Roman Catholic co-operation, has sought to tailor its programmes not simply to resolve in academic fashion the traditional theological divides of a splintered Christian world, but also to correlate their insights with the Churches' empirical experience of life in Christ and to eliminate the false distinction between theology and the Church's social ministry to creation.[21] Indeed far from distinct, says M.M. Thomas, ecumenical theology and

Catholic International Commission, Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission and Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Clarifications of Certain Aspects of the Agreed Statements on Eucharist and Ministry of the First Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*, with a letter from Edward Idris Cassidy (London, 1994). The ARCIC-I document proclaims 'substantial agreement' – *Windsor Statement*, par. 12 – between Anglicans and Catholics on eucharistic doctrine. Theologians and leaders from both Churches, however, have challenged the sufficiency of ARCIC-I's concepts of *real presence*, *transubstantiation* and indeed *substantial agreement*. The Churches, whilst 'welcoming' the reports, have taken little further action. Cf. Aram I, u.e.d.

20 To be sure, ecumenists are not unified on the means: see Jacques Matthey, 'Milestones in Ecumenical Missionary Thinking from the 1970s to the 1990s', *International Review of Mission* 88, no. 350: 293, 295, 299–300; International Congress on World Evangelization, *Lausanne Covenant*, 1974, in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, eds Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (Geneva, 1997), pp. 358–64. One of the most visible divisions is between the WCC and the (evangelical) Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. WCC policy has been to promote the Churches' engagement in common social witness based on shared ethics (for example, in programmes to combat racism or promote economic justice) alongside inter-Church dialogue, common prayer and sacramental life. The Lausanne Committee holds that the priority of ecumenical co-operation should be direct evangelization of 'the unreached'. However, the two groups are not in direct competition, and some convergence between them has occurred in recent times.

21 In recent years the Churches' common experience has been emphasized through studies on *koinonia* and its practical manifestations, whilst the Churches' public witness has been explored in studies on the integral relationship between ecclesiology and moral or

concern for the world 'have interpenetrated each other so much that Church unity, world mission and the struggle for social justice and world community are now seen as impossible to deal with in isolation from each other'.[22]

This co-operative response to the world's needs would alone mark modern ecumenism as a movement unique from its predecessors. Although every historical era has produced its own peculiar threats to portions of Christian world, rarely since the end of the Roman persecutions have *all* segments of Christendom come under such constant existential challenges as those of the last century. Rarely has the impetus for ecumenical endeavour derived from such an urgent perception of the requirement for unity not only for the Church's sake, but for creation's as well.

All of these developments should be welcomed as signs that modern ecumenism has matured by and large in a healthy, promising manner. That the movement has had its fair share of controversy and growing pains is surely to be expected from such an inherently difficult undertaking. The reunion of hundreds of Christian sects is, after all, no small goal; perhaps the early leaders' time-scale expectations were simply too optimistic. The present-day consensus that the movement requires re-thinking and re-tooling is surely reasonable – a matter of basic maintenance. Recognition of incompleteness should not detract from the elementary reality that on a day-to-day basis Christians simply get along better than they did a hundred years ago and for the longer term are employing stable means of interaction that seem to have made the ecumenical project a permanent feature of Church life.

Ecclesiological convergence: a primary investigative parameter

In the final analysis, however, the fundamental ecumenical challenge in any age comes down to one critical factor: *convergence both in theory and in practice on the doctrine of the Church*. For precisely in the Church's daily worship and ministries do the doctrines of Christian faith (those held in common and those yet in dispute) find tangible expression. Here amongst the historical faith-communities does the Spirit effect the signs of salvation – the restoration of communion between God and humanity – and the abiding, healing presence of Christ in solidarity with his creation. Without a clear vision of the ongoing, concrete, *ecclesial* sign of God's

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ethical dimensions of Christian faith; see, for example, Faith and Order Commission, *Towards Koinonia in Worship* [*Ditchingham Letter and Report*], statement prepared by the Faith and Order consultation, Ditchingham, England, 1994, online edn; Faith and Order Commission and World Council of Churches Study Programme Unit III (Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation), *Costly Commitment*, study prepared at F&O-WCC Study Unit III Consultation, Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Israel, Nov. 1994, online edn; Faith and Order Commission and World Council of Churches Study Programme Unit III, *Costly Obedience*, study prepared at F&O-WCC Study Unit III Consultation, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 1996, online edn; Faith and Order Commission and World Council of Churches Study Programme Unit III, *Costly Unity*, study prepared at F&O-WCC Study Unit III Consultation, Rønde, Denmark, Feb. 1993, online edn.

22 M.M. Thomas, *Search for Wholeness and Unity*, address to the World Council of Churches Central Committee, 1973, in Kinnamon and Cope, p. 44.

Logos acting in the world to forge a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1), the economy of salvation becomes disembodied from its historical anchor and history from God's eschatological will; the resolution of long-disputed theological models, however integral to the articulation of faith, becomes mere philosophical abstraction; and the search for unity amongst humanity becomes an exercise in futility. Thus, the development of a *viable ecclesiological model* – one that comprehends the common life of the actual Christian communities, reflects accurately their experience of life in Christ and with one another and enables them to enact in practice the theological convergence achieved theoretically in dialogue – becomes the true and final test of the ecumenical movement's success and sustainability.

Of particular importance is the challenge that *plurality* in theological, doxological and institutional manifestations of Christian faith poses for the Churches' self-identity and approaches to Christian unity, for in this very issue's resolution is the essential task of ecumenical ecclesiology most visible. Of course, as noted previously, Churches throughout history have rarely failed to make some measure of metaphysical distinction between their non-communicant Christian counterparts and secular organizations or non-Christian faith communities. Yet prior to the rise of modern ecumenism interdenominational polemic had ordinarily taken precedence over co-operation.

As a result Christians had grown accustomed to the daily exercise of faith in relative isolation. They had learnt to treat the unity of their own immediate worshipping communities as the primary evidence of ecclesial authenticity and authority. Even to this day the general concept of *unity*, by which Christians have typically meant incorporation into Christ by the Spirit through a common faith, sacrament and ministry, provides the denominations with an internally coherent argument that their own immediate communities constitute a true iteration of the *una sancta*. Historically an inference has often followed that 'foreign' communities, bearing as they do different forms of Gospel proclamation and ministry, have been deficient in authentic ecclesial character.

With the advent of modern ecumenism, however, general interest has shifted away from polemic towards convergence and commonality. And as communities have formally expanded their understanding of the Church's boundaries to include groups beyond their own immediate jurisdiction they have struggled to re-assess the concept of unity and re-state it in broader terms. Christian Duquoc argues that

> little by little, the practice of ecumenism has blurred the lines of Church membership. There has been a transition from war between Christians to negotiation … . Ecumenism is impossible without relativizing one's own point of view … . To negotiate is to recognize that the other party has some justification for its position. To negotiate is to join in the game of compromise. One does not negotiate with evil or sin; one destroys it. To negotiate is to recognize the right of the other Christian to confess that the status of his or her church is different.[23]

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23 Christian Duquoc, *Provisional Churches: An Essay in Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, trans. John Bowden (London, 1986), p. 15.

The open, seemingly permanent and near-universal character that contemporary ecumenical effort has imparted to the Christian peoples' mutual recognition has meant that denominations can no longer remain content to maintain in theory a connection with 'foreign' believers whilst in practice identifying 'authentic' ecclesial life exclusively with their own confessional self-expression. Churches have found that the standards of common faith and *praxis* by which they have denied apostolic authenticity in other communities have been called into question by their experience of plural Christian ministries accomplishing at the least some semblance of the 'true' Church's mission and, at best, a genuine parity. Alongside the explicit avowal of a genuine fellowship amongst all Christians there arises at least an implicit acknowledgement that the recognisable boundaries of the Church itself must touch upon a *plurality of faith-communities*. Thus, the ecumenical movement has rendered impossible catholic ecclesiology as an isolated, inward-looking, intra-denominational exercise. Any realistic attempt to produce a comprehensive ecclesiology must venture some explanation for the existence of non- or semi-communicant communities – a plurality of Churches – and their role in actualizing a Gospel of communion.

This shift in perspective raises key existential questions concerning the Spirit's formation and revelation of God's People in history:

(1) Given the widespread acknowledgement of multiple communities, each with its own reasonable claim to some measure of authentic ecclesiality, on what basis shall we now identify the essential reality of Christ's one true Church? What elements are necessary to constitute a genuine iteration of the *una sancta* in its fullness? How and where would we locate *the* Church visibly in and amongst a plurality of Christian Churches?

(2) To what extent do Christians outside a given communion participate in ecclesial life? How and how effectively are the essential elements of the Christian Church expressed amongst the separated faith-communities? How should we characterize the involvement of multiple Churches with the one Christ's revealed presence in the one Spirit's abiding action?

In sum: where in and amongst the diversity of recognisably Christian bodies do we find *the* Body of Christ – the *locus* of the Spirit's abiding, revealed and revealing presence; the tangible wellspring of humanity's unity with one another and with God? And importantly *what significance does the fact of multiple faith-communities hold for our apprehension and experience of this revelation?* The first steps towards a functional ecumenical ecclesiology must come in the attempt to grapple with these problems: to create a credible theological convergence on the manner in which the multiple faith-communities with their multiple doctrines, forms and orders relate to one another and to God.

This is not to suggest that ecclesiological convergence should not proceed at its own pace alongside other vital areas of theological discourse. We need not require a complete, systematic treatment in order to appreciate the value of ecumenical progress thus far. However, to evaluate the modern movement's long-term efficacy we must enquire into prevailing ecumenical thought to determine what ecclesiological patterns, if any, have emerged. We must then ask whether these patterns represent the

beginnings of a general conceptual framework within which effective exploration may be carried out and sustained convergence reasonably anticipated. Do they give adequate expression to the real and diverse situations in which the Churches find themselves in relation to God and to one another? And do they do so whilst also working themselves out in a fashion consistent with scripture and the tradition of the Church throughout the ages, to whose heritage the modern communities lay claim?

Three models for ecumenical ecclesiology

In recent years the WCC has exhibited sufficient confidence about the direction of ecumenical dialogue to charge Faith and Order with the task of preparing a common ecclesiological statement through which Council members may 'give expression to what the churches can now say together about the nature and purpose of the Church'.[24] Actually the ecumenical movement has not yet produced one dominant ecclesiological paradigm; indeed an important portion of what the Churches can say together is to point out vital areas of disagreement on the 'institutional dimension of the Church and the work of the Holy Spirit'.[25] Nonetheless, consensus has begun to solidify around three broad models that account for the multiplicity of worshipping communities and their ecclesial status; for the present purposes we shall dub these the liberal, the Catholic/Orthodox and the conservative models. Despite the finer nuances of the multitude of specific theories, on a broader scale most lend themselves readily to classification within one of these categories. It bodes well for ecumenical ecclesiology that the Churches have successfully consolidated scores of ecumenical-ecclesiological paradigms into so few common models after so short a time. Disappointing, however, is that the models' dividing-lines fall very close to those already separating the major denominational groupings or Church traditions, a point which suggests that considerable work remains to be done along the primary fault-lines of Christianity.

(1) The *liberal model* arises principally from mainstream Protestantism, although it also claims the individual loyalties of many Anglicans and some Roman Catholics, whose Churches collectively fall into other categories. (This is the model that on occasion the WCC's critics will accuse the Council of favouring.)[26] The approach entails blanket recognition of all Nicene communities as legitimate manifestations of Christ's Church through their common faith in Christ's resurrection and their baptism in the triune name. Each community is said to be more or less equally involved with the Spirit's grace and authentically endowed with his signs. None has a justifiable claim to superior ecclesial status. Edmund Schlink sums up the position concisely:

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24 Faith and Order Commission, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper, no. 181 (Geneva, 1998), online edn, par. 4.

25 Ibid., pars. 4, 13.

26 See pp. 31f., below; cf. World Council of Churches, *Toronto Statement*, statement prepared at the World Council of Churches Central Committee meeting, Toronto, Ontario, 1950, online edn, §III.5.

The common features we find in the separated churches are not 'elements' of our own church in other churches; they are means and fruits of Christ's work in the separated churches in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we cannot regard the other churches as planets rotating around our own church; we must perceive Christ as the sun around whom we and the other churches rotate. A sort of Copernican change in our evaluation of the other churches is necessary. We are not to judge the other churches from the standpoint of our own church; we are to submit ourselves together with the other churches to the judgment of Christ.[27]

The model, however, does not represent an essentially pluralist conception of Church life, for, although liberals acknowledge the multiple communities, their central affirmation is of a *single* universal Church in which Christians from all confessional fellowships participate, bound together already by a common baptism into one body. Typically characterized as 'parts' or 'branches' of the larger whole, all Christian Churches are said to bear unique gifts which the larger community will one day require if the fullness of the Gospel message and the perfect visible unity of God's People is to be realized.

All Churches, however, are said to exist in brokenness, error and sin, their wilful pride evident in their refusal fully to actualize their mutual interdependence in Christ. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, for example, describes the situation thus:

Paul speaks of the Church as 'one body in Christ' (Romans 12:5) or 'the body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:27) to stress the variety of gifts present in the members of the Church for the good of all. Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 1:22-23 stress the lordship of Jesus over all the Church, his body. Thus, the Church gets its unity from the 'one Lord' (Ephesians 4:5) under whom it   lives … .

Those who disrupt the unity of the Church are held to be culpable as wrongdoers (Galatians 2:11-20), who are 'not acting consistently with the truth of the Gospel' (v. 14; cf., 2:5), and who need to return to the truth of the Gospel and faith in Christ as the essentials for Christian fellowship.[28]

From a similar perspective Lukas Vischer, long-time director of the F&O secretariat, characterizes the Church as 'one people in many places' whose God-given unity and catholicity are marred by sin and wilfulness, but not in the final analysis destroyed: Christians need merely 'to be reminded that the people of God has a universal character and that the fellowship which binds it together cannot be restricted to any human boundaries'.[29] Likewise Anthony and Richard Hanson describe today's communities as participants in an *internal* Church schism, the

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27 Edmund Schlink, 'The Unity and Diversity of the Church', in *What Unity Implies: Six Essays after Uppsala*, ed. Reinhard Groscurth, World Council of Churches Studies, no. 7 (Geneva, 1969), pp. 35–6.

28 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA* (Minneapolis, 1994), p. 11.

29 Lukas Vischer, 'The Church – One People in Many Places', in Groscurth, p. 65.

remedy for which – organic reunion – would mean 'making real and living in empirical experience what already exists for us in God's truth'.[30]

Importantly, because the liberal model presupposes Christian unity as God's abiding gift to his one Church, shared unconditionally amongst all believers, but obscured by schismatic worship, ecclesiastical plurality constitutes a deeply anomalous, ultimately intolerable situation for the one People of God. The ecumenical task must therefore be conceived as a vocation to bring a pre-existing communion to full visible expression by transforming the multiple communities from a disparate collection of incomplete denominational peers into a single, unified, *complete* worshipping community.

In the application of these principles the model's adherents generally accept the ministries of all trinitarian Churches as equally valid (although many object to such terminology in the first place) or, conversely, as equally defective.[31] Sacramental intercommunion is often seen as a means of reconciliation: a sign of God's promise of a more perfect reunion of believers and a token of good faith – indeed common faith – amongst separated communities. In fact Paul Avis insists not only that restricted communion is antithetical to the nature of baptism and the eucharist, but also that 'intercommunion imposes an *obligation* on the churches to work out their full reconciliation'.[32] On this basis many mainline Protestant denominations have come into a state of *de facto* intercommunion, offering open-table eucharistic hospitality, reception (rather than re-confirmation) of converts in good standing with their previous Churches and recognition of one another's holy orders as true ministries of word and sacrament.

(2) The *Catholic/Orthodox* model espoused by Rome, Constantinople and smaller groups such as the Old Catholics and the Oriental Orthodox, maintains the absolute necessity of a specific, visible community in which the one true Church of Christ must 'subsist', to borrow the terminology of the Second Vatican Council.[33] Each group regards its own community by definition as the *una sancta* of the creeds within which the fullness of Christian faith and ministry remains observably manifest and which in itself is sufficient to wield all authority in the name of the whole People of God. However, the explanations of the specific relationship between the *una sancta* and other denominations vary.

(a) Following the declarations of Vatican II Rome has maintained that the
    Holy Spirit does indeed effect authentic revelation and redemption within
    communities beyond the Holy See's ken.[34] Even so, the conciliar ecclesiology
    distinguishes clearly between 'Churches' in a full sense and 'ecclesial

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30 Hanson and Hanson, pp. 50, 58.

31 For example, ibid., pp. 136–44; the Hansons refer specifically to ordained ministries (but also by association to Christian ministries in general) as equally valid, but equally defective too, given that 'we all lack the authority which a fully united Church would confer'.

32 Paul Avis, *Christians in Communion* (London, 1990), pp. 56-8, emphasis mine.

33 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 21 Nov. 1964, online edn, §8.

34 Vat. II, *Lumen*, §§8, 15; Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis redintegratio: Decree on Ecumenism*, 21 Nov. 1964, online edn, §§3, 4.

communities'; the extent to which authentic ecclesiality resides in other communities depends on conformity to Roman teaching, *praxis* and structure as well as the historical circumstances surrounding separation.[35]

Eastern and Oriental Churches, for example, 'have had a treasury from which the Western Church has drawn extensively – in liturgical practice, spiritual tradition, and law'.[36] They share a common theological heritage in the early councils and patristic writings, retain traditions of devotion and organization that predate the Great Schism, identify their origins directly in the Apostles' mission and maintain an essentially common understanding of apostolic authority and the sacramental mysteries.[37] Thus, eastern communities are reckoned as true sister Churches – out of full communion, yet preserving the continuity of priesthood and sacrament through which 'the Church of God is built up and grows in stature'.[38] So too are recognized western Churches of a similar disposition – Old Catholics, for example. Reformation communities, however, because of their historical origins, theological appropriation of faith, spiritual discipline and ministerial structures, are dubbed 'ecclesial communities': not eucharistic fellowships in the Roman sense, but nonetheless 'in some real way … joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power'.[39] In either instance, however, the one Church 'is God's only flock', and the foreign bodies' status as vehicles of the Spirit comes by virtue of an already-present, although considerably impaired, communion with the Holy See through a common baptismal justification.[40]

(b) In contrast the Orthodox (Eastern and Oriental) and Old Catholics maintain for their own communities a claim of absolutely unique ecclesiality. The Eastern-Old Catholic joint dialogue on ecclesiology concludes characteristically, for example, that the participants must regard 'communities which continue in heresy and schism as in no sense workshops of salvation parallel to the true visible Church'.[41] Ultimately, however, both groups mitigate their own harsh-sounding assertions by claiming that

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35 See John Paul II, pars. 10–11.

36 Vat. II, *Unitatis*, §14.

37 Ibid., §§14–16.

38 Ibid., §15; John Paul II, pars. 55–7.

39 Vat. II, *Lumen*, §15; Vat. II, *Unitatis*, §19; further discussion in Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission, *All Under One Christ: Statement on the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission*, 1980, in Meyer and Vischer, pars. 75–8. *Unitatis*, §13, ambiguously grants the Anglican Communion a 'special place' seemingly in between full Church and ecclesial community, because in it 'Catholic traditions and institutions in part continue to exist'; however, in practice Anglicans are usually expected to interact with Catholics much like any other Reformation community; cf. Leo XIII, *Apostolicae curae: On the Nullity of Anglican Orders*, 15 Sept. 1896, online edn.

40 Vat. II, *Unitatis*, §§2, 3; Vat. II, *Lumen*, §15.

41 Joint Orthodox-Old Catholic Theological Commission [a.k.a. Mixed Orthodox-Old Catholic Commission], *Ecclesiology: Agreed Statement, Chambésy 1977, Bonn 1979, and Zagorsk 1981*, in Meyer and Vischer, par. 30.

since it is impossible to set limits on God's power … it can be considered as not excluded that the divine omnipotence and grace are present and operative wherever departure from the fullness of truth in the one Church is not complete and does not go to the lengths of a complete estrangement from the truth.[42]

In the end the overall position comes more to resemble a non-committal variant of the Roman approach than an outright denial of any salvific significance in the existence of non-communicant bodies.

In practice the Old Catholics have given a fairly generous interpretation to terms like *heresy* and *schism* inasmuch as they have been willing to enter on relatively loose terms full intercommunion arrangements with groups such as Anglicans, who share a degree of common history and self-understanding but are not necessarily seen as 'valid' by their Roman or Orthodox counterparts.[43] Orthodox Churches tend to avoid precise pronouncements about the status of foreign communities but often treat them as having only *potential* validity, contingent upon re-integration into the full Orthodox faith and *praxis*. Yet paradoxically neither do they invariably approach ecumenical partners' sacramental or doctrinal expression as matters wholly isolated from the life of the *una sancta*. For example, their recognition of valid non-Orthodox holy orders does not impose the obligation to receive converting priests into communion *as priests*; rather, the Orthodox regard recognition as conditional upon establishing sufficient dogmatic agreement amongst the Churches, *after* which re-ordinations would not be required to regularize communion.[44] Yet some years ago, when raising objections to Anglican women's ordinations and expressing concern about internal Anglican dissension, Orthodox ecumenists

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42   Ibid.; *complete estrangement* is not defined.

43   For example, the *Bonn Agreement – Old Catholic Churches and Anglican Communion, Statement Agreed between the Representatives of the Old Catholic Churches and the Churches of the Anglican Communion, 1931,* in Meyer and Vischer, p. 37 – is sufficiently brief to cite in full: '1. Each Communion recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other and maintains its own. 2. Each Communion agrees to admit members of the other Communion to participate in the Sacraments. 3. Intercommunion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of Christian faith'.

44   Sample texts concerning Orthodox recognition of non-Orthodox orders (Anglican in these instances) include Meletios of Constantinople, *Letter of the Oecumenical Patriarch to the Archbishop of Canterbury*, 16 Feb. 1923, trans. Germanos of Thyateira, in Bell, pp. 93–4; Meletios of Constantinople, *From the Oecumenical Patriarch to the Presidents of the Particular Eastern Orthodox Churches*, Aug. 1922, in Bell, pp. 94–7; Damianos of Jerusalem, *Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury from the Patriarch of Jerusalem*, 12 Mar. 1923, in Bell, pp. 97–8; Cyril of Cyprus, *Letter to the Oecumenical Patriarch from the Archbishop of Cyprus*, 20 Mar. 1923, in Bell, pp. 98–9. Although Cyril's letter admits the possibility of accepting Anglican converts without re-ordination, the principle was never universally established. Further discussion in Michael Ramsey, 'Constantinople and Canterbury', in *Canterbury Essays and Addresses* (London, 1964), p. 69; Timothy [Kallistos] Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London, 1964), pp. 326–8.

argued not only that they could not approach the issue as a 'purely internal matter, in which the Orthodox are not concerned', but went so far as to cite 1 Cor. 12:26: 'If one member of the body suffers, all the other members suffer with it'.[45]

(c) Despite a certain interpretive flexibility, no Catholic or Orthodox perspective allows that the pluriform communities exist on an equally authentic basis *as* pluriform communities. Like the liberal model, this model presupposes both the reality of ecclesial unity as divine gift and the necessity of Christians' reconciliation into the life of one Church but, unlike its mostly Protestant counterpart, associates the authentic manifestation of Christian unity with a single existing community's entire dogmatic canon and sacramental life. Denominational pluriformity remains antithetical to the Church's nature but signifies defective ecclesial life only in communities that for some reason have lost or forsworn one or more of the essential signs of Christian unity. Ecumenical reunion must be conceived, then, as the reconciliation of 'separated brethren' into the life of the true mother Church. And in practical application, because the essential elements of Christian communion exist already in that one community, sacramental intercommunion must occur only as the effective sign of reconciliation (or, on occasion, economic hospitality), never as the means.[46]

(3) The *conservative grouping* actually represents not a single model but a series of models bound loosely together by simultaneously affirming in principle the genuine involvement of all baptized Christians in the life of a single trans-denominational Church and advancing a particular ecclesiological concern that inhibits ecumenical dialogue and implicitly denies ecumenical egalitarianism.[47] Beyond this general motif Churches in the conservative category may share little common ground; depth analysis of their ecumenical practices must be carried out case-by-case. However, two examples, Anglicans and Baptists, will suffice to illustrate the category's overall basis:

(a) The Anglican Communion historically has never considered itself anything more than the Church lawfully established in England at the Reformation and those thereafter built on her missions: the provinces 'of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church in communion with the See of Canterbury'.[48] Anglicans assert the integrity of their ministries and authority not by their own standards *per se*, but because they believe that the priesthood in which Anglican

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45 Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission, *Athens Statement 1978*, in Meyer and Vischer, par. 10.

46 Orthodox participants [in the World Council of Churches' Seventh General Assembly, 1991], *Orthodox Concerns*, in *Beyond Canberra: Evangelical Responses to Contemporary Ecumenical Issues*, eds Bong Rin Ro and Bruce J. Nicholls (Oxford, 1993), p. 52.

47 Here *conservative* refers *strictly* to ecumenical behaviour, *not* to theology in general.

48 Lambeth Conference 1958, *The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops Together with the Resolutions and Reports* (London, 1958), p. 1.17.

Churches share 'belongs to the universal Church'.[49] They accept not only that all baptized Christians are involved with the life of the one Church catholic, but that all trinitarian Churches are in some sense authentic iterations of God's one People – Churches' rather than 'ecclesial communities' – constituted not by virtue of an implicit connection with Anglicanism, but in their own right as peoples bound together by the Holy Spirit. Anglicans typically open their altars without discrimination to communicant members of all Nicene Churches not as a matter of economy, but because they truly believe that any baptized believer has an indisputable right to communicate at the Anglican – or, more to the point, the *Christian* – altar.[50]

Less evident, however, is whether Anglicans are prepared to treat all Churches as *equal* iterations. The English Settlement was built upon the notion that local Churches (meaning *national* or *provincial*) have authority, subject to scripture, to order themselves and worship in forms appropriate to a particular population – a point which suggests the legitimacy of presbyterian or congregational polity under appropriate circumstances.[51] Yet Anglicanism has never fully reconciled liberal ecumenical principles with its internal ecclesiological norms, most importantly when *episcopé* is at stake. In modern ecumenism's early days Anglicans eagerly anticipated serving as a 'bridge Church', their traditional *via media* uniting as it did ecclesiological positions congenial in various respects to Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox. Their lack of success can be blamed only in part on Roman and Orthodox refusal to recognize Anglican Churches as 'sisters' and Anglican orders as unconditionally valid.[52] Of equal importance, Anglicans themselves have never universally acknowledged the ministries of non-episcopal Churches as comparable to those of communities retaining the historic episcopate.

Ultimately Anglicans have never achieved amongst themselves a consensus on whether episcopal succession exists for the Church's being (*esse*), well-being (*bene esse*), or full being (*plene esse*).[53] But in practice the *plene esse* view has dominated their ecumenical theology overall – as, for example, in conditions for reunion set out by the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, the Anglicans' basic ecumenical formula, in which, says Richard A. Norris, 'Catholic order takes its place alongside norms of teaching and of sacramental practice as a factor essential to "the visible unity of the church"' and which itself, as the 1998 Lambeth Conference affirmed, has grown into a symbol

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49 Henry Chadwick, *Episcopacy in the New Testament and Early Church*, address to Lambeth Conference, London, 1978, quoted in *The Anglican Tradition: A Handbook of Sources*, eds G.R. Evans and J. Robert Wright (London, 1991), p. 512.

50 Lambeth Conference 1968, *Resolutions and Reports* (London, 1968), res. 45.

51 Church of England, *Articles of Religion*, 1571, in Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1662 edn (Cambridge, n.d.), articles 19–20, 34.

52 Leo XIII, par. 37. See ch. 1, n. 44, above.

53 See Richard A. Norris, 'Episcopacy', in *The Study of Anglicanism*, eds Stephen Sykes and John Booty (London, 1988), pp. 303–7, passim; Schlink, p. 33.

of intra-Anglican unity.[54] So too has the *plene esse* view dominated the Anglicans' ecumenical behaviour: they routinely require re-confirmation and, when applicable, re-ordination of Protestant converts to ensure continuity of sacramental life in the context of episcopal succession, whereas Romans and Orthodox need merely be received into full communion. More importantly Anglicans in framing ecumenical agreements traditionally have hesitated either to permit eucharistic presidency of guest ministers without episcopal orders or to declare themselves in full communion with united Churches that have not integrated ministries in such a way as to ensure historic succession in all clergy.[55] Thus, Paul Avis contends, 'as Rome treats Anglicans, denying their orders and sacraments to be orders and sacraments of the Christian (Catholic) Church, so Anglicans treat the Free Churches'.[56]

Certainly Avis's claim is exaggerated; historically Anglicans have refused *either* to declare non-episcopal ministries null and void *or* to acknowledge them as equally efficacious compared to historic episcopal order.[57] Moreover, in recent decades Anglican Churches have entered a critical period – possibly a transition or reception phase – of re-assessing their views on the legitimacy of non-episcopal ministries and the nature of apostolic succession in light of ecumenical experience. A growing recognition that, in the *Porvoo Common Statement*'s words, 'faithfulness to the apostolic calling of the whole Church is carried by more than one means of continuity' signals a new engagement with the *bene esse* view that has enabled Anglicans to acknowledge in several formal agreements – the *Meissen*, *Fetter Lane* and *Reuilly Common Statements*

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54 Norris, pp. 306–7; Lambeth Conference 1998, 'Called to Be One: The Report of Section Four to the Lambeth Conference 1998', Lambeth Conference Section IV (ecumenical) working paper, LC98/IV/054.1/ha.ic.sg.wi-g.jm, Canterbury, 1998, photocopied, pp. 12–15, passim; Lambeth Conference 1888, *Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral*, in *Quadrilateral at One Hundred: Essays on the Centenary of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/88-1986/88*, ed. J. Robert Wright (London, 1988), pp. vii–ix. The *Quadrilateral* declares four elements necessary for Church union: (1) recognition of scripture as 'containing all things necessary to salvation', (2) acceptance of the ancient creeds as the 'sufficient statement of the Christian faith', (3) the two dominical sacraments and (4) the historic episcopate.

55 See Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *Beyond Anglicanism* (London, 1965), pp. 35–47; LC1998, p. 3. The history of the Church of South India (CSI) provides a useful example of Anglicans' dealings with united Churches. At its 1947 inauguration the CSI received the historic episcopate from its Anglican partners, thus ensuring episcopal continuity in all CSI ministers ordained thereafter, but required no re-ordination of presbyters previously ordained in non-episcopal partner-Churches. Anglicans worldwide therefore existed in anomalous communion with the CSI for decades, recognizing only its episcopally ordained presbyters and refusing free exchange of ministries whilst non-episcopal CSI orders still existed. Only in 1998 were CSI bishops reinstated as full Lambeth Conference members. Regarding guest celebrants, see ch. 1, n. 61, below.

56 Avis, *CiC*, p. 59.

57 Norris, p. 307.

among them – authentic ministries of word and sacrament in non-episcopal Churches and episcopally-ordered Churches without historic succession.[58]

'Nevertheless', as the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant* of 2001 dryly states, 'further work remains to be done'.[59] With the exception of *Porvoo* – to which only episcopally-ordered Lutheran Churches are fellow signatories – none of these agreements establish 'full visible unity' (interchangeability of ministries and membership), but only 'bring about a stage on the way towards that goal'.[60] Although such agreements suggest an important broadening of Anglican perspectives – and may open the door to wider concrete application in future – to date only Churches retaining or integrating episcopal succession have achieved full intercommunion with Anglicans.[61] 'Despite their own internal disagreements', says John Hind, Anglicans 'have in effect made [episcopacy] an essential condition of any unity scheme'.[62] Pragmatically, then, Avis's point is well taken, for the Anglican Communion, although not arrogating unique ecclesial status to itself, tolerates pluriformity in faith and *praxis* only to a point. Anglicans continue to maintain that 'the historic episcopate belongs to the full visible unity of the Church' and, further, that they 'must remain committed on this point, in discussions with non-episcopally ordered Churches, if they are to be consistent with what they have said over many decades to the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches'.[63] In the end, despite their recent moves, Anglicans still treat the visible authenticity

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58 ALJC, par. 52; Church of England and Evangelical Church in Germany, *On the Way to Visible Unity: A Common Statement*, in *The Meissen Agreement Texts*, Council for Christian Unity Occasional Paper, no. 2 (London, 1992), par. 17; Church of England and Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland, *Anglican-Moravian Conversations: The Fetter Lane Common Statement*, with essays in Moravian and Anglican history by Colin Podmore, Council for Christian Unity Occasional Paper, no. 5 (London, 1996), pars. 47–8, 55; [British and Irish Anglican Churches and French Lutheran and Reformed Churches], *The Reuilly Declaration*, in *Called to Witness and Service: The Reuilly Common Statement*, with essays on church, eucharist and ministry (London, 1999), online edn; cf. Anglican-Lutheran Commission, *Pullach Report 1972*, in Meyer and Vischer, par. 77; contrast par. 81. Brian E. Beck, 'The Porvoo Common Statement: A Methodist Response', in *Apostolicity and Unity: Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement*, ed. Ola Tjøhom (Geneva, 2002), pp. 248f., discusses the application and limitations of *Porvoo*'s approach to apostolic succession.

59 MCGB-CoE, par. 160.

60 Ibid., par. 170; cf. par. 157.

61 Recently, however, some individual Anglican provinces have negotiated limited covenants with non-episcopal Churches that involve 'the possibility of an ordained minister of one church being authorised to serve in one of the other participating churches'; LC1998, p. 6, cites the South African Anglican-Reformed-Methodist scheme.

62 John Hind, 'Sign but Not Guarantee: Reflections of the Place of the Historic Succession of Bishops Within the Apostolic Continuity of the Church in Some Current Ecumenical Texts', in Tjøhom, p. 152.

63 MCGB-CoE, par. 171; cf. Peter Moore, 'The Anglican Episcopate: Its Strengths and Limitations', in *Bishops. But What Kind?: Reflections on Episcopacy*, ed. Peter Moore (London, 1982), p. 133.

or defectiveness of ecclesial life as a matter of degree, which varies from one community to another.

(b) The issues dominating Baptist ecumenical involvement trace directly to their origin as a radical, libertarian sect in seventeenth-century England.[64] Historically Baptists have considered the autonomous local congregation the manifestation *par excellence* of the Church universal. In *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland* Thomas Helwys wrote,

> That as one congregation hath CHRIST, so shall they all, 2 Cor. 10.7. And that the Word of GOD cometh not out of any one, neither to any one congregation in particular … . But unto every particular church as it doth vnto al the world Coll.i.5.6. *And therefore no church ought to challeng any prerogative over the other*.[65]

This position distinguishes Baptists markedly from others – Anglicans and Orthodox, for example – who also stress the local community's sacramental and juridical integrity, but envisage equally a wider conciliar authority as the vital, collegial expression of the communities' common life.

Baptist convictions about the local congregations' authority do translate into recognition of other Baptist Churches and other denominations as co-mediators of divine grace. Thus, in her spiritual diary eighteenth-century English Baptist Jane Attwater affirms her reasoned choice of Baptist doctrine but adds, 'Not that I think that there is none good but those who adhere to this particular way of thinking far from it'.[66] However, the doctrines which Attwater affirmed were not absolute; Baptists have always argued the word, and indeed many matters debated down four centuries have direct ecumenical implications: how can Baptists relate to paedo-baptist Churches, for example; to whom can they open the Lord's table – to those baptized as infants, to members of other Churches, to the unbaptized?[67] Such questions have been answered differently in different times and places by different Baptists, all claiming prerogative by the one Holy Spirit's guidance, as did the Church in Kittery, Maine, in its 1682 covenant,

> wherein wee doe Covenant & promise to walk with god & with one another … according to ye grace of god & light att present through his grace given us, or here after he shall

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64 See E. Glenn Hinson, 'The Baptist World Alliance: Its Identity and Ecumenical Involvement', *The Ecumenical Review* 46 (Oct. 1994), online edn: u.e.d.

65 Thomas Helwys, *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland*, 1611, quoted in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Chicago, 1959), p. 120, emphasis mine.

66 Jane Attwater, 1753–89, quoted in Marjorie Reeves, 'Jane Attwater's Diaries', in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honor of B.R. White*, eds William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes (Macon, Georgia, 1999), p. 215.

67 Bill Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 2003), pp. 45, 48; John Bunyan required neither immersion nor believer's baptism – two Baptist mainstays – for communion or Church membership.

please to discover & make knowne to us thro his holy Spiritt, according to ye same blessed word all ye Dayes of our lives.[68]

This same Spirit has frequently been sought in respect of one critical ecumenical problem – the local communities' relationship with the Church abroad (both Baptist and beyond) and the extent to which extra-local ecclesial identity obtains – as when an American (formerly Northern) Baptist commission urged recognition that 'we, as a denomination, are as truly a Church within the Body of Christ as any one of [our] congregations'. The American Baptist Church accepted the commission's report in 1972; yet ironically the same year it changed its name to American Baptist *Churches*, the better to reflect its polity – a point which has important ecumenical ramifications.[69]

Theoretically Baptists recognize, as William Barnes writes, 'no higher human authority' than the local congregation.[70] Although Baptist Churches formed associations as early as 1644 and, just as early, associations produced doctrinal confessions, 'congregations which differed were free', as Bill Leonard wryly states, 'to write their own'.[71] Such freedom, Baptists argue, lies at the heart of what it means to *be* Church. Even today Baptist unions usually facilitate fellowship, co-operative mission and development of common resources, but do not govern or define doctrine in quite the same manner as do presbyterian or episcopalian Church synods.[72]

Diverse and numerous as Baptist associations are, their ecumenical involvement is equally varied. Some national Baptist unions enjoy membership in the World Council of Churches; others move in and out at their congregations' behest.[73] Northern Baptists, for example, were charter members of the WCC and have defeated several calls for severing ties.[74] Scottish Baptists, however, entered the Council in 1948 by one vote and left in 1955 because of WCC liberalism.[75] Dutch Baptists similarly joined in 1948, but withdrew in 1963 to avoid schism.[76] The 2300 Baptists of Finland maintain two associations

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68 First Baptist Church of Kittery, *Church Covenant*, 1682, in H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, 1987), p. 144.

69 Leonard, p. 410.

70 William W. Barnes, *A Study in the Development of Ecclesiology: The Southern Baptist Convention* (Seminary Hill, Texas, 1934), p. 11.

71 Leonard, pp. 52, 64.

72 Cf. World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Baptist World Alliance, *Report of Theological Conversations Sponsored by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Baptist World Alliance, 1977*, in Meyer and Vischer, par. 41: 'Common service and witness as such have ecclesiological significance, and yet Baptists tend to attach to the wider relationships only pragmatic importance. They fear ecclesial superstructures above the local level'.

73 Hinson, u.e.d.

74 Leonard, pp. 406–8.

75 Ibid., p. 377.

76 Ibid., p. 313.

– one fiercely independent, the other happily participant in several ecumenical endeavours.[77]

Ultimately Baptist unions lack sustainable authority to maintain formal agreements on their constituents' behalf. Ironically some of twentieth-century Britain's strongest ecumenical advocates were Baptists – F.B. Meyer, president of the Baptist Union in 1906; Howard Shakespeare, who urged reunion with the Anglicans (1919); Hugh Martin, moderator of the Free Church Federal Council (1952–53). But Baptists consistently rejected their urgings because of polity and doctrine.[78] Although many progressive Baptists – individuals and associations – are indeed ecumenically-minded, the extent to which associations embrace the movement depends finally on the congregations' practice and their members' conviction.

Baptist ecclesiology commonly supposes that the fundamental nature of Church as a concrete gathering of believers under Christ's lordship and the Spirit's inspiration is endangered when extra-local *magisteria* impose uniform codes of faith. This view challenges other Churches' views of doctrinal convergence and structural reunion as appropriate, necessary expressions of ecumenical reconciliation. But other Baptist definitions of Church, particularly as covenant community – God's 'covenant of grace', the Son's covenant with the Father to become flesh and effect salvation, God's covenant with the congregation and the covenant of believers together – give Baptists distinct charisma for ecumenical action.[79] However, for the foreseeable future their vision for Church unity is likely to remain one of reconciled diversity ('unity, but not uniformity', as Hugh Martin says) – the extension of covenant beyond Baptist unions to the wider Church Body.[80]

(c) The two denominations used here to illustrate the conservative grouping are driven not only by distinctive but indeed opposing concerns about the nature and derivation of ecclesial authority. Yet they are bound together by three methodological factors essential to their ecumenical outlook. First, both openly acknowledge the existence of genuine ecclesial life beyond their own boundaries and recognize other Churches' bonds of unity as dependent on the Spirit's direct action, not on a semi-visible connection with themselves.[81] Second, both act upon ecclesiological presuppositions that, when followed to their logical conclusions, imply a dilution of authentic ecclesiality in at least some external communities: in the Anglicans' case, the necessity of episcopal succession; in the Baptists', a suspicion of extra-local religious structures.

77 Ibid., p. 312–13.

78 Ibid., p. 370–1; cf. Anthony R. Cross, 'Revd Dr Hugh Martin: Ecumenist', *Baptist Quarterly* (Apr. 1997): 72–3; Anthony R. Cross, 'Revd Dr Hugh Martin: Ecumenical Controversialist and Writer', *Baptist Quarterly* (July 1997): 143–4.

79 Paul S. Fiddes, '"Walking Together": The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today', in Brackney and Fiddes, p. 48; cf. Hinson, u.e.d.; Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, *It's Time: Resource Guide* (n.p., 2003).

80 Hugh Martin, quoted in Leonard, p. 370.

81 For example, WARC-BWA, par. 28, refers to a 'mutual recognition of each other's good standing as Christians'.

Third, both understand ecclesial dilution to occur in degrees: Anglicans, for example, might suggest that North American Methodists, who practise episcopacy without historic succession, have come closer to appropriating the *plene esse* of Church order than have the Reformed, whereas Baptists might allege the same for Congregationalists over Methodists or Lutherans.

In either instance full ecclesiality, whilst not identified with a particular community, must be associated with specific historical norms for the ordered expression of Christian life and ministry. Ecumenical reconciliation will therefore become conditional upon the reconciliation of the pluriform communities into these norms. Like the liberals, conservatives usually affirm, first, that the visible Churches already exist in impaired communion within one Church and, second, that the very fact of separated communities – the Churches' failure to realize the unity God wills for them – indicates defective ecclesial life. Yet with the Catholics and Orthodox conservatives assert – sometimes by explicit statements, but often more implicitly – that, beyond the mere fact of multiple Churches, their actual patterns of faith and *praxis* have significant bearing on the extent to which ecclesial life in any given community is to be considered either authentic or defective.

Provisionality of Churches: an emerging ecclesiological theme

In the course of this chapter's survey we suggested two vital questions for evaluating the direction and success of ecumenism in its modern incarnation. First, do we find evidence that modern ecumenism is succeeding in the attempt to forge a common framework for genuine, long-term ecclesiological convergence? Second, if indeed we do, can we then expect the framework envisioned finally to prove capable of incorporating a viable theological understanding of multiple worshipping communities – the real situation in which all Christians actually find themselves – and a credible approach to the relationship of those communities one to another in Christ? A fairly superficial overview might raise considerable doubt.

We should not deny that the movement shows ample evidence of institutional sustainability. The actual ecumenical achievements of the twentieth century's Churches are remarkable in character, scope and depth: the broadening of dialogue, the sharing of theological resources, the development of viable communication methods, the creation of mutual understanding, the practical co-operation in prayer and worship and mission of hundreds or thousands of local and provincial communities – even the merging of a few like-minded Churches. In some instances change has been revolutionary: for example, the lifting of the 1054 excommunications between East and West as a result of the Second Vatican Council or the integration of a great majority of Protestants in India, the scene of such fierce missionary competition in the nineteenth century, into some of the earliest truly pan-Protestant Churches.[82] Overall there is little question that, despite the increasingly frequent call of Churches and scholars for reassessment, ecumenical institutions now established will continue

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82 Although in China the official Protestant Church is also genuinely pan-Protestant, its ecumenical character was initially the result of state coercion.

in some form for many years to come. In this sense the movement has fulfilled its founders' hopes that the twentieth century would mark the beginning of a new era in the Churches' common life.

Yet our critical concern cannot ultimately remain with prior achievement or the likelihood of institutional permanence. Longevity alone cannot guarantee that the ecumenical movement will bear any more relevance for day-to-day Christian life than the Privy Council, for example, as a residual institution of state, holds for the daily operations of the modern British government. Crucial to the movement's long-term viability is its potential for building a meaningful convergence amongst Christians on the most fundamental theological and ecclesiological levels, one that both reflects adequately the Nicene faith passed down from generation to generation and correlates with the actual experience of God's People(s) in worship and fellowship.

At this very point legitimate concerns arise. In the last century most Christian groupings have committed themselves to tremendous dialogue. As a result they have resolved many contested theological points and relegated many others to *adiaphora*. Churches have striven to develop significant insight into one another's ecclesiological understandings. Yet, despite so much genuine effort, the lines separating the three ecumenical models strongly suggest that overall the major Christian traditions have grappled with the most basic issues of unity, division and ecclesial identity not by developing radical new means of approaching one another, but by liberalizing their customary ecclesiological resources to accommodate a new ecumenical vitality:

(1) Protestants have employed or interpreted the traditional Reformation marks of the Church – the word of God and the two dominical sacraments – in such a way that all Nicene Churches must now be understood to bear those marks.
(2) Catholics and Orthodox have transformed erstwhile heretics into 'separated brethren'. However, they have left fundamentally untouched the core means of identifying themselves as the one 'true' Church – many of which still figure large in other Churches' explicit objections about the nature of true ecclesiality: Roman insistence on Petrine supremacy, for example; Orthodoxy's particular use of the seven ecumenical councils; or the apostolic succession in both cases.
(3) The conservative category, broad by nature, may leave us to imagine a few wider possibilities. Certainly, however, the Churches here cited as characteristic do follow the general pattern of merely relaxing an essentially conventional position:
 (a) Anglicans, employing their customary *via media*, have simply adopted elements of both the other approaches. Having always recognized Christian Churches beyond their jurisdiction as genuine in some sense, Anglicans, despite having now begun seriously to reconsider the status of non-episcopal orders, have reacted to ecumenism mainly by broadening sacramental hospitality.
 (b) Baptists have externalized the concepts of reconciled diversity and co-operative covenant which have long been critical features of their own intra-denominational dynamics.

In sum: we may easily doubt whether any of the three dominant ecumenical models herald a *fundamental* shift in ecclesiological thought. Ecumenical

involvement has, of course, occasioned a distinctly broadened theological perspective within the mainstream Churches. And many individual ecumenists arising from all traditions are radical indeed. Yet in overall reception of ecumenical effort the major Christian traditions have thus far failed to internalize one another's ecclesiological perspectives enough to move beyond their historic points of division. Many of their most traditional bones of contention and bases of separation remain in force.

Indeed none of the ecumenical models seems easily reconciled to the others. Many definitive matters can admit only so much compromise, at least as we presently understand and approach them: the role and jurisdiction of the papacy, for example; the concept of episcopacy generally; the relationship of scripture and tradition; the number and nature of sacraments – all of these being issues that tie directly into the Churches' basic self-identity. As matters presently stand large-scale reunion between the different models' adherents cannot occur without some groups' making significant sacrifices of their fundamental tenets about the Church's constitution.[83]

On the surface, therefore, none of the models commends itself as an obvious means of uniting the world's Christians. Nor is an immediate solution for producing deeper convergence amongst the three models yet evident. Thus, we may question whether the Churches have actually adopted the 'new outlook' and 'new measure' to which the 1920 Lambeth Conference called the Christian peoples or whether, despite best intentions, they have spent the last few decades merely making strategic alliances with those most like themselves.

However, having argued previously that we need not demand the emergence of a complete systematic ecclesiology in order to assess the ecumenical movement's

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83 The point is not that critical convergences have not occurred, but that some issues finally provide only *either/or* choices. Catholics and Protestants have made significant moves, for example, on authority, justification, the relationship of scripture and tradition; Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches have achieved remarkable convergence on christological doctrine; see Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission, *Report of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on the Gospel and the Church, 1972* [*Malta Report*], in Meyer and Vischer, pars. 18–21, 26–30; World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Presence of Christ in Church and World: Final Report of the Dialogue Between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, 1977*, in Meyer and Vischer, pars. 25–6; John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, *Common Christological Declaration Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*, 11 Nov. 1994, distributed to Lambeth Conference Section IV (ecumenical) working group, 1998, typewritten and photocopied; Oriental Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue, *Oriental Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue: The First Four Sessions*, ed. H.S. Wilson (Geneva, 1998), pp. 20–2, 51–2. However, papal authority, for example, remains problematic even amongst episcopal Churches; in the end either the pope has universal ordinary jurisdiction or else he does not, and the denominations' yes-or-no responses intertwine (usually in equal measure) with their views on the Church's essential constitution; see Mesrob K. Krikorian, 'The Primacy of the Successor of St. Peter from the Point of View of the Oriental Orthodox Churches', in *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church: 'Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue'*, ed. James F. Puglisi (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1999), pp. 91ff; John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, 'Primacy in the Church: An Orthodox Approach', in Puglisi, pp. 120ff.; Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (Slough, 1988), pp. 44f.

potential and evaluate its direction, we must take note of one especially critical factor: namely that on a basic level the three models do hold distinctly in common certain essential methodological features and presuppositions about the root character of Church life, particularly with regard to its plurality:

(1) In each model *authentic ecclesial being is defined strictly by the unity of the faithful*. In other words, because Christ is one, the true Church must at some level be one already, right at this moment, despite the empirical plurality of Christian communities: 'There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, over all, through all and within all' (Eph. 4:5–6).[84] In none of the three systems do the plural faith-communities participate in the *koinonia* of the Christian Church *as* plural communities; rather, to whatever extent they are understood to do so, they do *despite* their plurality.

(2) *Ecclesial multiplicity in itself is said to bear no direct witness to any kind of unique theological content or revelation*. That is, we are said to experience no facet of God's this-worldly action through our experience of the Church(es) as *plural entities*.[85] In fact, quite the contrary, each model presents the multiplicity of Christian worshipping communities as a profound aberration from the ecclesiological norm – by definition a direct affront to God's will in calling out for himself *a* holy People. Plurality eclipses our experience and proclamation of God's gracious unity with creation; it becomes effectively an ecclesiastical 'disease', the obliteration of which must be the ultimate, necessary goal of ecumenism.

(3) To the same extent that the Churches' plurality is seen to detract from the true, fundamental unity of Christ's Body the separated Churches are said to lack the fullness of ecclesial life, authority and visibility; conversely restoration of ecclesial fullness occurs only with the restoration of unity. Stated more simply: *for as long as the Churches remain plural they exist only in provisional form*. Vatican II's *Unitatis redintegratio* defines the Catholic view, whereby the provisional condition damages only the 'separated brethren' in an ontological sense, although division does affect the mother Church superficially:

The divisions among Christians prevent the Church from attaining the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her sons who, though attached to her by Baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her. Furthermore, the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all her bearings.[86]

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84 Cf. 1 Cor. 1:13.

85 To clarify, this statement concerns *separated, plural Christian communities* in varying degrees of excommunication. It does *not* suppose a *perichoresis* of diverse communities which, although retaining distinctive structures and traditions, explicitly recognize in one another an essential faith shared and an authentic apostolic ministry and on that basis enjoy real, substantial union through a common sacramental life. Concepts of *covenant reconciliation* and *reconciled diversity* advanced by many ecumenical advocates and Churches are means *describing* the latter but *addressing* the former.

86 Vat. II, *Unitatis*, §4.

In contrast *Porvoo* reflects the shared understanding of liberals and conservatives, whereby multiplicity compromises the root ecclesiality of every Church:

> The unity to which we are summoned … demands fuller visible embodiment in structured form, so that the Church may be seen to be, through the Holy Spirit, the one Body of Christ and the sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom. In this perspective, all existing denominational traditions are provisional.[87]

Overall the models embody deep disagreements about the means by which a community becomes disenfranchised from Church life in its fullness as well as the nature of the repercussions. Yet each approach is predicated on the premise that a multiplicity of worshipping communities must be understood by definition as existentially contingent.

Taken collectively these three assumptions represent a powerful claim about the fundamental nature of ecclesiality. We shall refer to this claim hereafter as *provisionalism* and summarize it as follows: as the direct result of an antithetical relationship existing between God's will for a unified Church and the multiplicity of faith communities, the empirical Churches' existence or at the least *some* empirical Churches' existence embodies by definition something less than the authenticity of the *una sancta*; restoration of ecclesiality occurs only with the restoration of unity. Without a much deeper exploration and elaboration, however, to deduce a doctrine of ecclesial provisionality in any complete sense would be premature. Nevertheless, this concept may well form a doctrinal kernel in the ecclesiological dialogue of modern ecumenism.

If indeed this provisionalist idea does represent a basic assumption of modern ecumenism, then the theological viability of the ecumenical movement would depend in large part on the validity of its assertions, which are of deep epistemological importance. If the notion itself is valid, the call away from a sub-standard state of ecclesial *being* should provide a profound impetus for forging ever-greater convergence amongst the Churches. However, the concept's validity can be determined only by examining in depth its ecclesiological implications, ramifications in practice, sufficiency to describe the actual experience of the Christian Churches in history and ultimate continuity with the Christian tradition-inheritance. A broader evaluation of these matters, followed by conclusions and suggestions as to the future direction of the ecumenical movement, will thus be this study's goal.

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87 ALJC, par. 22; cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *What is 'a Local Church Truly United'?*, paper presented at the World Council of Churches consultation on the local Church, 1976, in Kinnamon and Cope, p. 120.

Survey of ecumenical provisionalism

The World Council of Churches

To evaluate the extent to which the provisional-Church concept may have taken hold within ecumenical circles generally we now turn to the World Council of Churches, the central clearing-house for considerable formal dialogue and ecumenical activity. If sufficient agreement on the concept's acceptable parameters has developed, the WCC's statements and studies should provide some record and perhaps an overview of the extent to which denominational Churches and groupings have dealt with the concept in ecumenical work.

We should bear in mind, however, that the WCC has never claimed to be co-terminal with 'the one ecumenical movement' (the phrase commonly used to indicate ecumenical impulse and activity as a whole, particularly in contrast with any individual institutional expression thereof). Although the Council can often provide a valuable general picture of developments within the ecumenical community, we need not assume that its conclusions are exhaustive.

In the first instance, the Council provides the Churches a means of interaction only on the highest institutional levels. Although the organization encourages local ecumenical projects and recognizes that some of the most promising activity in recent years has arisen at that level (often despite parent Churches' institutional policies), the WCC itself is not a grassroots movement, but an affiliation of national Church bodies.[1] The relevant caveat is that doctrinal propositions from 'top-down'-type ecumenical institutions may not finally be well received by those who populate church buildings daily.[2] These organizational limitations, however, should not present any unusual difficulties for this study, for the subject matter itself, concerning relationships of certain types of localized worship to the universal; the fundamentally doctrinal character of the issues and the assessment of their scope within a wide ecumenical context; and the study's aim to assess the plural Churches' large-scale involvement with one another on epistemological matters are wholly in keeping with the WCC's aims and activities.

More problematic is the perception by some outsiders and insiders that the Council's theological ethos and institutional structures reveal an in-built bias towards liberal Protestantism. To name but one prominent example, the General

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1 See F&O, *Ditchingham*, pars. 23–5, 29; cf. U&UC, pars. 43–6.

2 Although local reception is by no means the only relevant factor in the search for theological truth, we need look only as far as Northern Ireland for an extreme example of how institutional agreements can instantly become irrelevant if the religious populace fails to engage with them.

Assembly's constitution as a parliamentary-style congress of delegations from each member Church means that Reformation traditions, because of their sheer degree of splintering and variety of polities, arguably wield disproportionate power by reason of simple numerics. The 'one member, one vote' system, though it often gives voice to insights of small Church groups that might otherwise be overshadowed, complicates the problem of weighting amongst the broader Christian traditions.[3] Additionally the parliamentary model itself, as opposed to a consensus model, may effect a bias towards a historically Protestant means of governance and theological enquiry. At the very least majority rule runs the risk of pushing to the fringes even the most venerable old traditions if they are not popular at voting time.[4] Difficulties such as these have often hindered relationships between the WCC and the more conservative evangelical and pentecostal Churches. Also in recent years they have provoked no small amount of discontent amongst the Orthodox Churches, which ironically are among the Council's longest-standing and most faithful members.[5]

Nevertheless, as General Secretary Konrad Raiser points out, the Council, despite these shortcomings, 'continues to be the most comprehensive and the most representative institutional expression of the ecumenical movement'.[6] Through its General Assembly, standing commissions such as Faith and Order and Life and Work, the mission and evangelism division, social justice programmes, facilitation of dialogue and development of multilateral 'convergence texts', the Council has served to focus mainstream ecumenical activity since its founding in 1948. It provides a consistent venue for denominations to grapple together with the doctrine and *praxis* that unite and divide – issues that cannot usually be tackled authoritatively on the local level. It offers a meeting-place in which Churches from vastly different cultures can come together to work out the essentials of Christian unity and devise effective, appropriate mission strategies. Additionally the WCC coordinates social action on

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3   World Council of Churches, *World Council of Churches Member Churches, Associate Member Churches and National Council Bodies*, 2001, world wide web site, u.e.d., provides a full listing of WCC General Assembly members, illustrating the difficulty of achieving representational balance: for example, whereas each autonomous Anglican province sends a delegation, the Reformed are represented not only by national Churches, but even multiple national Churches in areas where jurisdictions overlap – in America, for example, where immigration created Scottish Presbyterian and continental Reformed jurisdictions. Each such national delegation has the same vote as, for example, a lone African independent Church or hypothetically the entire Roman Catholic Church, were it to seek membership under the present system.

4   See, for example, Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *Seventh Report of the Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches* (1999), online edn, appendix A: following a JWG consultation Rome decided in 1972 not to seek full membership 'in the immediate future', in large part because of concerns about the Council's structure and the need for 'due regard' for the RCC's size.

5   WCC-EO-OOC, pars. 7–9, 22–5; Ecumenical Patriarchate, 'The WCC on the Eve of the Third Millennium: Reflections of the Ecumenical Patriarchate', *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (Apr. 1996), online edn: u.e.d.

6   Raiser, 'Report', §3.2, par. 27.

a global scale impossible for many smaller member-Churches otherwise to attain. Finally, the Council enjoys a size, geographical span and diversity of membership that few ecclesiastical groups can claim.[7] Although we cannot confine the present study solely to the thought and activity of the WCC, nonetheless we should expect the Council's activities and analyses to provide, first, a reasonable means of gauging initially the prevailing thought in ecumenical ecclesiology and, second, a base reference point for theological investigation – a guidepost to the vast array of ecumenical thought arising from a variety of individual authors, denominational studies and bi- or multilateral dialogues.

The WCC's approach to ecclesiology

Unfortunate, however, is the WCC's reluctance to take head-on the most difficult and controversial ecclesiological issues, a hesitance that has its earliest precedent in the *Toronto Statement* of 1950. *Toronto*, a document issued by the Central Committee just two years after the Council's founding and to which WCC studies still constantly refer, represents the then-untested Council's response to legitimate and specific ecclesiological concerns of Church leaders both inside and outside its membership – including not least importantly those of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches – about the Council's understanding of its own ecclesiological significance. For this reason, although the document is not actually a part of the WCC's Constitution, as the Council's first public attempt to clarify its self-understanding and mission the *Toronto* text has reached near-canonical stature. Five decades after the document's initial publication some ecumenical thinkers still hold up *Toronto* as the single most crucial text for understanding the Council's ecclesiological approach.[8]

At the outset the text states emphatically that 'the World Council of Churches is not and must never be a superchurch'.[9] Membership does not imply that the Council may make decisions or proclaim doctrine on behalf of the Churches, nor that the Churches must abide by Council statements. Its purpose 'is not to negotiate unions between churches, … but to bring the churches into living contact with each other and to promote the study and discussion of the issues of Church unity'.[10] In more recent years the Council has fostered the development of 'convergence texts' such as F&O's *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982) and facilitated inter-Church dialogues. Nonetheless, its primary purposes remain: to study the requirements of unity, to promote common prayer and to suggest but not legislate future areas of theological exploration.

More important for our purposes, however, is *Toronto*'s conclusion that, 'the World Council … does not prejudge the ecclesiological problem … . It cannot possibly become the instrument of one confession or school without losing its very

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7   WCC, *Members*, u.e.d.

8   Michael Kinnamon, *History of the NCC's Commitment to Ecumenism*, address to National Council of Churches General Assembly, Atlanta, Georgia, 14 Nov. 2000, online edn, u.e.d.

9   WCC, *Toronto,* §III.1.

10 Ibid., §III.2.

raison d'être'.[11] In other words, at the institutional level the WCC officially claims strict agnosticism on ecclesiological matters – not least on the essential requirements for unity and the ramifications of division for ecumenical thought:

> In [the WCC's] midst there are those who conceive unity wholly or largely as a full consensus in the realm of doctrine, others who conceive of it primarily as sacramental communion based on common church order, others who consider both indispensable, others who would only require unity in certain fundamentals of faith and order, again others who conceive the one Church exclusively as a universal spiritual fellowship, or hold that visible unity is inessential or even undesirable. But none of these conceptions can be called the ecumenical theory. The whole point of the ecumenical conversation is precisely that all these conceptions enter into dynamic relations with each other.

> In particular, membership in the World Council does not imply acceptance or rejection of the doctrine that the unity of the Church consists in the unity of the invisible Church … . The World Council does not 'imagine a church which one cannot see or touch, which would be only spiritual, in which numerous Christian bodies, though divided in matters of faith, would nevertheless be united through an invisible link'. It does, however, include churches which believe that the Church is essentially invisible as well as those which hold that visible unity is essential.[12]

Given the Central Committee's stated intention of allaying a specific set of critics' fears, *Toronto*'s employment of negative self-assessment tactics prior to stating the positive assumptions of the project was wholly appropriate, although, considering the influence the text has since come to wield, we may question the precedent set for ecumenical ecclesiology in general.[13] But as the creature of a vast constituency the WCC's continuing reserve in its ecclesiological pronouncements has been largely a matter of necessity. We cannot therefore immediately equate the Council's claiming an impartial approach with a complete absence of ecclesiological direction in the wider movement.

However, awareness of these claims can shed considerable light on evaluation of ecclesiological statements which have arisen thus far in WCC circles and the ecumenical movement generally. Two issues in particular obtain, both of which should be seen in conjunction with the Council's theological methodology, according to which statements are formulated primarily to enable the Churches to say together what they can say together and 'within that perspective to state the remaining areas of disagreement'.[14]

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11 Ibid., §III.3.

12 Ibid., §III.5; although the second par. contains an explicit denial of WCC support for provisionalist-type concepts, further statements call this denial into question; see pp. 37ff., below; cf. World Council of Churches Section on Unity, *Report of the Section on Unity* [*New Delhi Statement*], statement presented to the Third General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, New Delhi, 1961, in Kinnamon and Cope, pars. 25–7.

13 WCC, *Toronto*, §§III–IV; specifically the text proclaims 'What the World Council of Churches Is Not' *before* 'The Assumptions Underlying the World Council of Churches'.

14 F&O, *NPC*, par. 4; cf. Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry: Report of the Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches, Lima, Peru 1982*, in

The first issue is the matter of time-scale. Only in 1998, full 50 years after the WCC's founding, did the first 'convergence text' on ecclesiology appear: F&O's prototype, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*.[15] We cannot reasonably expect centuries of ecclesiological division amongst the Churches to have disappeared much earlier in a burst of good intention; yet neither must we forget that dialogues amongst all the major Christian traditions have proliferated for decades, concurrently and indeed decades prior to the WCC's work, many explicitly concerned with ecclesiological convergence and others with organic union outright. But in fact organic unions and full communion agreements, the practical fruit of ecclesiological convergence, have been relatively scarce in modern ecumenical history.

Moreover, with few exceptions (the Churches of North and South India, for example), those few extant unions have usually transpired between Churches with similar backgrounds, traditions and temperaments: Methodists with Methodists, Presbyterians with Congregationalists, Anglicans with Old Catholics, Anglicans with episcopalian Lutherans. There is almost no indication that dialogue may produce any broader reunion schemes amongst the larger Reformation, Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions in the near future. In this overall context, the late arrival of *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* does not bode particularly well.

The second and more important matter concerns the content of WCC ecclesiology which often consists of vague statements upon which all member-Churches can agree in principle but which leave room for broad, even contradictory, tradition-specific interpretations. For example, in *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, F&O states:

> The Church is centred and grounded in the Gospel, the Word of God. The Church is the communion of those who live in a personal relationship with God who speaks to them and calls forth their trustful response – the communion of the faithful. Thus the Church is the creature of God's Word which as a living voice creates and nourishes it throughout the ages. This divine Word is borne witness to and makes itself heard through the scriptures. Incarnate in Jesus Christ, it is testified to by the Church and proclaimed in preaching, in sacraments, and in service.[16]

The statement's wording reflects one of the essential formulae of Reformation theology: the word preached and the sacraments administered as the marks of the Church. Nonetheless, any Orthodox, Roman, or Anglo-Catholic believer could say it all in perfectly good conscience, given the right interpretive angle. The concepts are traditional, common at some level to all Christian communities and scripturally derived. The *Word of God*'s ambiguous identification both with scripture and with Christ himself leaves considerable room for an individual community's preferred interpretation. The prominence given to preaching and sacraments by no means identifies these phenomena as sole means of recognizing the Church. In fact the larger text quickly moves on to discuss the ancient credal formulation with which Catholics, Orthodox and many Anglicans might be more comfortable: unity, holiness,

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Meyer and Vischer, Preface, pp. 468–9.

15 Note in fairness that F&O, *BEM*, raises many important ecclesiological issues.

16 F&O, *NPC*, par. 10.

catholicity and apostolicity.[17] The text avoids discussing specific requirements for sacramental validity or the manner in which Christ's living voice is carried down the ages. Simply put, it presents a description by which all signatories may recognize their own Churches, but by which recognition of other communities as 'true' Church may be optional.

We would not make light of the difficult labour and love invested in the generation of any kind of theological convergence amongst the major traditions. The process of sifting through the common elements of Christian faith and the outstanding differences is a crucial and often thankless task. Yet a discerning approach to ecumenical texts such as this one remains vital. Aram I raises a very pointed criticism of modern dialogue generally:

> It has become common in the ecumenical movement to focus on issues which seem the least likely to threaten further the unity of the churches and to avoid altogether certain crucial topics that spark controversy. Despite many years of ecumenical togetherness, we remain fearful that raising sensitive questions and touching divisive issues will harm our ecumenical fellowship. The churches must find the courage to tackle the root causes of their old and new divisions with a spirit of honest and constructive mutual criticism. Unless such a readiness … prevails in all spheres and at all levels of the ecumenical movement, the movement will remain passive and risks becoming a sentimental exercise in togetherness quite foreign to the existential concerns of the life of the churches.[18]

The WCC's 50-year delay in producing a comprehensive convergence text on ecclesiology, combined with a continuing reticence to propose even a statement-for-the-sake-of-argument concerning the identity of the Church and involvement of separated Christians seems to confirm the earlier suggestion that, despite many decades of ecclesiological discussion within and parallel to the WCC's activities, and despite the emergence of many common themes in ecumenical dialogue (*koinonia*, for example), convergence-in-depth remains limited, at least amongst the three major Christian traditions.

Indeed the briefest review of WCC, bilateral commission and individual Church statements, will demonstrate that many core ecclesiological differences present at the twentieth century's outset still pose significant obstacles for the reunion dynamic at the start of the twenty-first, among them: the spiritual and juridical role of the papacy; the appropriate relationship between scripture, tradition and ecclesial authority; the character of sacramental grace; the definitive signs of the Church's apostolic continuity; and the requirements for authentic Church order. In a word, the sort of ecclesiological convergence required for a broad, sustainable reunion – genuine convergence on the identity, *locus* and constitution of the true *una sancta* and the plural faith-communities' relationship thereto – remains an unrealized and far-off goal. In looking for ecclesiological patterns within ecumenical thought, we cannot yet find a comprehensive treatment.

Despite these comments' pessimistic tone, however, we should not conclude instantly that modern ecumenical work has failed to produce any significant

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17 Ibid., par. 12.

18 Aram I, u.e.d.

ecclesiological progress or that vital common trends in thought have entirely failed to emerge. Nor need we conclude that the WCC's work can yield no positive insight on the more specific issue of ecclesial provisionality. Often, however, the notable points lie in the 'back-door' theology that, despite the WCC's claims of ecclesiological neutrality, emerges from time to time in the statements that aim to say what the Churches can say together.

For a prime example we need look no further than three paragraphs below *Toronto*'s own denial that the WCC exists to promote any particular understanding of Church unity or ecclesiological agenda:

> The member churches recognize that the membership of the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body … . All the Christian churches, including the Church of Rome, hold that there is no complete identity between the membership of the Church Universal and the membership of their own church. They recognize that there are church members 'extra muros', that these belong 'aliquo modo' to the Church, or even that there is an 'ecclesia extra ecclesiam' … . The underlying assumption of the ecumenical movement is that each church has a positive task to fulfil in this realm. *That task is to seek fellowship with all those who, while not members of the same visible body, belong together as members of the mystical body*. And the ecumenical movement is the place where this search and discovery take place.[19]

Although this paragraph stops short of claiming outright that all Christian communities are equally *Church*, it clearly implicates all Christians into the life of a larger mystical body (which – the previously mentioned disclaimer notwithstanding – without further elaboration we might guess to be invisible). Moreover, in the paragraphs that follow, *Toronto* remains deeply divided, jumping back and forth between disavowing WCC commitment to any given understanding of Church unity and theorizing about existence of ecclesial elements in diverse Christian bodies.

Similarly the *BEM* convergence text, a more contemporary example, refers to

> our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, [and] is thus a basic bond of unity. *We are one people* and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world. The union with Christ which we share through baptism has important implications for Christian unity … . *When baptismal unity is realized in one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church, a genuine Christian witness can be made to the healing and reconciling love of God*. Therefore, our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship.[20]

In this instance the members of the Christian communities seem to partake not just superficially but substantially in one another's lives through their baptismal incorporation into Christ. They share not merely their similar sets of external religious language and symbols, but the essential inward grace of which language and symbols are indicative. As with *Toronto*, *BEM* stops very slightly short of proclaiming one 'invisible' Church composed of all the baptized faithful. However, the reader might be forgiven for wondering how an involvement in such a Church would not in fact

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19 WCC, *Toronto*, §IV.3, emphasis altered.
20 F&O, *BEM*, Baptism, par. 6, emphasis mine.

be the case for 'one people' whose intrinsic vocation is to 'overcome their division and *visibly* manifest their fellowship'.[21] Moreover, in the most vital respect for our purposes *BEM* goes well beyond the *Toronto* remarks: specifically, in its implicit attribution of a *provisional character* inherent in the life of the present Christian communities – inherent in that they cannot *adequately* bear witness to God's reconciliation of humanity to himself without a fuller realization of their common baptismal life.

Not all WCC members have accepted the encroachment of implicit ecclesiology without question. Indeed the WCC's most essential and constitutional self-definition, commonly known as 'The Basis of the WCC', has recently come under fire from no less significant an entity than the Ecumenical Patriarchate. 'The Basis' refers to the WCC as 'a fellowship of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.[22] Although one might suppose this definition to be harmless, the Eastern Orthodox have been particularly concerned that the entire language of Christian *fellowship* (including *communion* and *koinonia*), insofar as this refers to the present Churches' common experience, should be understood as something quite distinct from the *true* (eucharistic) fellowship of the *una sancta*, which is the ultimate goal of ecumenical endeavour and which, of course, from the Orthodox perspective already exists within their own community.[23] Nevertheless, WCC statements, although sometimes disputed, do illustrate the general course of ecumenical discussion and highlight the favoured theological trends. The statements give rise to two particularly important points:

First, the presence of such notions as an invisible unity amongst all Christians and provisional authenticity of separated Churches as *procedural assumptions* reinforces the first chapter's suggestion that a common set of presuppositions about ecclesial unity and diversity – the beginnings of an ecclesial epistemology, in other words – has begun to surface consistently across all three major ecumenical models' boundaries. Orthodox objections notwithstanding (for they too were *Toronto* and *BEM* signatories), the sheer magnitude of apparent agreement on the two *basic principles* is impressive. Second, because the WCC's more explicit aim is to enable the Churches to say together what can be said together, the Council's reticence formally to identify the *una sancta*'s boundaries even guardedly for the sake of debate and the entry of ecumenical provisionalism into WCC documents mainly through the back door suggest a *lack of consensus* on the theological *details* and practical application of the provisionalist epistemology – a point borne out by the very existence of the three ecumenical models discussed in the first chapter.

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21 Emphasis mine.

22 World Council of Churches, *Constitution*, prepared at the Third General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, New Delhi, 1961, online edn, §I.

23 EcuPatr, u.e.d.; [Orthodox delegates to the Third General Assembly of the World Council of Churches], response to the *New Delhi Statement* [no title given], 1961, in Kinnamon and Cope, pp. 92–3.

In practice we cannot assume that, since agreement on ecclesial provisionality as a basic premise appears to be widespread, the concept has been effectively defined and uniformly applied, nor that its ramifications have been clearly examined. The more likely case is that provisionalism has grown up quietly as a standard presupposition within the ecumenical project, yet without an open debate about its appropriateness to the ecclesiological task of reconciliation.

But neither can we conclude that ecumenical provisionalism will not ultimately provide a sufficient basis upon which Churches may draw up an ecumenical ecclesiology without further exploration. Are the provisionalist assumptions potentially capable of drawing the Churches together eventually? By following such assumptions could the multiple Christian communities find themselves on the convergent path promised in scripture? To begin answering these questions, we must seek the concept's practical ramifications and its logical implications. To this end, however, we must re-examine the three ecumenical models individually, for ultimately the WCC's statements are not sufficiently developed.

Implications of provisionalism for the three ecumenical models

Although interdenominational dialogue has broadened our theological perspectives so that much progressive ecumenical thought has arisen amongst thinkers of all prominent Christian traditions, the Churches on an *institutional* level have treated the issue of ecclesial multiplicity largely with the resources of their own theological heritage, thus creating models primarily by broadening their own store of ecclesiological insights. Having examined each model's general premises previously, we now turn to explore for each tradition the logical consequences of forging an ecumenical ecclesiology on the assumption that ecclesial multiplicity imparts a provisional character to some or all Christian communities in separation. What advantages does this proposition carry for each model? And what difficulties might it raise?

(1) The Catholic/Orthodox model has the distinct advantage of safeguarding as a necessary sign of ecclesial *being* and Christian unity an identifiable primary community with more or less precise boundaries – one empirical entity in history to which a person may point and say, to paraphrase Karl Rahner, '*There* is the sign of humanity's union with its God'.[24] Although the Second Vatican Council has said that the mother Church does not comprise the totality of God's People on earth, it nonetheless remains invested with the fullness of the Gospel message, endowed with the plenitude of salvific realities and imbued with the infallibility of the Spirit's grace.[25] Thus does God in effect confer upon the one 'Catholic' community the competence, complete in itself, to speak authoritatively on behalf of the whole body of Christians *as if* it were representative of the entire Church. Neither Eastern nor Oriental Orthodox have ever completely forsaken the view that each of their

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24 Cf. Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W.J. O'Hara (London, 1963), pp. 14–15, quoted on p. 69, below.

25 See Jeffrey Gros, Eamon McManus and Ann Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism* (New York, 1998), p. 69.

respective communities is indeed the totality of God's earthly People. However, their expression of this position has grown ambivalent with their long-standing ecumenical involvement in modern times.[26]

By positing an imperfectly realized ecclesial life beyond the primary community, the Catholic/Orthodox model effectively relegates 'separated brethren' to a type of second-class citizenship in the Kingdom of God in that a community's separation from the mother Church by definition entails a certain self-divestment of authentic ecclesiality, yet without effecting a complete break. Whether separated believers are to be understood as 'less Christian' is a debatable point; but certainly their practical involvement in the unity of God's People exists at a remove from that of the 'true' visible Church. Solely because of participation in a community other than the self-declared mother Church, their ability to experience the fullness of God's self-offering as Son and Spirit is of an inferior quality. Although these secondary communities are now formally recognized as ecclesial in some respect, their fundamental reality-as-Churches is measured in direct proportion to their degree of doctrinal and institutional separation from the mother Church. Their experience of the 'true' Church's life and reality is provisional by definition, contingent upon complete re-integration into the 'true' fold.

This claim, as liberals rightly point out, appears arbitrary. Once a Church begins to recognize 'foreign' communities as having significant participation in ecclesial life at all there can finally be no absolute reason to suppose that its own set of dogmas and practices is in every critical respect superior. Similarly institutional communion with the mother Church – a status predicated historically on dogmatic agreement as a means of affirming or denying outright the ecclesiality of a given community – loses force when transformed into a means of measuring ecclesiality in communities already received as Church without either integration or agreement. Liberals and indeed many conservatives will often argue that each community with its own unique witness inevitably bears a special appreciation of some aspect of the Gospel message which the others require.[27] Even Catholics and Orthodox themselves acknowledge having enriched their theology and community life by appropriating 'foreign' insights from separated denominations where, as John Paul II concedes, 'certain features of the Christian mystery have been more effectively emphasized'.[28] This being the case, any attempt to locate the 'true' Church in one specific community cannot but degrade into a sort of 'my word against yours' scenario that carries little logical, much less theological, weight.

The scriptural record, too, notably in the Apostle Paul's thought, raises considerable doubt that a second-tier involvement with God's People can occur amongst Christian believers. Opening his first letter to the Corinthians with the theme of dissension in the congregation and periodically returning to the same topic

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26 See pp. 18f., above.

27 Cf., Hanson and Hanson, pp. 39, 60f., 209f., 234f.

28 John Paul II, par. 14; see WCC-EO-OOC, par. 18: 'Participation in the ecumenical movement … has offered numerous occasions for Orthodoxy to be introduced to other Christians, religious communities and the world at large. This has helped Orthodox theology to manifest itself in a fuller way'.

throughout (1:10–17, 3:1–4:1, 11:17–22, 16:10–11), Paul repeatedly underscores the matter's significance: he treats factionalism as perhaps the most glaring of threats to the Church's life. Crucially he propounds for the Church's unity the importance of adhering to a true and common doctrine (15:1–4, 12–14), one of the key points upon which the Catholic/Orthodox position hinges. Yet Paul's warnings and admonitions, even those concerning the content of true doctrine, are never given apart from the underlying assumption, present from letter's outset, that those to whom he writes are indeed 'consecrated in Christ' (1:1–3). Granted, Paul depicts the Corinthian Christians as errant – in dire want of correction on a range of doctrinal and moral issues. True, he insists that they misunderstand, misuse and abuse the grace and fellowship of the Church as well as the gifts of the Spirit (1:10ff, 3:1ff., 5:1ff., 4:6ff., 6:1ff., 12:4ff.). But nowhere in this nor any other epistle does he leave open the possibility of a substandard *ecclesiality*, only substandard behaviour from Christians. Those who step too far beyond the acceptable limits of faith and tradition earn outright excommunication, says Paul (5:2, 13b; 16:22), for 'no one who says "a curse on Jesus" can be speaking in the Spirit of God' (12:3a). Yet even given the gravity of the Corinthians' errors, 'nobody is able to say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit' (12:3b).[29] In the end Paul addresses not a community semi-participant in the Church, but rather God's People in Corinth, whose lives and thought should be made to fulfil the grace they have received so freely (3:16-7, 15:58).[30]

Although Paul's letters do not expound a comprehensive, systematic doctrine of the Church, the Apostle delivers his words on Church life with absolute conviction and clarity. And in this case the Corinthians' universal participation in Christ provides him with the indispensable reason to consider factionalism so especially disastrous: 'Every one of you is declaring "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been split up?' (1:12–13). Whatever else we may conclude from Paul's writings about the precise status of extra-ecclesial believers, we cannot but appreciate that he speaks here, as elsewhere, with the fundamental supposition that a person is either 'in Christ' or not. No middle ground exists.[31]

Beyond the Pauline epistles passages of a similar tenor surface now and again throughout the New Testament, frequently emerging not as doctrinal exposition so much as a base assumption applied directly to the struggles of concrete communities. James, for example, roundly denounces preferential treatment of the wealthy within Christian worship (2:1–9). Although the passage does not address doctrinal schism directly, James is nonetheless appalled that distinctions might be made amongst those recognized as believers. The underlying rule at work is that Christ has conferred an equal dignity upon all whom he has chosen. Peter in fact offers a more directly ecclesiological view with his *kingdom of priests* discourse, in which, like Paul, he offers only two distinct possibilities for the human relationship with God: 'Once you were a non-people and now you are the People of God; once you were outside his pity; now you have received pity' (1 Pet. 2:10).

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29 Cf. Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Gabriel Vahanian (London, 1958), p. 117, quoted on pp. 136–7, below.

30 Cf. 2 Cor. 13:5.

31 Cf. Rom. 8:1–2, 1 Cor. 10:21.

The patristic period finds these precedents explored, debated and developed more explicitly, as the Church Fathers were forced by circumstance, much like their apostolic predecessors, to find practical means of identifying the Church and its faithful amidst a growing Christian and pseudo-Christian population made fluid by persecution, heresy and schism. Cyprian, for example, lends especially enthusiastic support to the 'either-in-or-out' notion of Church, arguing forcefully and succinctly in his treatise, *On the Unity of the Church* that 'he who breaks the peace and concord of Christ, sets himself against Christ. He who gathers elsewhere but in the Church, scatters the Church of Christ'.[32] We shall return to examine the patristic record in further detail. For the moment, however, it is sufficient to note that in important respects the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, rather than acknowledging separated communities as second-class Churches, actually stood on sounder scriptural and theological ground when, in earlier times, they rejected outright any other community's claim to ecclesiastical status.[33]

(2) In this respect the liberal model, which affirms, first, the existence of an ultimately unified universal Church and, second, the equal integrity of all denominational Churches, more closely reflects the implicit Pauline position and Cyprian's explicit argument, insofar as the model acknowledges only one degree of Church membership. The great advantage of ecumenical liberalism is that the system enables mutually acknowledged Christian believers to meet one another at the discussion table without forcing one group to justify its basic claim to ecclesiality to the other before meaningful dialogue can begin. Thus, the model allows a developing understanding and appreciation of one another's theological and ecclesiological perspectives to inform a growing consensus. The uniquely valuable insights of one party need not be sacrificed merely for the sake of furthering conversation. Instead, both points of view taken together may be seen as an expression of the Spirit's richness and diversity in calling forth the Gospel message amongst creation – each party being in its own right an equal participant in the Spirit's free gift of Christ's grace and dignity, rather than a corruption dependent on the other. Each of these points represents an important liberal counterargument to the Catholic/Orthodox model's corollary that establishing the several communities' ecclesial status in the first place is one of the critical functions of dialogue.

Yet liberal provisionalism also poses its own significant problems, not least because, although the theory insists upon the equal inheritance of Christ's life and the Spirit's power for all the Christian faithful and the congregations they form, in the process it sacrifices the visible unity of the *una sancta* to the provisional character of the plural denominations. At this point the model falls sharply away from the one Church envisioned by the scriptural and patristic authors. The liberal ecumenist would be hard pressed to show why Cyprian, for example, would not denounce as *anathema* the suggestion that two or more Churches can exist *as Church*, remaining

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32 Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church*, in *The Treatises of S. Caecilius Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, and Martyr*, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church Anterior to the Division of East and West (Oxford, 1876), §5.

33 Cf. John Knox, *The Church and the Reality of Christ* (London, 1963), pp. 142–4, especially p. 143.

in separation and out of full communion, yet each with the ability to speak in Christ's name. Indeed the picture he paints in *Unity* stands diametrically opposed to any such proposition:

> Rebuking the faithless for their discord, and by His voice commending peace to the faithful, He shews that He is more present with two or three which pray with one heart, than with many persons disunited from one another; and that more can be obtained by the agreeing prayer of a few persons than from the petitioning of many where discord is among them.[34]

In fact, according to Cyprian, not only is disunity a mark of separation from the true Church, and with it Christ; it is an evil wrought by Satan himself,

> who snatches men from out of the Church itself and while they think themselves come to the light, and escaped from the night of this world, he secretly gathers fresh shadows upon them; so that standing neither with the Gospel of Christ, nor with His ordinances, nor with His law, they yet call themselves Christians, walking among darkness, and thinking that they have the light; while the foe flatters and misleads, transforms himself, according to the word of the Apostle, into an *Angel of light*, and garbs his ministers like ministers of righteousness … .

> This will be, most dear brethren, so long as there is no regard to the source of truth, no looking to the Head, nor keeping to the doctrine of our heavenly Master.[35]

Whilst liberal advocates concur with Cyprian in assigning to sin the primary blame for Christianity's divisions, they imagine sin as that which obscures in schism the underlying unity of the multiple worshipping communities.[36] In contrast Cyprian holds that the belief that schismatic worship can harbour truth of any kind is itself the bedrock of the Evil One's great deception. To his mind, if a Church is not one, then by definition it cannot be *the* Church, for it actualizes neither the unity of Christ's teaching nor his unity of *being* in which his People share as the gift of the transcendent God.[37]

Although talk of serpents and Satan has grown less fashionable in today's ecumenical circles, Cyprian's final objection remains a valid criticism today. True, in the liberal system the Churches meet one another on an *equal* footing, but so long as they remain in division, all are ontologically inferior and reside a step away from the fullness of the 'true' Church's life; *all* the Churches of the liberal model are in effect as defectively *in Christ* as the separated brethren of the Catholic/Orthodox model. By assuming that the Church can be fully itself only in structural union, the liberals, unlike the Catholics and Orthodox, for whom one true ecclesiastical fellowship remains, risk defining the collective communities as a 'whole' Church potentially too damaged to carry out its prime directive: to realize in all generations

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34 Cyprian, §11; cf. Matt. 18:19–20.
35 Cyprian, §§2–3.
36 See pp. 15f., above.
37 Cyprian, §§4, 6–7.

the communion established once for all between God and humanity in the living Christ:

In the first place, the manner in which the model establishes the communities' equal integrity risks reducing the Gospel message to the lowest common denominators of Christian doctrine. We are forced to leave aside as second-order doctrine not only genuinely trivial matters, such as Mary's perpetual virginity, but also many fundamental issues still under deep debate: the *filioque* controversy, for example; the interrelation of divine and human in the person of Christ; the importance of Church order to ecclesial *being*; or the nature of sacramental grace. Whether these disputes will require resolution at some future stage or perhaps simple tolerance is perhaps debatable; but, whatever the case, none of those doctrines can be treated as constitutive of the Church's core faith if all Churches are considered as meeting on a level playing-field. The only doctrines to be viewed with any confidence as finally definitive are those precious few upon which all the Churches universally agree.

In the second place, then, no individual community can pronounce upon doctrinal matters with an authority that is not strictly provisional, because only the whole Church can speak legitimately in the name of all Christians: 'Who else', demand Anthony and Richard Hanson, 'could possibly claim such authority? … Could any individual church or province of the church determine doctrine? … Only the whole church, the consensus of all true Christians, or some body which adequately expresses that consensus, could have have authority to determine doctrine'.[38]

In other words, the separated communities' provisional character is not simply a matter of confident proclamation tempered with disciplined introspection, doctrinal re-evaluation in the light of human frailty and the respectful acknowledgement of a variety of faith-experiences. Rather, all 'parts' of the Church must acknowledge that their authority is defective until they have reunion in a single, organic fellowship. Any binding proclamation of the Christian Gospel in more than the barest form becomes conditional upon the shaky, speculative hypothesis that the full organic reunion of all Christians will actually come to pass before the *parousia*. Highly questionable is whether a universal Church under such constraint can present a coherent picture of the Gospel message. A Church whose 'internal' schism renders all of its iterations incapable of expressing more than a skeletal Gospel provides no guarantee that any one iteration will apprehend divine revelation sufficiently to claim fidelity in all essentials of faith.

(3) Because the conservative model combines certain vital aspects of the other two systems, it shows some promise. On the one hand, the model's proponents affirm along with the Catholics and Orthodox that a comprehensive presentation of Gospel truth must involve theological and doctrinal specificity. The essential elements of Christian witness and practice, however difficult they may be to identify in an ecumenical environment, cannot be limited to the few points upon which all Christians agree lest the Gospel become eroded into insignificance. Yet, on the other hand, the conservatives refuse to arrogate unto themselves all final ecclesial authenticity and authority; rather, they claim with the liberals to be but a part of the

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38 Hanson and Hanson, p. 199.

one whole Church and generally seek to affirm all other communities' competence and integrity as fellow participants.

The model's main advantage lies in its pragmatism about determining amongst the variety of Christian faith-expressions the essence of ecclesial *being*. Notwithstanding the credal declaration of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, conservatives accept the reality of authentic divine-human communion beyond their own communities: the *ecclesia extra ecclesiam* of the *Toronto Statement*. Yet paradoxically each conservative-model Church also claims for itself in ways explicit and implicit some unique apprehension of the Christian faith's embodiment of Christ's continuing presence in his creation. Differing denominational approaches may throw these propositions' conflicting nature into sharper or milder relief; in either case, however, the juxtaposition inevitably creates a dilemma. Yet both propositions together describe undeniably the real circumstances of modern Church life with which living congregations must and do grapple daily. The conservatives, to their credit, face the challenge directly.

Both of our exemplars have long been subject to periodic disparagement for the relatively placid manner with which they accept ambiguities and incorporate them into their ecclesiological and ecumenical approaches. Anglicans have developed a reputation for woolly-mindedness, by which is usually meant a reluctance or inability to define their ecclesiology sufficiently. Certain Baptists are accused of isolationism, by which is usually meant their ability, intrinsic to their breed of congregationalism, to claim substantial ecclesiastical authority even when living with a broken or impaired state of communion with other denominations and sometimes with other Baptists. Faced with the same conflicting propositions, however, the liberal model relinquishes the Christian Church's *magisterium* by underscoring the present sectarian dispersion, whereas the Catholic/Orthodox model minimizes the reality of dispersion through their own claims to unique sacramental charisma and teaching authority. In these models the rush to reconcile the two propositions effects a division between the empirical Church and the qualities (catholicity and authority) traditionally attributed to it. In contrast real value does inhere in the conservatives' attempt to hold both actualities in tension, patiently, in the acceptance that although a resolution may not be immediately forthcoming, the full recognition both of fellow Christians' status and of the Church's real authority are vital to the Church's long-term identity.

Importantly the conservative approach lends itself to a natural acceptance of conflict and disagreement as legitimate means of furthering the cause of unity by ascertaining the Church's mind on a range of issues. Some conservatives even enshrine conflict as a distinguishing feature of the Spirit's action in the world. Archbishop Robert Runcie's opening address to the 1988 Lambeth Conference is characteristic:

> We need to recognise the persistence and place of conflict in Christian history. There has never been sharper conflict among Christ's people than the great debate over the admission of the Gentiles to the Church without the ceremonial law. Think of Paul withstanding Peter to the face (Gal. 2:10).

> Nor were the early ecumenical councils of the Church any easier: tempers blazed on the doctrines of the person of Christ and the Holy Trinity, charge and counter-charges were

levelled, coalitions were formed. At the Council of Ephesus the monk Shenouda hurled a copy of the gospels at Nestorius – a gesture at once orthodox and effective, for it struck him on the chest and bowled him over.

Yet in and through such unholy conflict the Church eventually, and never without difficulty, came to a common mind. Through the initiatives of prophets and primates, the deliberations of synods, and the active response of the whole Church, the Holy Spirit has been at work. Conflict can be destructive. It can also be creative. We are not here to avoid conflict but to redeem it. At the heart of our faith is a cross and not, as in some religions, an eternal calm.[39]

Moreover, the conservative approach reminds us that throughout Christian history – the Hansons' comments notwithstanding – the Church's local congregations, dioceses, presbyteries and regional synods, have always been said to wield some degree of genuine authority as the universal Body in microcosm.[40] Indeed local exercise of authority has often served as a catalyst for the very processes by which the larger Church, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in heated clashes, could arrive at consensus on matters of faith, doctrine and practice. Drawing an analogy between the local synods of antiquity and the denominational Churches of modernity, though perhaps debatable, could offer ecumenical partners a useful mechanism for approaching one another with both integrity and humility.

Even if we reject this comparison, the conservative premises do serve to underscore the valuable insight that, if Christ's gift of himself, though the Holy Spirit's action, is *truly* present within a community, then he will have given that community not only confidence in its ecclesial integrity, but a fundamental responsibility even within a pluriform Church to evaluate doctrinal propositions and take practical action in relation to Christ's Gospel. Whilst not wishing to undermine the importance of ecumenical consultation on issues of faith, morality and ethics, we should nonetheless be able to affirm the integrity of the local communities in creating their own authoritative interim consensus.

However, despite the model's strengths, conservatives finally are subject to problems similar to those of both other models. Notwithstanding the recognition of real authority intrinsic to all denominations, ecumenical conservatism finally comes to rest upon the liberal equation of ecclesiastical multiplicity and a maimed universal Church; division must be overcome in order for that Church to bear witness to God's Kingdom truly and effectively.[41] Like the Catholic/Orthodox model, albeit more implicitly, conservatives also employ a qualitative notion of membership in Christ's Body, according to which certain ecclesiological norms above and beyond those held in common by all Christians indicate the extent to which a community takes on ecclesiality in fullness. By adopting aspects of both the other models' use of provisionalism the conservative approach not only falls prey the weaknesses of

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39 Robert Runcie, *The Unity We Seek* (London, 1989), pp. 8–9; although Runcie was directly addressing his own denomination, the text's introductory note, p. 3, suggests that the Archbishop was keenly aware of the many ecumenical observers in his audience.

40 Hanson and Hanson, p. 199, quoted on p. 44, above.

41 Cf. ALJC, par. 22.

both the other models but in the final analysis actually expresses even its potentially useful propositions in a mutually-defeating manner:

On the one hand, the affirmation of a divided Church in which all 'parts' are defective and the consequent reluctance to wear the mantle of the one 'true' inheritor of full ecclesiality leaves conservatives at a loss to justify either the authority they take on any given issue or the qualitative view of Church membership that their position ultimately requires. Whereas the Catholics and Orthodox, rightly or wrongly, justify their ecclesiological demands by citing their unique status as God's People, the conservatives close off this avenue by counting themselves as one defective group amongst many. If we may legitimately raise concern about the arbitrary character of the Catholic/Orthodox contentions, the conservative model opens itself far more to such charges, ironically, as a result of its very attempt to seem more inclusive.

Yet, on the other hand, the conservatives' placing certain categorical ecclesiological conditions upon ecumenical reunion, thereby claiming for themselves in the interim a dimension of ecclesial fullness not possessed by their neighbours, means that any affirmation of all Churches' equal integrity cannot hold together. Despite many conservatives' admirable and creative efforts to side-step the problem, ultimately denominations that do not meet set ecclesiological criteria face the same relegation to second-class status that occurs with the Catholic/Orthodox model. The primary distinction between the models is that, whereas Orthodox and Catholics openly insist upon their unconditional claim to true ecclesiality, the conservatives create a divided universal Church in which all branches are equal but, to adapt George Orwell's phrase, some are 'more equal than others'.[42] The unfortunate reality is that, although the conservative model does represent an important attempt to redress the most problematic aspects of the other two models and does yield some important insights into ecclesial operation, the difficulties it raises are potentially more problematic than those it purports to solve.

Epistemological implications of provisionalism

To draw together our study's main lines of thought we recall our earlier claim that ecumenical outreach involves a relativizing process: an acknowledgement by each community that its counterparts have some claim to recognition as authentic iterations of Christ's Church. The opening-up of ecumenical relations forces the recognized boundaries of 'legitimate' or authentic Christianity beyond the visible confines of any one given denomination and requires at least the tacit recognition of a certain common inheritance of faith and tradition amongst all trinitarian believers. However, given that the Church's most elementary significance lies in its vocation to proclaim and participate in Christ's reconciliation of creation to the Godhead – in other words, the forging of *unity* between God and humanity – ecumenism implicitly poses an unavoidable question: to what extent can multiple communities, characterized as they are by such a wide diversity of theological perspectives, practices and

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42 George Orwell [Eric Blair], *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*, with an introduction and notes by Laurence Brander (London, 1960), p. 91.

ministries, constitute a valid expression of a Church for which legitimacy as the vessel of reconciliation and authority in the power of the one Holy Spirit has long been intimately associated with its visible unity as the Body of Christ?

In response to this challenge we have seen that one theme exists amongst all dominant ecumenical models: all treat the multiplicity of communities as a profound aberration from the ecclesiological norm. The Church's true unity is assumed as a matter of course to require some form of organic union that does not presently exist. If the life of the Church and its unity are the efficacious sign through which God actualizes his creative, salvific presence, the divine presence by which creation is redeemed and bound into the life of its creator, then the existence of plural communities must be treated as a retreat from that reality, an 'anti-sacrament', so to speak, that detracts from the essential *being* of the worshipping communities.

Therefore, in practice, for all their differences, all of the major approaches follow a common underlying pattern: the Churches' attempts to preserve their own traditional concepts of unity have led them to force the new empirical recognition of Church plurality into an uncomfortable conformity with *a priori* paradigms of Church unity which themselves go largely unexamined at root level. Rather than allowing the actual, empirical and indeed plural situation of the Christian communities to *inform* the ecumenical dialogue and the concept of unity beyond a fairly superficial level, the dominant ecumenical models force it to *conform* to the old paradigm.

That the communities have adopted multiple, even antithetical, systems for approaching the problem of ecumenical recognition stems from the distinct agendas that they bring to the table as they attempt to grapple with the division of Christians. But the underlying principle upon which they build – in effect a dichotomy in which unity and pluriformity are equated with, respectively, ecclesial reality or the lack thereof – remains the final source of the objections to which the dominant ecumenical models give rise. In other words, this underlying paradigm creates a system in which the Church's perceived reality is determined wholly by this unity and more crucially *against* which are set the pluriform communities as observed in the actual historical circumstances of the Christian people(s). This paradigm is also arguably the source of the ecumenical models' irreconcilability, for without a significant attempt to locate the Church's unity in something other than an idealized model that exists more in theory than in fact the Churches' attempts to explore theme of unity and division simply veer off in different directions from the same starting point. In the final analysis the results will not likely be reconciled without a realistic examination of the underlying premise.

Yet the modern ecumenical movement has failed to explore the ways in which the pluriformity of Christian communities may inform our understanding of ecclesial unity; rather, the Churches have simply taken as an article of faith that in fact it cannot. To be sure, the ecumenical movement suffers no shortage of creative attempts to explore ways in which diversity may be expressed *within* a (conceptually) united Church. But with few exceptions, none of which play particularly significant roles in formal ecumenical dialogue, *no major ecumenical model finally takes the debate so far as to question the fundamental assumption that without organic union separated*

believers participate in something less than the fullness of the true Church. The problem is of basic epistemological import.[43]

The profound implications of that same assumption must be closely examined. Whilst provisionalism is often treated in practice as a simple tool for adapting traditional ecclesiology to implicate 'foreign' Christians as genuine participants in ecclesial life, in fact its ramifications are considerably further-reaching. That the concept has not produced a unified ecumenical approach, but indeed very divergent approaches, does not necessarily invalidate it, but merely the ways in which heretofore it has been worked out in practice. Beyond the initial statement, however, its general applications entail certain presuppositions and consequences that apply necessarily across the board and do raise some concerns, among them these:

(1) The Holy Spirit's constitution of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church may be divorced conceptually from the concrete experience of some or all of the Christian faith-communities.

(2) This ideal Church (that is, the 'true' *being* of the Church) may be considered more real than the empirical – that is to say, the visible – forms of ecclesial life.[44]

(3) The concrete Christian communities may reflect this ideal to a greater or lesser extent depending on their conformity to a predetermined standard; to the extent that they do not reflect this ideal they are to be considered provisional.

(4) The multiple communities' provisional character may be based upon categories and events that are *not eschatological*; some groups appear to hold that structural reunion will necessarily happen prior to the *parousia*; all suggest that structural reunion would create a Church with more ontological weight than the Churches as they presently exist.

In a word, ecumenical provisionalism requires a series of assumptions about the Church's basic nature – that is, about *ecclesial ontology* – that cannot be made without a supporting systematic exposition. The concept raises rudimentary issues about the Church's constitution and God's involvement therein – the factors that allow us to identify Christ's 'true' Church and the *locus* of the Spirit's authentic, authoritative action on earth. It also raises a more general question: how do we characterize the relationship of an eternal God to his finite creation, and in what

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43 Moreover, the term *organic union* is itself an ill-defined concept that introduces a host of problems in its own right – for example, what requirements will need to be satisfied for a state of organic union to be declared? Will fully interchangeable ministries be adequate or does sufficient union demand the integration of governing structures as well? Will the Churches need to homogenize their ordained ministers into one system of holy orders and, if so, what kind? Is a universal primacy (that is, a papacy) required and, if so, what jurisdiction would it have?

44 Because Catholics and Orthodox explicitly account for a 'true' visible Church, this supposition is less immediately evident in their ecumenical position than in the other models. Nonetheless, the Churches' ambiguous recognition of other Churches' association with the 'true' Church undermine their intentions.

manner do we understand his eternal, eschatological reign to be realized in space-time through his gathered People?

To be sure, scripture does attest to a distinct element of provisionality about the Church's life and pronouncements: 'Now we see only reflections in a mirror, mere riddles, but then we shall be seeing face to face,' writes Paul, for example. 'Now I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall know just as fully as I myself am known' (1 Cor. 13:12). Yet this type of provisionality, concerned wholly with our human capacity to apprehend creation's eschatological condition whilst still in the midst of our own redemption, in no way precludes the Church's ability to proclaim with absolute assurance that coming eschatological perfection, made possible in the Christ-event, and to speak with the unique authority of the Holy Spirit in the meantime.[45] In this sense the Church as an earthly community becomes an unfulfilled but authentic – and in a special sense *complete* – mediator of redeemed creation to a fallen humanity. It is a place in which the eternal makes itself thoroughly present and continually effective in space-time. As Hans Küng indicates, 'God's saving act is not exhausted in the imperfect, temporary and uncertain present, but is directed towards a perfect, permanent and revealed future' which itself is likewise directed back towards us.[46]

This concept of ecclesial provisionality, however – although not without some presence in ecumenical discussion – is far from that arising just as prominently from ecumenical discourse which risks conflating the scriptural promise of an *eschatological* unity of creation in the life of the Godhead with the mere re-integration of a few decision-making bodies.[47] To do so is not only to identify mistakenly the article upon which ecclesial life has traditionally been said to be provisional, but potentially to undermine in a way never envisioned by scripture or tradition the ability of the Christian Church(es) to proclaim eschatological unity at all. If, as proposed in the first chapter, we are to examine the viability of the provisional-Churches hypothesis, it is to these issues that we must finally turn. *Are the epistemological positions that ecumenical provisionalism requires ultimately compatible with the Christian experience of God's presence in the Church?*

Conclusion: examination of ecclesial ontology required

Because the ecclesiological difficulties thus far described and the questions they raise are of basic epistemological and ontological significance, we shall have to approach them at that level. To speak of the unity of Christian believers is not to employ a mere descriptive phrase in the same way that, for example, a socialist might speak of unity amongst the world's workers.[48] The latter usage expresses a singleness of purpose and will. Christian thought, however, carries the notion considerably further, tying in unity not only with these but with the substance of created *being* itself. For,

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45 Cf. 1 Cor. 13:9-10, Rom. 8:14–30.

46 Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, New York, 1976), p. 101; see also p. 131.

47 Contrast CoE-ECG, par. 7, with ALJC, par. 22.

48 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*, with an introduction by Eric Hobsbawm (London, 1998), p. 77.

however we may formulate our understanding of unity's specific manifestations, a declaration that the Church is one in Christ or one in the Spirit constitutes no less than a pronouncement of the believers' reconciliation into the *very life* of the Godhead.

Moreover, as the Apostle reminds his Corinthian flock, the idea of Christian unity resonates not merely with static, descriptive overtones but with a thriving, dynamic connotation: a vocation to incorporate all of created *being* into God's redemptive order, and not only this, but in fact to become (or more accurately to be made) the vessels by which God likewise implicates himself as gift into the world to guide this event of reconciliation.

> So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a *new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see*. It is all God's work; he reconciled us to himself though Christ and *he gave us the ministry of reconciliation*. I mean, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ; *it is as though God were urging you through us*, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:17–20.)[49]

To speak of Christian unity, then, is to speak first and foremost of the infinite God's salvific relationship with his finite creation. To enquire into its character and identifiable manifestations is in the final analysis to ask how we may conceive not only an eternal God's intimate involvement, particularly in the person of the Spirit, in the process of salvation but ultimately too the manner in which he makes himself present in the spatio-temporal realm in general and the precise characteristics of the spatio-temporal revelation of that presence. The type of created world we conceive, then, and its fundamental relationship to its divine eternal source has direct bearing on our understanding of the character of revelation therein. In a word: *if we are to question the way in which we understand the unity of God's People, a basic sign and characteristic of the Spirit's guiding presence in the world, we cannot finally avoid examining either the ontological operation of that presence or our epistemological frame of reference.*

Precisely herein lies the crux of the difficulties with the provisionalist assumption common to all the ecumenical movement's dominant models: the investment of 'true' ecclesiality in an idealized ecclesial nature that has no direct empirical counterpart and exists at a remove from the tangible worshipping communities we find on earth appears to be neither logically sustainable nor consistent with the scriptural and patristic characterization of the Church's institution, constitution and purpose. Even if we were to assume the diametric opposition of Christian unity and ecclesial multiplicity (a debatable point in itself, not least because no consensus exists on what organic union might actually mean), can we be convinced that the equation of those particular qualities with, respectively, ecclesial reality and unreality should actually be made out of hand? Not least amongst the problematic issues are these:

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49 Emphasis mine.

(1) The absolute manner in which the opposition of unity and plurality is forged creates an ontological gulf, or *chorismos*, between the spatio-temporal world and the reality of the divine life or, more directly pertinent to the discussion at hand, the salvific operations of the Holy Spirit.

(2) The nebulous, static, isolated character that is a necessary quality of an idealized 'true Church' autonomous of the tangible conditions of the Christian faithful in space-time undermines the anticipatory, dialogical relationship traditionally said to be at the heart of the historical Christian communities' engagement with God's eschatological promise unity with creation.

For, after all, Christianity's traditional claim to be a historical religion has never meant merely that its revelations and institutions can be traced historically to a specific origin. More crucially it has meant that divine revelation to and redemption of creation comes by means of specific, meaningful, historically contingent events which define created *being* from *within the created realm itself*. Specifically, in the particular ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as at no other time and place, the very *Logos* of God, he who orders the universe itself, 'became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14, RSV).

By the same token the Christian faith holds the Church to be a 'kingdom of priests, a holy nation' (1 Pet. 2:9) specifically called out by God from within the world and fashioned into a People through whom the fullness of divine revelation (1 Tim. 3:15) and redemption (Matt. 16:18–19, John 20:21–3) – the Gospel of this same Jesus of Nazareth – continues to be proclaimed and mediated by a unique action of the Holy Spirit in all creation 'to earth's remotest end' (Acts 1:8).[50] Thus, the Christian Church, as T.F. Torrance argues in *The Trinitarian Faith*, should rightly be described as the 'empirical counterpart' of the Holy Spirit's presence toward creation and activity in our very midst.[51]

On its most basic level Christian thought is profoundly experiential, which in this sense does not imply that subjectivism or existentialism lies at its core, but precisely the opposite. As Nikos Nissiotis points out (in a slightly different context), the economy of salvation is based on the fact that 'Christ is identical with the concrete historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. His humanity is that of a specific person at a specific time and place. The Word of God has not merely become humanity in general'.[52] Nissiotis goes on to add that the Holy Spirit too manifests himself with concrete specificity as a 'distinctive reality' in history and that he does so by forming and constituting a tangible entity manifest in space and time: Christ's Body, the Church.[53]

The first generations of Christians began to proclaim that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, because they witnessed both personally and collectively his divine lordship

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50 Cf. Is. 43:20–1, 1 Cor. 3:5–17, Phil. 6:14–20.

51 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: An Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 256–7, emphasis mine.

52 Nikos Nissiotis, 'The Pneumatological Aspect of the Catholicity of the Church', in Groscurth, p. 15.

53 Ibid., p. 18.

in their lives and communities. Likewise, they began to identify their communities as the Body of Christ – God's one, holy, catholic and apostolic *ekklesia* – because those terms reflected their actual experience of the Holy Spirit's presence amongst them and interaction with them. In other words, the believers' intimate involvement with both the incarnate Christ and his abiding presence in the Spirit attested that divinity is *not* a remote thing, as many of their Greek contemporaries maintained, *not* a god aloof and detached from the universe and made known purely through the exercise of rational, philosophical thought (despite the rational ordering of creation in the exercise of the divine creative will).[54] Rather, in the concrete acts of the incarnate Christ, in the words of Scripture, in the celebration of the Sacraments and the gifts of the Spirit, they discovered God's revelation made abundantly manifest in and through the material, historical realm in which they lived and moved. 'And they shall call his name Emmanuel' (Matt. 1:23): a God who chooses unity between himself and his creation and whose revelation of his eternal *being* and will – indeed the definitive self-revelation of God – comes not despite our experience of what Plato would call the sensible, but precisely because of it. In Christ, a Christ who is none other than the historical Jesus of Nazareth, God is revealed in his eternal fullness. And in the Spirit, whose this-worldly action binds humanity in a common life with one another and with God himself, Christ's self-revelation remains in the actual *being* of his People as a tangible sign of the divine renewal of creation.

The point cogent to our present concern is that, as Torrance points out in *Space, Time and Incarnation*, 'the Incarnation together with the creation forms the great axis in God's relation with the world of space and time, apart from which our understanding of God and the world can only lose meaning'.[55] In this particular work Torrance does not address to any great extent the Spirit's presence as an additional aspect of divine-human interaction; his immediate concerns are, as the title implies, much more christological than pneumatological. But the point is nonetheless clear: human experience of the eternal God and his involvement with the world takes place wholly in the real events of history. It is from within, not without, the realm of creation that we encounter divinity and come to comprehend God's eternal will. Thus, should not the real situation of the Church, the concrete experiences in which the faithful participate as the Body of Christ be of key importance for understanding what the Church is and does? If, in dealing with revelation, we take away that which we see manifest before us and relegate it out of hand to the sphere of unreality, then our apprehension of God's true involvement with creation suffers.

However, in approaching ecclesial pluriformity, an undeniable aspect of modern Christian experience, each of the major ecumenical models here described strictly avoids any attempt to examine and understand what the situation might in itself imply for the Church's *being*. Rather, because unity is seen to be a paramount mark of the Church (not wrongly, of course), the more immediate, tangible experience of multiple Churches ultimately signifies a retreat into unreality. Of course, none of the models denies the pain of division keenly felt by most Christians. But in

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54 Further discussion on pp. 62ff., below.

55 Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, [2d edn] (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 68.
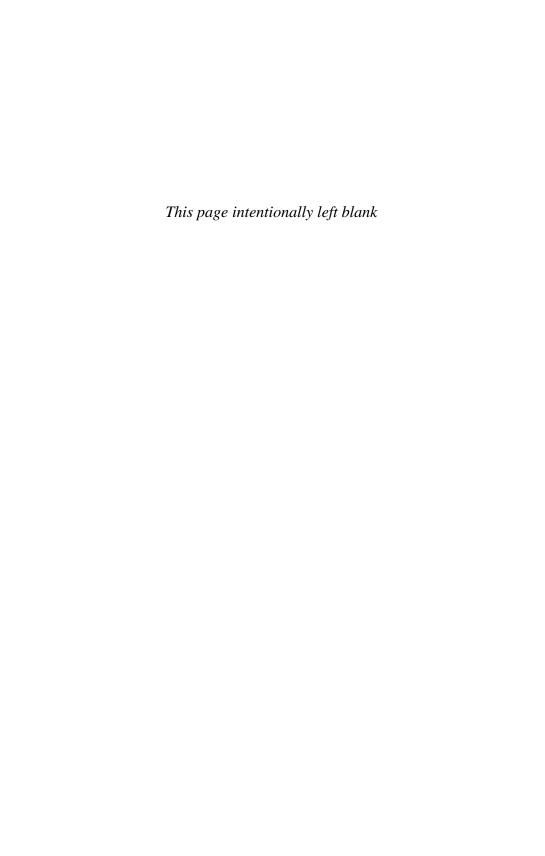
the provisionalist context that pain is depicted primarily as the pangs of being disenfranchised, or at least partially so, from authentic ecclesial life as if plurality were not in fact a significant aspect of that reality.

Christoph Schwöbel points out that 'ecumenical input to contemporary ecclesiology invites us to rethink the theological basis of the understanding of the church. It suggests dimensions of ecclesial communion that have not always been prominent, but could be fruitfully explored, in the theology and life of the churches'.[56] Surely the time has come, then, to re-assess whether the full organic reunion of separated believers would, as the dominant ecumenical models assume, truly re-constitute the Church in a form less damaged or provisional in any genuinely meaningful sense. Or in the end should we embrace the possibility that our recognition of separated brothers and sisters actually opens the door for us to build upon our concepts of unity in alternative ways? In the rest of the study we shall therefore turn to explore Christian ontology and the epistemology of the Church, with the aim of understanding what authentic revelation ecclesial plurality might convey and of using this insight to re-evaluate more fully and explain more clearly how modern ecumenists may best understand the legitimately provisional character of God's tangible-yet-eschatological People without falling prey to the weaknesses outlined above.

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56 Christoph Schwöbel, *The Quest for Communion: Reasons, Reflections and Recommendations*, paper presented at King's College, London, 1995, p. 10. That the present passage refers to Orthodox theology's impact on Lutheran understandings of communion does not negate the point's more general value.

PART 2

Trinitarian ontology:
the ecclesiological cornerstone

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Chapter 3

Principles of trinitarian ontology and cosmology

Introduction: God and history in Torrance, Gunton and Zizioulas

We concluded the second chapter by raising the matter of Christianity's unique affirmation of faith: that in Jesus of Nazareth God himself becomes historically manifest, not as an expression of eternity *imposed upon* space-time, but as truth itself, divine reality, emerging from *within* history *as* history – not history made to represent the divine nature in analogical fashion but rather an aspect of history made to *be* at once both the primal event of the created world and the self-realization of God's essentially creative will and eternal *being*.[1] The Church is likewise formed in the Spirit: an aspect of history in which God continues to make his divine presence known in this-worldly actuality. It follows, then, that revelation and the experience of the divine comes not as an enlightening intuition or understanding that is itself disembodied, timeless and impersonal. Rather, the divine revelation in both Christ and Church *lives synonymously* with the *revelatory event* in interaction with and within the world. Where we identify revelation in the fully Christian sense, there we see eternity itself emerging amongst us dynamically, in no way fettered by having *being* in the finite realm.

This very fact of the eternal God's *being* in the finite realm in Christ and Church is itself a vital aspect of the revelation, in that it exposes the characteristics of the historical-eternal relationship. Otherwise stated: our perception of the eternal God's operations in the world, whether in the Christ-event or in his pneumatic, ecclesial presence, has direct implications for our ontology and cosmology, and vice-versa. The introduction of changes into those epistemological constructs would necessarily affect our conceptions of Church and the nature of its activity, for precisely in the Church and its daily activities do Christians understand eternity to intersect with space-time. Conversely an altered view of God's operation in ecclesiastical realities cannot but affect our apprehension of God's self-presentation in creation more generally. In the end, therefore, we cannot confine an evaluation of ecumenical provisionalism to the 'purely' ecclesiological, for, because of the claims the Christian faith makes for the nature and purpose of the Church, ecclesiology itself cannot be so fundamentally confined. Ecclesiology, ecclesiastical ontology, general ontology, cosmology – all these theological sub-disciplines are inseparably intertwined.

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1   *Primal* here implies ontological centrality, rather than temporal priority (that is, the Big Bang) – although certainly Christianity teaches that the Word was 'in the beginning' (John 1:1) when God said 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3).

More specifically we must ask whether in ecclesial multiplicity, where once only schism was seen, we can find theological significance – whether some aspect of the transcendent God's presence is revealed or effected in history *because* the concrete structure of the faith-community is divided and pluriform. The very question would seem to contradict much traditional and most modern teaching about the nature of Church unity (and therefore God's action in history).[2] Yet having called into question ecumenical provisionalism's creation of an artificially constructed, non-empirical Church unity in order to preserve such teaching, and having also indicated the need to recognize the *eschatologically* provisional character of the Church as it relates to ecumenism and implicitly to the eternal-historical relationship, we cannot finally avoid the question of whether multiple ecclesiastical iterations can be indicative of theological truth or revelation.

It follows that we should first clarify the broader conceptual framework and general criteria we employ for understanding the action of a limitless God within the finite parameters of history. It also follows that by clarifying the principles by which God interacts with the world we go a long way in cataloguing ecclesiological parameters. That is to say, a systematic understanding of the means by which God makes himself present will help us see what we can and cannot affirm about the *being*, purpose and action of the Church.

To reiterate the second chapter's conclusion, then, this enquiry's foundational issue is epistemological: although presumably the investigation will not ultimately involve a paradigm shift in the basic Christian understanding of historical existence as a genuine sphere of divine activity, it will nonetheless involve a thorough assessment of the way we have conceived the presence of the transcendent God – particularly in the person of the Spirit, who constitutes the Church as the Body of Christ – within the finite material world of space-time. Beyond the matter of general ontological and cosmological principles the ecumenical movement's provisionalist position, in and of itself, implicitly demands a certain set of epistemological conclusions, discussed briefly in the previous chapter. To challenge the one is to challenge the other.[3]

Three major factors will demand special attention in order to provide a useful perspective upon the provisional character of the Church and the interrelation of the multiple communities, one to another and to God:

(1) The relationship of divine transcendence to space-time: the manner in which we conceive of God's transcendence itself and the way God causes himself to appear in history will have direct implications for the way we characterize the events that transpire daily in the Church as a community of divine redemption.

(2) The order and purpose of created existence: to explore God's purposes in creation and the goal of communion will suggest an appropriate understanding of what the Church is accomplishing in calling the world to redemption and what is meant by the unity to which it is drawn – that is, what the Church redeems the world *from* and what it redeems the world *to*.

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2   Cf. Eph. 4:3–6; Cyprian, §19; Hanson & Hanson, pp. 43–4.

3   See pp. 29ff., 48ff., above.

(3) History as the place and method in which God works out revelation and salvation: exploration of the way God uses history to accomplish his purposes – the actual mechanisms by which historical events transpire, especially the divine-historical event, and the manner in which God causes meaning to inhere in them – will provide a context for appreciating the *means* by which Christ, in the Church, draws his People into unity.

Perhaps the kernel of the epistemological basis for evaluating ecumenical ecclesiology may be found in the modern resurgence of trinitarian-based dogmatics, a school of thought emerging from the second half of the twentieth century, the advocates of which treat trinitarian discourse as 'the framework in which all other doctrines are to be developed'.[4] The chief strength of these theological systems is that 'they see neither traditional metaphysics of substance nor modern theories of subjectivity as capable of offering a valid conceptualization of the doctrine of the Trinitarian God', preferring instead a 'relational ontology' in which personhood-in-communion, free and open, constitutes both the divine substance and, through God's creative will, the essence of historical *being* as well.[5] This profound re-statement of God's *being* both in himself and towards us has broad ramifications extending throughout the whole range of doctrine.[6]

Such a perspective may provide us an especially fruitful avenue of exploration for at least three reasons. First, if, as previously argued, Christianity does indeed claim that God is the the final source of all that *is* and the Church is in some tangible way the chosen sign of divinity's involvement with creation, then we must build our systematics upon the life of God himself as the foundation of ecclesial life. By formulating a clear doctrine of the triune God as its premise trinitarian dogmatics dive straight to the heart of this involvement. Second, historically it has been within the life of Church itself that the three persons of the Trinity have been seen most clearly to emerge *together* in harmonious action in and towards the created realm: the Spirit binding the faithful together into One Body to effect the Son's ongoing presence in creation as the Father wills for the salvation of all.[7] Thus, an explicitly trinitarian approach to ecclesiological epistemology commends itself as particularly appropriate. Third, the communitarian emphasis of trinitarian ontology promises a

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4 Schwöbel, *Quest*, p. 13.

5 Ibid., pp. 13, 15; Torrance, *ST&I*, pp. 4, 18ff., 52; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, with a foreword by John Meyendorff, Contemporary Greek Theologians, no. 4 (Crestwood, New York, 1985), pp. 40f.; John D. Zizioulas, 'On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood', in *Persons Divine and Human*, eds Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 41.

6 Schwöbel, *Quest*, p. 13.

7 That is, although the foundational premise of modern trinitarian thought is that all theology should flow from the revelation of God's tri-unity, historically, because of the triune persons' unique functions in the economy of salvation, western Christian thought in particular has sometimes tended to compartmentalize them in the context of certain subjects – for example, christology or soteriology. Ecclesiology, however, depends upon all three explicitly.

valuable viewpoint for formulating our own understanding of the nature of unity and community as it exists in the observable Churches.

In this broader trinitarian school of thought the works of T.F. Torrance, Colin Gunton and John Zizioulas in particular seem especially promising help for grounding our ecclesiological investigation in a broader epistemological framework because their insights and methods have the potential to address a number of the specific concerns raised both in Part One and in the paragraphs above:

(1) Amongst the most significant goals in these theologians' thought is to deliver a clean, decisive break from concepts that they believe to be philosophical accretions on the core scriptural and patristic approaches to this-worldly realities, especially as they come to be involved with divinity. Drawing rigorously from both scriptural and patristic sources, most especially Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers, all three argue the necessity of re-establishing the epistemological balance that ultimately transformed both ancient Jewish and Greek thought into a distinctively Christian world-view during the scriptural, pre- and immediately post-Nicene periods, a balance they believe was lost in later centuries through syncretistic distortion by unreconstructed Greek thought and post-Enlightenment concepts.[8] Their concern for tradition parallels our concern to re-examine entrenched ecclesiological assumptions without doing philosophical violence to an authentically apostolic and patristic expression of faith.

(2) All three writers explore the principles governing the finite world's involvement with eternity, both the manner in which the historical realm acquires meaning from God's creative acts and the actual cosmological mechanics of *being* and meaning in space-time. Torrance and Gunton particularly, drawing out the potential metaphysical implications of twentieth-century space-time physics, involve the ancient tradition of the Church in an intimate dialogue with modern ontological and cosmological insights. Indeed Torrance argues that, given the radical philosophical revolutions inspired by twentieth-century scientific discoveries which have undermined many hellenistic and Enlightenment insights, the Athanasian and Cappadocian approaches to ontology and cosmology suddenly stand better able to answer present-day intellectual queries and challenges than has been the case for centuries.[9] This assertion may well provide valuable insights for exploring the mechanisms of God at work in his historical Church.

(3) Torrance, Gunton and Zizioulas, without being rigid empiricists in the scientific sense, all regard this-worldly events meaningful in their own right. They argue that empirical phenomena can constitute a revelation of God's action towards creation by virtue of what they *are* rather than by virtue of a greater reality to which they point. This position reflects one of their most fundamental criticisms of the ontological-cosmological consequences of hellenistic and Enlightenment approaches to christology. Specifically their objections focus on the central fact of the incarnation and the distinctive proclamation of Christian faith: that in Jesus of

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8   See Torrance, *ST&I*, pp. 24ff., 43–4; Colin E. Gunton, *Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology*, 2d edn (London, 1997), pp. 107ff.; Zizioulas, 'OBP', pp. 39–40; Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 40.

9   Torrance, *ST&I*, pp. 45, 51, 58–9.

Nazareth two realities inhere: the unbounded transcendence of God and the finite immanence of humanity, both aspects being wholly *co-present*, to use Gunton's term; both expressed in fullness without limitation; and neither subordinated to the other either in theory or fact.[10] The three authors' particular concern is to eliminate any kind of dualistic disjunction in our concepts of historical *being* and eternity that would either absolutize the reality of the one at the expense of the other or set the two into ontological opposition (or both), thereby distorting our view of Christ's presence in and towards the world as God of God and Man of Man and ultimately limiting any real possibility of human interaction with the divine in his eternity.[11] In Gunton's own words,

> The New Testament, if we take it seriously, will not allow us to choose between time and eternity, immanence and transcendence, in our talk about Jesus. The two are always given together. It is at this point that Biblical teaching about the reality of God and his freedom to involve himself in the world without loss to his or the world's reality runs up against the philosophical assumptions which dominate both ancient and modern culture. Faced with a document claiming the co-presence of the temporal and the eternal, the mainstream philosophical tradition tries to present us with a choice: either time or eternity[12]

According to Gunton, Christ's real presence in and towards creation as both God and human *must* impose itself as the central truth whereby we must shape our understanding of God in relation to the world. Any epistemological framework that would undermine either the humanity or the divinity of Jesus is *rightly* to be discarded; we can hardly reject that conclusion without rejecting the Nicene Creed itself.

The issue will be especially critical to this investigation, for the core reality of the Church too is God's continuing will to bring forth in the Spirit's power the fullness of his divine transcendence by means of the historical contingencies of the world in which his creatures dwell: 'As the Father sent me, so I am sending you … . Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained' (John 20:21–3). Presumably the principles that apply to christology will have bearing on our understanding of authentic ecclesiality, especially in our attempt to clarify the nature of the divine-material relationship in the Church. At the very least coming to the ecclesiological task with a clearer understanding of the christological God/man ontology will allow us to explore more readily the phenomenon of the Church(es) as they appear before us, for certainly that ontology affirms God's full, positive involvement with the historical world in his acts of redemption.

In this second part of the study, therefore, we shall examine Torrance, Gunton and Zizioulas's ontologies and cosmologies and their implications for our understanding of ecclesial ontology, beginning with the authors' own starting point: Christian ontology's dual axis of creation *ex nihilo* and Jesus the *Logos* of God.[13]

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10 Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 119.

11 By *ontological opposition* is meant the kind of system, described on pp. 62f., below, in which material *being* constitutes a chaotic infringement upon the eternal.

12 Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 207.

13 Torrance, *ST&I*, p. 74.

Creation *ex nihilo*

In the religious literature of the Hebrews the earliest explicit affirmation of *ex nihilo* creation appears in 2 Maccabees in an account of seven brothers martyred for rejecting the pagan cults the Graeco-Syriac king Antiochus Epiphanes imposed upon subjugated Israel. As the last brother faces immanent execution his mother entreats him to meet death with confidence in God's sovereignty over all that *is* from the moment of creation itself to the final, bodily resurrection of the faithful departed:

> I implore you, my child, look at the earth and sky and everything in them, and consider how God made them out of what did not exist, and that human beings come into being in the same way. Do not fear this executioner, but prove yourself worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that I may receive you back with them in the day of mercy. (7:28–9.)[14]

The tale's grisly ethnic and religious conflict is appropriate in the present context, for it underscores the profound differences between ancient Greek and Hebrew thought which Christianity from an early stage would integrate and transform by identifying Jesus of Nazareth with the *Logos* of the *ex nihilo* creation: he without whom 'nothing was made that has been made' (John 1:3, NIV).[15] When the New Testament writers and Church Fathers began to articulate their experience of God as tri-unity, with Christ named explicitly as the universal *Logos*, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* allowed them to remain faithful to the concept of God's absolute sovereignty, a concept apparently unique to the Hebrew tradition, by defining God as the fully transcendent *Other* and the cosmos in its entirety as, in Gunton's words, 'the product of free divine activity'.[16] This concept stood in stark contrast with the overall consensus of centuries' worth of classical thought in which, as Zizioulas reminds us, all being was held to consist ultimately of a unity, and the multiplicity or differentiation of things, one from another, was said to signify decay – a fall from being.[17] Thus, the divine creators or cosmic principles of the Greek philosophers were bound by ontological necessity derived from the cosmic machine with which they were co-eternal and from which they were inseparable:

Plato's creator in the *Timaeus*, for example, is subject to pre-existing cosmic paradigms of the good – symmetry, justice, eternity and so forth – and therefore constrained to create accordingly. Yet he finds that, because of the inferior nature of the pre-existing matter and space with which he must form the sensible world, creation

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14 See also 2 Macc. 7:22–3.

15 Cf. 1 Col. 1:16–17: 'For in [the Son] were created all things, in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, thrones, ruling forces, sovereignties, powers – all things were created through him and for him. He exists before all things, and in him all things hold together'.

16 Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation: The 1993 Warfield Lectures* (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 69.

17 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 29; see John D. Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution', in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 52.

can only approximate the good.[18] The *Logos* of the Stoics, the impersonal divine logic in which the universe subsists, itself exists within the cosmos as the ordering principle of both mind and matter. Because it effectively constitutes the gears by which the universe moves, a wholly transcendent *Logos* is by definition inconceivable.[19] In the neoplatonic system of hierarchical emanation the differentiated existence of the 'sensible world' marked a descent into non-*being* from the One.[20] Depending on the ontological system employed, either the creator/universal principle remains captive to a greater ontological-cosmological reality which shares its eternity and which it is unable to transcend, or else technically the One *being* does not create at all, but merely extends itself through differentiation and in the process corrupts its own existence – frays itself around the edges, as it were.[21]

By their adoption of the Jewish *ex nihilo* creation-theology the early Christians specifically and categorically rejected these hellenistic notions of cosmic co-eternity with God. In the following passage from his exegetical homilies on Genesis, for instance, St Basil affirms in direct opposition to such theories, first, the createdness of matter and second, that God, rather than being bound by pre-existing paradigms, instead *defines* the good by his very *being*.

> But the corrupters of the truth, who, incapable of submitting their reason to Holy Scripture, distort at will the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, pretend that these words ['The earth was invisible and unfinished'] mean matter.[22] For it is matter, they say, which from its nature is without form and invisible, – being by the conditions of its existence without quality and without form and figure. The Artificer submitting it to the working of His wisdom clothed it with a form, organized it, and thus gave being to the visible world.

> If matter is uncreated, it has a claim to the same honours as God, since it must be of equal rank with Him. Is this not the summit of wickedness, that an extreme deformity, without quality, without form, shape, ugliness without configuration, to use their own expression, should enjoy the same prerogatives with Him, Which is wisdom, power and beauty itself, the Creator and Demiurge of the universe? …

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18 Plato, *Timaeus*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, eds Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series, no. 71 (Princeton, 1961), §§30a–b, 37c–38b, 48a, 51a–b; see also Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 29–30.

19 Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York, 1968), pp. 7–8; Torrance, *ST&I*, pp. 9–10; Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 29–30, 69–70; equally inconceivable, however, was a *Logos* which could participate in the events of creation in a particularized fashion; the hellenistic *Logos* manifested itself in the cosmic machine as a whole, identified only by the intelligible rationality of that machine, not in any particular constituent part; contrast Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* [*De Incarnatione*], in *Early Church Fathers*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 4, *Athanasius: Select Writings and Letters*, online edn, §41.

20 Tillich, *History*, pp. 51ff.; Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 29–30.

21 Cf. Zizioulas, 'DHT', p. 52; Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* [*Contra Gentes*], in *ECF/*NPN, series 2, vol. 4, §§27–30, a refutation of monistic, pantheistic and panentheistic concepts.

22 Gen. 1:2; NJB trans.: 'Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep.'

Such is the idea that they [who assert matter's eternity] make for themselves of the divine work. The form of the world is due to the wisdom of the supreme Artificer; matter came to the Creator from without; and thus the world results from a double origin. It has received from outside its matter and its essence, and from God its form and figure. They thus come to deny that the mighty God has presided at the formation of the universe, and pretend that He has only brought a crowning contribution to a common work, that He has only contributed some small portion to the genesis of beings: they are incapable from the debasement of their reasonings of raising their glances to the height of truth.[23]

Although *ex nihilo* creation was a relatively late theological development, it did arise as the logical conclusion of a consistent biblical theme, beginning with the Genesis creation mythology and developed throughout the Old Testament in all its literary forms, which demands the absolute sovereignty and freedom of God over all that is, both 'heaven and earth' (Gen. 1:1, 2:4).[24] In both Jewish and Christian traditions Yahweh alone designs and builds the world by a logical act of will and free exercise of his magnificent power: 'Where were you', he demands of Job, 'when I laid the earth's foundations? Tell me since you are so well informed! Who decided its dimensions, do you know? Or who stretched the measuring line across it?' (Job 38:4–5). Moreover, without his continual, dynamic, animating presence, life itself withers:

Creatures both great and small …
They all depend upon you
to feed them when they need it.
You provide the food they gather,
your open hand gives them their fill.
Turn away your face and they panic;
take back their breath and they die and revert to dust.
Send out your breath and life begins;
you renew the face of the earth. (Ps. 104:25, 27–30.)

Unlike the Stoic concept of *Logos* as the inherent, inescapable and impersonal logical principle in which all things find *being*, Yahweh's sustenance of creation involves an explicit resolve that becomes synonymous with sovereign action in moulding the world as a whole and particularly his chosen people according to a *conscious* plan. Moreover, God's creative act is a shaping of the people in their *other*ness; their *being* is contingent upon, but is not finally resolved into, the divine

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23 Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on Creation* [*Hexaemeron*], in *Early Church Fathers*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 8, *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, online edn, §II.2; more extensive argument in §I.8; cf. §§I.11, II.3; Athanasius, *DeIncar*, §6.1–2. Basil's employment of the neoplatonic term *demiurge* is awkward. Nonetheless, in the larger homily, he clearly asserts God's absolute prerogative over all that *is* and his unshared eternity. Thus, by equating *demiurge* with *creator* Basil directly counters the argument that a power distinct from the creator merely forms pre-existing matter, instead maintaining that Yahweh truly is the sole, uncreated shaper *and* source of all.

24 Cf. Gunton, *TrCr*, p. 19; Basil, *Hexaemeron*, §§I.11, II.2–3; Athanasius, *DeIncar*, §6.1–2.

being. And their existence is of a sort that allows them at will to co-operate with the universal logic or not, but over which God nonetheless has the final prerogative:

> I went down to the potter's house; and there he was, working at the wheel. But the vessel he was making came out wrong, as may happen with clay when a potter is at work. So he began again and shaped it into another vessel, as he saw fit. Then the word of Yahweh came to me as follows, 'House of Israel, can I not do to you what this potter does? Yahweh demands. Yes, like clay in the potter's hand, so you are in mine, House of Israel. Sometimes I announce that I shall uproot break down and destroy a certain nation or kingdom, but should the nation I have threatened abandon its wickedness, I then change my mind about the disaster which I had intended to inflict on it.' (Jer. 18:3–8.)[25]

The introduction of christology into the Jewish thought significantly altered the *ex nihilo* concept's course of development; yet the Christian concept remained rooted in the idea of God's *absolute priority over* and *absolute otherness from* creation. For formulating an epistemological framework, a number of implications apply:

(1) *God is the wholly sovereign root of all being*. To claim that all existence sprang at God's conscious initiation from that which is not is to assert that nothing – neither matter, spirit nor even concept – is ontologically anterior to or simultaneous with God's *being*. Basil, for example, as we have seen, insists that God is the one true creator as opposed to a mere sculptor – indeed that to characterize God otherwise is to cheat him of the appropriate credit for his unique and glorious divinity.[26] Christian ontology can find its basis solely in Yahweh's personal *being* and will, because 'prior' (so to speak) to the conscious act of creation God alone *is*. Simply put, nothing exists nor can be conceived that is not wholly dependent on God; nothing exists nor can be conceived that does not owe its *being* directly to God's creative will and free choice.

(2) *Historical existence (the realm in which Church mediates revelation) is neither an inferior nor a meaningless form of being; divine creative intention and ordering is inherent within it*. Created *being* exists within the finite limits set for it but its *being* is not for that reason less real than eternal *being*. 'There are not degrees of being,' Gunton argues from John Duns Scotus's concept of the univocity of *being*,

> but things just are. To say that God is and to say that the world is are not two different kinds of judgement, even though they concern distinctly the infinite and the finite … . It is a peculiarly Christian theological insight that there are not degrees of being, but a duality. There is God, and there is creation.[27]

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25 Cf. Tob. 13:1–11.

26 Basil, *Hexaemeron*, §§I.7, II.2; Athanasius, *DeIncar*, §2.3–4. Although the Jeremiah passage cited above does in fact refer to God as a sculptor, the prophet's imagery emphasizes God's power to shape creation entirely as he wills, whereas the Greek conception forced the creator to work within limitations set for him by matter itself.

27 Gunton, *BTR*, pp. 52–3; see Gunton, *TrCr*, pp. 118–19: although Duns Scotus did not reject hellenistic concepts such as *form*, his 'doctrine of *haecceitas*, or "this-ness", implies that the ultimate reality of a thing is to be found in its being what it is rather than in its instantiating general notions or forms. This means, as T.F. Torrance has pointed out, that a

Historical *being* arises entirely from the positive choice, the irresistible will, of a God who alone is anterior to all else. Classical philosophy characterizes material existence as a descent from *being* into non-*being* (or chaos) because of the cosmic opposition of eternity/spirit and matter which divinity (if it is conscious at all) would be powerless to overcome. But the Christian proposition that the world arose *ex nihilo* affirms the opposite: that the world's existence represents an *ascent* into *being* rooted in the conscious, orderly will of the divine creator. Thus, the created realm cannot simply by reason of its finite limitations be viewed as negation of eternity nor as less real than eternal existence. Similarly the material cannot be defined as meaninglessness in the hellenistic sense – inferior to reason – because in the creative act the transcendent God is free to make the cosmos exactly as he wills it to be.[28] And, because God has consciously ordered creation, an objective truth imparted by God inheres in the very nature of created *being*. That is to say, created *being* is *being* with inherent purpose. Through the conscious will of God creation is endowed with both an *other*ness from divinity and an integrity of *being* in its own right.[29]

(3) *The eternal cannot be spatialized or temporalized, not even in the negative*. Because the divine *being* is the ontologically anterior source of all things – things 'visible and invisible' in the words of the Creed – spatio-temporal concepts cannot be applied to God in his transcendent *being*, for they are an integral part of created, historical existence.[30] Moreover, although our three authors do not mention this point specifically, it follows from their arguments that this principle applies equally to the negative conceptions, spacelessness and timelessness. If such characteristics truly exist, they cannot be of God's essence, for to characterize God's *being* as necessarily a negation of space-time (that is, as a timeless eternity) would imply, first, an ontological constraint on God's absolute freedom; second, his inability to interact freely with his creation in its own nature or even to place himself into spatio-

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knowledge of particulars is prior to a knowledge of abstractions'; cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 4–5. See also Jonathan Dolhenty, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus: 'The Subtle Doctor',* Radical Alchemy [world wide web site], u.e.d.: Duns Scotus makes 'no real distinction between essence and existence … . Regarding the concept of being, Scotus holds that it is univocal, as against St. Thomas, who teaches that it is an analogous concept.'

28 Contrast Plato, *Timaeus*, §§29e–30a: the creator 'was good, and … desired that all things should be *as like himself as they could be* … . God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, *so far as this was attainable*. Wherefore also *finding the whole visible sphere* not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other'; emphasis mine. The passage implies that, had the creator been free to make the sensible realm better than it is, he would have done. The world is less – and less meaningful – than he wills, because by nature it only mimics good. In contrast, although linguistic parallels arguably exist between this passage and Gen 1:1–27, the Hebrew God creates freely a creation seen by him to be 'good'; the biblical author is not satisfied with merely 'the best possible'. See Gunton, *BTR*, p. 69; Basil, *Hexaemeron*, §II.1.

29 Gunton, *BTR*, pp. 52–3; Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 65–6.

30 Cf. Col. 1:16.

temporal categories; and third, a denial of God's positive, constructive and dynamic involvement with the world in the act of creation. He would not be wholly free to act according to his own terms within a temporal world to which he stands in ontological opposition; indeed he would not be free to involve himself fully in space-time in any real sense. God in his very *being* is above all possible spatio-temporal necessity: absolute freedom means that God must be able to implicate himself wholly into the framework of space-time (and indeed into spacelessness and timelessness if such a framework exists) and to draw these realities to himself; he must be able to do so utterly without restriction.

(4) *Transcendence cannot imply a chasm or separation* (chorismos) *between God's being and that of creation; God's being extends itself as general, immanent presence through all creation*. If transcendence cannot be understood either in spatio-temporal terms or in the absence thereof, neither can God's relationship to historical existence be spatialized or temporalized. 'God', suggests Torrance, 'is the transcendent Creator of the whole realm of space and time and stands in a creative, not a spatial or temporal relation, to it'.[31] In other words, divine transcendence, God's complete *Other*ness from the universe and its categories, in no way suggests a spatio-temporal separation from or antithesis towards creation; there cannot be a hellenistic-style gulf (*chorismos*) between God and the created realm. Quite the opposite, Torrance claims: God's ontological primacy demands that we characterize his relationship with the universe as a *positive, dynamic relationship* which forms and sustains the world in its *being* and imparts meaning to spatio-temporal existence. Gunton points out that 'the world is contingent, finite and what it is only by virtue of its *continuing* dynamic dependence upon its creator'.[32] However, by referring to God's creative act we do not simply refer to an act 'in time' (for example, at the beginning-point of the universe), but to the larger 'universe-event' in both its spatial and its temporal dimensions, an event towards which God is generally omnipresent. God's *being* and action *interpenetrate* the realm of created *being* in such a way that God and the world are invariably and fundamentally interrelated in the divine creative act, but neither one ceases to be *other*.[33]

The *Logos*

'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). This single sentence in the Fourth Gospel's introduction sums up in one fell swoop Christianity's radical synthesis and transformation of both Jewish and Greek religio-philosophical thought. In the ancient world its cosmological implications were truly

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31 Torrance, *ST&I*, p. 3.

32 Colin E. Gunton, 'The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community', in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, eds Colin E. Gunton and Daniel Hardy (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 67, emphasis mine.

33 Gunton, *Y&T*, pp. 118f.; cf. Athanasius, *DeIncar*, §17.1: 'He is at once distinct in being from the universe, and present in all things by His own power – giving order to all things, and over all and in all revealing His own providence, and giving life to each thing and all things, including the whole without being included'.

stunning. The second pole of the Christian ontological axis is the christological identification of the hellenistic concept of *Logos*, the transformed doctrine which binds up the active principle of created existence – that to which Torrance refers as the inherent rationality of the universe itself – with the life, death, resurrection and ultimately the *parousia* of Jesus of Nazareth.[34] Thereafter the nature of the created realm could not be defined without explicit reference to a single, specific human being who existed in a particular time and place.[35] Here the earlier comments on the Christian adoption and transformation of conflicting Greek and Hebrew ontological and cosmological thought become especially relevant.

Judaic tradition held the world of history to be the *locus* of Yahweh's mighty acts: a world that revealed categorically the truth of his faithful lordship, especially in his consistent fulfilment of his divine covenant with his Israel. Far from the hellenistic preference for a static, idealized divinity removed from the differentiated, mutable material realm and with limited ability to alter it, the Old Covenant People held that God created and then essentially *exploded* into history, using it, as was his unique right, as the very stage upon which to demonstrate his all-consuming righteousness and power. Far more conceptual than scientific in its approach, the Old Testament wants nothing to do with any suggestion that God cannot involve himself with space-time on whatever basis he wills. Episode upon episode in the Old Testament and Apocrypha chronicles the theme of God's consummated pledges to the chosen and through these his self-revelation: the proliferation of Abraham's seed into nations and kings, for example; the Exodus and conquest of Canaan; the perpetual blessing promised the Davidic line; Yahweh's faithfulness during the exile; the restoration of Jerusalem after the captivity; Maccabean victory over the gentiles and the faithless. Ultimate truth, to the Hebrew mindset, is entirely synonymous with God's oath or word. Moreover, as Zizioulas reminds us, it is in the very nature of God's word, God's promises, to be concerned with the fulfilment of history and as such truth becomes essentially an eschatological matter, ever pointing and in fact drawing the human being towards the future.[36]

However, the Hebrew creation-tradition describes purely an *external* relationship between God and the world he has created, for even in speaking of God's immanent presence towards the world the premises of creation *ex nihilo* nonetheless demand God's *Other*ness from that which is created. With the Fourth Gospel's christological employment of the *Logos*-concept a profound new element is added, for in Christ God becomes not merely immanent towards creation, but whilst yet remaining in his own divine *being* also becomes fully participant *within* creation *as* creature. In other words, whereas creation *ex nihilo* enables us to affirm the general but external presence of God towards all creation in the creative act, the explicitly christological *Logos* calls us additionally to affirm that general presence as assuming an internal quality.

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34 Torrance, *ST&I*, p. 23.

35 Cf. Nissiotis, p. 15.

36 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 68; see also 2 Sam.7:28; Ps. 40:12, 61:8, 119:160, 132:11; Deut. 7:9; Is. 49:7.

Gunton explains this concept as follows: having argued that 'the world is what it is through the operation of the spatially [and temporally] omnipresent divine field of force' which interpenetrates the realm of created *being*, he then goes on to claim that Jesus Christ embodies 'the outcome of the *self-differentiation* of the divine omni-spatiality' and omni-temporality into a particular finite reality, but

> without either losing his general relationship to the whole or depriving that one part [of the finite world] of its genuine humanity. *In this one piece of space [and time] there are co-present two levels of reality*, that which permeates everything by virtue of his creating power, and that which by virtue of the same power, he takes freely and graciously to himself, becoming what in himself he is not.[37]

Moreover, whilst maintaining the Jewish treatment of history as the *locus* of divine revelation through God's mighty acts – God's personal Messianic presence amongst his People being the mightiest act of all – Christianity broadens the ultimate significance of that act beyond the immediate historical implications of the event itself to establish conclusively God's salvific covenant with the world not only throughout the fullness of time, but indeed by means of the *Logos*-concept as *the very purpose* of space-time – its very ordering principle. No longer, as Karl Rahner declares, was the traditional eschatological expectation of the Jewish community to be identified with faith in an unseen future; rather, the intimate presence of the Son himself in history as *Logos* transforms eschatological *expectation* into eschatological *knowledge* – a christological knowledge of a future whose outcome is not only promised by God himself, but made present to us in tangible form:

> Before Christ, … new, incalculable and surprising reactions of the living God who manifests himself in his actions throughout that history, could take place. Of what kind they would be, was not to be inferred from the previous course of human history with God. But now in the Word of God, God's last word is uttered into the visible public history of mankind, a word of grace, reconciliation and eternal life: Jesus Christ. The grace of God no longer comes (when it does come) steeply down from on high, from a God absolutely transcending the world, and in a manner that is without history, purely episodic … .

> That is what we mean by saying that Christ is the actual historical presence in the world of the eschatologically triumphant mercy of God. *It is possible to point to a visible, historically manifest fact, located in space and time, and say, Because that is there, God is reconciled to the world.*[38]

The participant entry of God himself into that which he created, yet without loss of his divine nature, meant that the hellenistic *Logos* too acquired radical re-definition. Since the Greeks mostly held that the world of space-time was of a qualitatively lesser type of *being* than the eternal realm of timeless ideas or reason and that empirical *being* existed merely as an allegorical or analogical representation of truth, they were deeply suspicious of any suggestion that historical events could

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37 Gunton, *Y&T*, pp. 118–19, emphasis mine; see Gunton, *BTR*, pp. 52–3; note Gunton's term *levels*, rather than *degrees*, of reality.

38 Rahner, *C&S*, pp. 14–15, emphasis mine.

serve as the *locus* of divine action, much less inherently *be truth*. Truth in the sensible world is evident only to the extent that reason sees the intelligible forms reflected imperfectly in earthly bodies, events or concepts: 'Beauty', which Plato takes for an example, 'is beautiful because it partakes … , in whatever way the relation comes about, of absolute beauty'.[39] Containing no truth in itself, historical *being* is merely, again in Plato's words, 'a moving image of eternity', an allegorical representation of truth which the soul comprehends through reason.[40] Although a part of the cosmic machine, the Greek *Logos* and thus cosmic truth always stood somewhere above immediate sensible perception; this in fact was the very nature of its divinity.

In sharp contrast the Christian *Logos* established cosmic meaning and order, not merely because as God Christ stood in a general presence above the sensible creation, but equally because as human being he stood firmly within it and in specific self-differentiation made that presence known through and as historical events. The revelation brought about in the Christ-event was meaningful *not despite its spatio-temporal character, but because of it*. This fact in itself reveals history as the *locus* of full, not allegorical, truth. The revelation of God's transcendent life, the source of all *being* and truth, comes because of the specific, concrete actions carried out by Christ in his historical ministry within the world (John 14:12–13), not as *gnosis* imposed from outside creation.

Indeed Karl Barth reminds us that the very name *Emmanuel*, 'God-with-us', indicates not only 'that God has accepted man in Jesus Christ, that in Him He has become man and that He is revealed in His unity with this man' in historical existence, but also,

> strictly speaking, what else do we know of God, the world, and man in their mutual inter-relationship? … Indeed, what is the value of the rest of the biblical witness to creation without the centre? Can we really gather from it a clear and certain knowledge in this matter? It is here that God Himself has revealed the relationship between Creator and creature – its basis, norm, and meaning.[41]

In other words, whilst in Christian thought the adoption of the Old Testament creation theology allows for the deduction of certain ontological and cosmological corollaries concerning the *action* of God, only God's immanent presence within the world reveals the *being* of God and his act of creation in a tangible, empirical form – the only form through which finite humanity may definitively appropriate and internalize revealed knowledge, either that of the infinite creator-God or that of itself as creature in relation to him. The intra-historical *Logos* of the New Testament therefore makes the Christ-event constitutive of Christian ontology and cosmology. It fully confirms the general insights of the *ex nihilo* creation doctrine, but more importantly builds upon them, placing God himself at the heart of the creation event and revealing in a unique manner unparalleled by any other event in history the

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39 Plato, *Phaedo*, in Hamilton and Cairns, §100c–d; cf. §102b.

40 Plato, *Timaeus*, §37b.

41 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, part 1, trans. J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey and Harold Knight, eds G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh, 1958), p. 25; contrast Plato, *Timaeus*, §29c–d.

natures of both God and creation and the relationship between the two. The Christ-event thus gives *specificity* to our understanding of God and imparts *meaning* to our understanding of createdness in a way that was not otherwise possible either from the hellenistic or the judaic perspective. For this study's purposes the cogent points following from these realizations are these:

(1) *The being of God is tri-personal*. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* entails two important propositions previously noted: first, that the personal *being* of God is the one final source of all that is and thus constitutes the only possible ground for ontological investigation; second, that the infinite God is wholly transcendent and utterly *Other* in nature from the created realm. If we as human beings, then, are ultimately to comprehend the true character of *being*, we must know not only that God exists but also who he is and what his creative purposes are. Yet, Torrance points out, the crucial problem when we come to imagine God as utterly transcendent and *Other* is that, as distinct from anything in creation, the inner being of God is so thoroughly incomprehensible – so unlike anything within creation, anything known to humanity – that no human question about the Godhead can be sufficient to the task. '*God may be known, not from without, but only from what he is within himself*'.[42] Although Torrance does not employ the terms, we may find it useful to borrow from German the linguistic distinction between *wissen* (to know a fact) and *kennen* (to know a person, in the sense of intimate personal engagement). It is this latter kind of divine knowledge which we creatures, finite and *other*, cannot attain.

Thus, the very definition of creaturely life centres on an existential dilemma of the highest order: to know God finally and conclusively and thereby to understand ourselves and the world created for us as creaturely expressions of his will we must become involved with the internal life of our Maker; yet, being finite creatures, constrained by our material, spatio-temporal existence, we cannot do so purely of our own nature or volition. The critical revelation of Christ as *Logos*, then, is the *revelation of himself* 'who, being in the form of God did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being' (Phil. 2:5–7). Christ's advent in the power of the Spirit (Matt. 3:16–17, 4:1; Mark 1:9–13; Luke 3:21–2, 4:1–2, 14–15; John 1:32–4) entails the direct and full self-revelation of God's *own transcendent life* within creation, both through and as the Godhead's tri-personal unity. First Christ declares to us that 'anyone who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?' (John 14:9–10). Then he promises the gift of the 'Paraclete to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth' (John 14:16–17).

Torrance argues that the *homoousion* of Father and Son, first and foremost, establishes that God in his bearing towards creation as the Son is 'what … he is inherently and eternally in himself. He himself is the living content of his Word and Grace in the Person of Jesus Christ'.[43] In the revelation of the Father as the one who sends the Son and in whose name solely the Son speaks Christ thus confirms conclusively the transcendent *Other*ness of God's eternal *being* (Acts 1:9–11)

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42 Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 207, emphasis mine; cf. 1 Cor. 13:12.
43 Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 215.

established with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.[44] Yet simultaneously the Christ-event expands human apprehension of God's *being* and thereby creation's recognition of itself in relation to God – so that now the divine nature in its fullness is revealed once and for all as the three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in eternal dynamic communion.[45] *Homoousios* with God and humanity alike, the incarnate Son therefore initiates creation's participation within the divine life. And because we understand through the doctrine of the *ex nihilo* creation that the *being* of God is the final source of all that is, and therefore the basis of all ontology, we come to experience in the person of Christ – bound to the Father in the Spirit's love – that the core ontological structure is *personhood-in-communion*.

(2) *History has an objective reality and an inherent rationality rooted in the free will of the Father and effected and made discernible in the person of Christ*. Let us recall for a moment the insight of the Chalcedonian definition which affirmed that the Son's divine and human natures, although in no way intermingled, are nonetheless to be understood as integrated wholly in one person, neither nature separated nor isolated one from the other. In practical terms this means that in speaking of Christ incarnate we cannot permit the revelation of God's omnipresence or internal dynamic to overshadow the human element; we must also recognize that God's appropriation of spatio-temporal existence to himself is integral, not merely incidental, to the *Logos*-revelation's expression and content – not simply a tool, but an expression of who God is: not one who needs spatio-temporal *being*, but a creator God who nonetheless wills communion with creation so strongly that he chooses to become what creation is (and indeed *can* choose to become what creation is). Whilst therefore the ultimate rationality and meaning of the material universe subsists in God's eternal will – in his creative, interrelated omnipresence towards the universe as a whole – yet the binding up of this omnipresence with Jesus's humanity means that the rationality of creation is not to be identified through historical allegorization of the eternal realm, but is to be found internally through a primal event: the Christ-event. As we have said, the *homoousion* of Christ with God and humanity means that creation comes to participate in the divine life; but, more than this, it also means that *creation does so whilst yet continuing in its own finite, spatio-temporal nature*. Thus, in Christ we comprehend not only God's revelation of himself to creation, but also God's revelation *of creation in itself*.

Therefore, although in transcendence God is beyond spatio-temporal categories, his willing, deliberate participation in historical *being* confirms,

(a) that spatio-temporal *being* has an objective reality bound to the will of God;

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44 See John 8:28–9, 39–42; 10:15–18, 22–39; 14:1–31 (especially vv. 12, 19).

45 Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Trinitarian Foundation and Character of Faith and of Authority in the Church', in *Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox and the Reformed Churches*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 89.

(b) that truth can be and *is* revealed through spatio-temporal events and processes (that is, acts in history) and, because God's act of creation is a personal and deliberate act of free will, this state of affairs 'cannot' be otherwise;[46]

(c) that in his creative act God has made the order of the created realm an inherent order by virtue of the divine presence of his Son the *Logos*; and

(d) that, as Barth points out, God exists in a *positive* (not an antithetical or even an apathetic relationship) to space-time:

> The person of Jesus Christ proves that there is a sphere in which God acts and reveals Himself apart from His own sphere; and that there is someone upon whom and with whom He acts, and to whom and through whom He reveals Himself, apart from Himself. The person of Jesus Christ is the proof that although the creature is not a second God beside the One, although it is not of the nature of God and therefore self-existent, it does exist after its own fashion by the will of God. It is the proof that the creature is not excluded and denied, but established and determined by Him.[47]

(3) *Christ is not an allegorical representation of God; what Christ is, God is in himself, mediated into the very fabric of space-time, thus transforming and redeeming creation and directing its cosmic events towards the* parousia *and* theosis. Christ's mediation of salvific realities to the world is the basis of his role as the high priest 'who offered himself, blameless as he was, to God through the eternal Spirit, [to] purify our conscience from dead actions so that we can worship the living God' (Heb. 9:14). Thus, the presence of a christological *Logos* in creation could not be seen merely as an allegorical representation of the eternal realm through historical events – Plato's 'moving image of eternity'– but rather a historical event the inherent significance of which established the meaningful order of space-time from within and *bound that order to the parousiac unity of finite humanity and infinite God.* Christ, therefore, being *homoousios* with God and humanity alike, implements the participation of created existence, even continuing as it does in its own nature, within the divine life:

> As both God of God and Man of man, Jesus Christ is the actual mediator between God and man and man and God in all things, even in regard to space-time relations. He constitutes in Himself the rational and personal Medium in whom God meets man in his creaturely reality and brings man, without having to leave his creaturely reality, into communion with Himself.[48]

Rather than impose meaningful *being* upon creation from outside, God in the priestly character of the incarnate Christ Jesus brings forth his own holiness and

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46 Torrance, *ST&I*, pp. 67f., says, 'God "can" no more contract out of space and time than he "can" go back on the Incarnation of His Son', to indicate, from a heavenly perspective, God's free choice to reveal himself according to the very rules of the cosmos he creates, loves and 'is pledged to uphold'– not by means counter to creation; from the human perspective, because cosmic meaning so revealed bears the order God wills, we are not free to envisage revelation otherwise.

47 Barth, *CD*3.1, p. 25.

48 Torrance, *ST&I*, p. 52; see Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 203.

sanctification from within created *being* itself to manifest his omni-spatiality and temporality as creation's *Logos*.[49] More specifically the Son reveals creation as that which from the moment of its contingent formation from nothing has been called to progressive sanctification until at the final moment of history its temporal progression towards full eschatological communion within the Godhead itself, the interrelation of human and divine persons within God's own life, will be complete – a process known in the Eastern Orthodox Churches as *theosis*.[50] Thus, we see the inherent, objective order within finite space-time; we retain and give objective meaning to the directedness of temporal progression; and we come to see (in contrast with hellenistic thought) that by virtue of the way in which God has created the world its temporal fleetingness and spatial movement underpin a constructive, not destructive, process.

By identifying the incarnate-parousiac Son of God with the *Logos*, then, the early Christians indicated that the ultimate purpose of creation is to exist in participant communion with the divine life of God himself, but also – and quite important to the present enquiry – *that it comes to do so by the very means of its own historical processes*. But we should state emphatically that in making this claim we do not argue that the self-revelation of the Son merely articulates a *theosis*-potential naturally intrinsic in the cosmos regardless of his presence. Quite the opposite: as the formative principle in the creative act (John 1:2) and – in the incarnation and *parousia* – the concrete embodiment of the objective logic which orders creation around itself, Christ and Christ alone can deliberately endow the cosmos from its very beginning with its vocation to *theosis* derived solely from Christ's own unity with the Father (John 17:21) which humanity enters through faith by the Spirit's grace.

The recognition that the world's vocation towards *theosis* existed from creation's outset can also be seen as a function or corollary of the aforementioned proposition that God in his eternal triune *being* stands in absolute freedom with regard to space-time. That all times and places are effectively spread out before the infinite God who created them from nothing does not deprive creation of its internal temporal directedness; yet it does mean that the entire system of historical events was formed as a whole with the Christ-event as its ontological ground. If the *theosis*-potential can at all be said to inhere in creation, this is so solely because God forms creation with the incarnation and ultimately the *parousia* in mind.

(4) *The* Logos *affirms the four-dimensional quality of spatio-temporal phenomena and revelation. Space and time are a function of events, not the other way around.* In a book entitled *Sound and Symbol*, from which Gunton draws heavily, musical theorist Victor Zuckerkandl illustrates the progressive character of *being* and the organization of phenomena across time into coherent events by describing the nature of metre in musical composition:

> Meter is experienced as a wave. Let us think of the simplest, the two-phase wave. Its two phases follow each other, occur at different times; we have seen that their difference as

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49 Cf. Athanasius, *DeIncar*, §42.6.
50 Ibid., §54.3: 'For He was made man that we might be made God'.

phases is based upon nothing but their temporal succession. 'Two', then, follows 'one'– in other words, if 'two' is present, 'one' is past. Is this pastness equivalent to nonexistence? Could 'two' be what it is if 'one', because it was no longer, were really nonexistent? … If 'one', once past, were lost in nonexistence, extinguished … , 'two' would simply be a second 'one', and nothing more … . [Moreover,] the one-hundredth measure is not the one-hundredth copy of the first but the one and only measure, which adds itself to the ninety-ninth … .

Let us look in the other direction. 'Two' follows 'one'– this too means that if 'one' is present, 'two' is future. Is this all we know about 'two'– that it is not yet if 'one' is? Yet 'one' is something quite different from the beat upon which 'two' will follow; it is the beat which *proceeds toward* 'two', with which we ourselves move toward 'two' … . The whole course of 'one' relates to the not-yet-existent 'two' just as the latter will relate to the no-longer-existent 'one'. Through its entire course we experience 'one' as something to be completed; its existence is a need for symmetrical completion. *'One' could not be what it is if 'two', because it was not yet, were really nonexistent, if the future 'two' were not already part of the existence of the present 'one'.* The present of 'one' is a present directed toward the future, pregnant with future.[51]

Zuckerkandl's meticulous but densely worded explanation draws out music as a vivid, concrete example of the *event* as a basic cosmological building-block: a material reality that *cannot* be abstracted from the interrelated spatial and temporal phenomena that comprise it without actually ceasing to *be* that reality. (There could not be a *form* of music in the philosophical sense that was somehow greater than the reality that inheres in an actual, specific *piece* of music. The form by its very nature could not be nor make perfect what the actual piece of music already perfectly is. Indeed music having spatio-temporal dynamism at its very core, the form concept actually detracts from what music is.) That which music *is* inheres in the ordered resolution of one note into the other in time (meter) and space (tone and harmony); in these interrelated resolutions a new reality comes to be – a musical event – that does not detract from the comprising notes, but affirms them and draws their individual, separated *being* beyond itself. Music therefore affirms the ontologically *constructive* nature of historical (spatio-temporal) dynamism.

To give this illustration specificity, if we imagine Handel's *Messiah*, certain movements and phrases – the Hallelujah Chorus, perhaps – spring immediately to mind. However, the Hallelujah Chorus separately, no matter how integral to the whole oratorio it may be, *is not itself the whole event nor can it alone convey what the whole is in its very being*. Only by hearing *Messiah* in its entirety do we gain an idea of what it truly is and what it truly means either musically or linguistically. Moreover, even if we read a copy of the score or recall a past, completed performance, the *being* and meaning of Handel's *magnum opus* do not reside in a timeless recollection of a single idea – a form – over and above the nuanced, dynamic tonal progressions of the piece. *The piece is objectively what it is because of the progressions*. To bring to mind the composition as a whole is to recall these dynamic progressions from

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51 Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London, 1956), pp. 224–6, emphasis altered.

the first chord to the last and to understand them as interrelated in a single coherent, progressive reality: *an event*.

Directionality, too – time's arrow'– is integral to the oratorio's *being*: *Messiah*, played backwards, would not be *Messiah*; it would merely be *Messiah*-played-backwards – that is to say, it would be something else.[52] The self-revelation of Handel's *Messiah* as a distinct musical work – or Beethoven's Ninth Symphony or Jimmy Buffett's *Why Don't We Get Drunk … ?* – comes because the piece exists as a coherent and *particular* phenomenon of interrelated, directed tones. To adapt Gunton's words to the present example, the Hallelujah Chorus 'can [only] be seen in its rational significance *in terms of its relationships to its context and not by abstracting it from them*'.[53]

In the process, however, temporality itself becomes a secondary concern: by this musical example we perceive time not as 'three mutually exclusive elements' – past, present and future – through which three-dimensional beings continually pass, the present being the eternal line of division between past and future; rather, time becomes a *function* of the dynamic progression or temporal self-extension of interrelated four-dimensional phenomena – that is, *events* – the present becoming the place where past and future meet, where indeed they *open up* to one another and *together* dictate the context, meaning and internal coherence of the whole event.[54] In a sense time and space do not actually even exist without the event-phenomenon extending itself *as* time and space.

The relevance of all this theory is simply this: the kind of world that God wills into *being* and orders according to his own design is the kind of world in which events-*as*-events bear coherent meaning *inherently* – without need for allegorical or analogical reference to any other thing or concept.[55] By the same token, the *Logos* himself, the Christ-event, entails *as* event a mediation of truth or divine reality structured in a coherent, sequential and directional, fashion. The Son's involvement with the world must be seen in its entirety as a phenomenon: creation, incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, *parousia*. No single aspect of the Son's action in and towards the world viewed in isolation conveys the full content of divine revelation in the Christ-event: when, for example, the Apostle describes the resurrected Christ as the 'first-born from the dead' (Col. 1:18), he describes not an isolated present, but one in which Christ's past as 'the first-born of all creation … [in whom] were created all things' (Col. 1:15–16) resolves itself dynamically into his future as the one who shall 'reconcile all things to [God], everything in heaven and everything on earth' (Col. 1:20).[56] The one moment, the resurrection, carries no meaning apart from a larger, *four-dimensional* reality of Christ's whole person: the omni-spatial, omni-

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52 For a broader discussion of time's arrow, see Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time from the Big Bang to Black Holes*, with an introduction by Carl Sagan (London, 1988), pp. 159–87.

53 Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 123.

54 Zuckerkandl, p. 228; Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 123; cf. and contrast Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now: Sermons* (London, 1963), pp. 104ff.

55 Gunton, *TrCr*, p. 119.

56 Cf. Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 122; Zuckerkandl, pp. 325ff.

temporal God who defines both the nature and the meaning of creation and then by his own grace acts within it by the very terms he has laid out for it.

When, therefore, we characterize Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection as an 'eschatological' event, we do not, strictly speaking, mean that a parousiac unity with the Father simply breaks out of its place in the four-dimensional whole, magically to appear, as it were, in isolation from its larger context and in a spatio-temporal *locus* which is not its own. Nor do we imply that such is our own experience when we partake of the salvation offered us in Christ. This would be to ascribe to the *parousia* a timelessness which it does not actually possess and to deny the genuinely spatio-temporal character of the Christ-event. Rather, we claim that through the self-differentiation of God's omni-temporality in the incarnate Son the revelation of the entire four-dimensional *Logos* – the Christ-event in its fullness, from beginning to end – is presented to humanity. God, as Gunton points out, 'enables an anticipation to take place: so mediates revelation that we may say that the mysteries of God are made known in our time'.[57]

Although participation in Christ's atoning death and resurrection indeed implies direct involvement in the eschatological adoption of humanity into the life of God, this is not, strictly speaking, because a timeless *parousia* appears in our midst – no more so than the final Amen of *Messiah* could break out of its context and appear meaningfully within the Hallelujah Chorus – but rather because we are brought to participate in an event, indeed swept up in a movement unified across four dimensions and are in this sense placed in direct, palpable continuity with the *Eschaton*. The futuristic-eschatological character of the *parousia* remains futuristic; this is the very meaning of Christian 'hope' in the resurrection of the dead.[58] The full content of christological revelation removes neither creation, incarnation, atonement, nor *parousia* from the spatio-temporal context in which they are first made available, nor does it make the intervening temporal moments irrelevant; rather, the opposite: the Christ-event affirms the dynamic spatio-temporal character of created *being* and frees humanity to partake fully in the *coherent, progressive, four-dimensional event* by which world is created and resolved into sanctification – and, if only as through a glass, darkly, to glimpse here and now the whole event for what it is.

Summary and discussion of relational ontology

The concepts presented in the preceding sections are a composite interpretation of the epistemological systems outlined by Torrance, Gunton and Zizioulas. Although all three agree on the fundamentals, each has his special emphases and nuances, all of which have been adapted, along with extrapolations, to create a systematic overview as a framework for the ecclesiological examination to follow. Terminology too has occasionally been adapted. *Theosis*, for example, a word that we have applied to aspects of Gunton's and Torrance's soteriological accounts is not their own; the Orthodox Zizioulas would use the term much more freely. Yet

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57 Gunton, *BTR*, p. 120.
58 Cf. Rom. 23–5, 1 Cor. 13:12.

each author characterizes God's saving work as an act whereby he brings humanity into the fullness of his dynamic triune life. Moreover, all three authors agree on the christological basis of the argument. In a word, the *ex-nihilo*/*Logos* doctrine of creation and salvation serves as the foundation of this trinitarian ontology and cosmology and gives rise to an epistemological framework which treats *relationality*, *historicity* and *theosis* as cornerstones of a dynamic creative/salvific economy – of God's direct action in this world.

Torrance calls the entire approach *relational ontology*: by establishing the Son of God as the *Logos*, the focal rationality of *being*, the Christian tradition came to understand the One God's existence as three distinct but co-essential and co-eternal persons (*hypostases*) in communion: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the simplest terms: because God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – *is*, then to *be* is nothing other than to *be*-in-communion; this is the core axiom of trinitarian ontology. The world's inherent cosmological principle comes from this concept: the Christ-event indicates that creation is made for communion within the Godhead's triune life. *In the Spirit's power the communion of the world with the Son becomes the communion of the Son with the Father*. This is God's essential creative and salvific intention. These affirmations collectively, when drawn to their logical conclusions, establish the following propositions which bear vital implications for our study:

(1) *'Relationality' or 'personhood-in-communion', God's own triune mode of being, becomes the fundamental ontological category from which all others are derived.* Consequently we may wish to explore more deeply the character of human personhood, especially in its relationship to God in Christ's redemption and in the Spirit's activity, in order to draw a clearer understanding of ecclesial ontology.

(2) *A positive relationship exists between eternity and history*. That the created realm is not a degradation of *being* from the eternal, but both the medium and result of God's positive choice to create and save, confirms the hypothesis that we must look to the *empirical* Churches to understand the authentic nature of ecclesiastical *being*; suggests that we should not rule out the possibility of distinctive theological content in the Churches' separation; and therefore calls us to explore further whether the real, multiple state of the Churches might yet impart a valuable perspective on the concept of unity in the Church.

(3) *Christ's incarnate presence as the central fact of created being demonstrates that spatio-temporal phenomena can and do bear a meaning of their own, and through their own means as dynamic four-dimensional events, not as imperfect, allegorical reflections of another, more perfect order*. Rather than impose an artificial unity upon the multiple Churches or explore the possibility of their theological significance from the perspective of an isolated snap-shot of the present, the event-character of created realities enables us to explore the multiplicity of Churches as a phenomenon that functions within a larger temporal movement from which it cannot be meaningfully abstracted. In this instance, the reality of the event would not depend wholly on the multiplicity but also upon how this multiplicity expresses the past resolving dynamically into the future.

(4) Theosis*, God's implication of creation into his own triune life through the saving work of Christ, can be identified as the core operation in created existence—a rationality that arises by the gracious act of God from within creation itself.* We may, then, look to the work of *theosis* to provide the basic ordering principle for the Spirit's ecclesial action and may therefore wish to explore especially the ontology of the Church-event mentioned previously in terms of its salvific significance.[59]

Given the ecclesial-ontological questions we must finally address at greater length in this second section of the study, we should be clear from the outset that the correlation of *being* with communion in this notion of relational ontology is *not in any sense* to be equated with the unity-in-diversity variant sometimes employed by advocates of the liberal and conservative ecumenical models, which likens the intercommunion of persons within the Church and sometimes the interrelation of denominational bodies to the unique but co-essential roles of the triune persons. Communion-relationships between human persons – and much less institutional relationships between denominational hierarchies – are in no sense *immediately* analogous to the internal, eternal dynamic of the Trinity, which with one *being* shared by three distinct persons exists well beyond the capability of finite humanity even to comprehend, much less to replicate.[60] Personhood-in-communion is to be seen as the primal fact of creation's *being* by virtue of its *relationship to the creator* – because created persons stand through the action of Christ and Spirit in a *particular sort* of relationship to the triune Godhead and through that to one another. Analogies in this instance are therefore irrelevant at best and obfuscatory at worst. The key to appropriating the ramifications of relational-ontological principles for application within pragmatic Church life is to understand the precise nature of the link.[61] Indeed that task will be the larger goal of the next two chapters.

Critics might argue that the point is a tautology – that of course created existence is what it is because of its relationship with the Godhead. The key is in how we characterize that relationship. Initially we may answer this criticism thus: in a more hellenized Christian approach the communion of persons is understood as a *function* or *property* of God's divine essence, whereas in the relational model communion of persons *is* the One God's divine essence and is, moreover, the God-willed essence of differentiated human beings too. We shall not at this stage attempt a more detailed answer to the criticism; clearer answers will unfold as exploration progresses.

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59 See p. 57, above.

60 Cf. Torrance, 'TrinFdn', p. 83.

61 Cf. Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 225: 'It is often claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is a relational doctrine and as such can be shown to militate against both the collectivism and individualism that are the two sides of the debased coin of modern social order. But the cross of the incarnate one saves us from superficial, ideological or merely evidential use of this principle, because it reveals that what the modern world needs is not simply good examples of living in community, though it does need them. It shows that the measure of the offence is such that repentance and new life in the gospel are preconditions of the reconciled relationality that is necessary if our world is not to decline into decadence and disorder'.

A more immediate concern is our three authors' admitted suspicion of hellenism. Torrance's and Gunton's arguments against Kantian (Enlightenment) influence on Christian thought are fairly easy to maintain in that the Enlightenment represented in its day a clear, intentional and unapologetic innovation in philosophical perspective with far greater interest in promoting early modern science and intellectual method than in preserving Christian tradition. In respect of hellenistic thought, however, we cannot but admit that the New Testament concepts themselves, not least the very *Logos* notion of Christ, represent in large measure a hellenization of Jewish notions concerning the nature of both God and the world. Orthodoxy as Torrance, Gunton and Zizioulas understand it has always dwelled side-by-side with more hellenized modes of thought. Greek philosophical categories lie at the very heart of much that is traditional in Christian self-expression and indeed certain Christianized variants of neoplatonic thought have long held a venerable position in Christian theological debate. A person might easily argue that Torrance and Gunton's emphasis on Athanasian and Cappadocian approaches over, say, the more neoplatonic Augustinian tradition is potentially unbalanced and arbitrarily selective and, moreover, that their thought, rather than representing the heart of Christian tradition is but one possibility amongst many.

The criticism is to be taken seriously. However, the authors *do* recognize as perfectly legitimate the hellenic-judaic synthesis that has characterized Christian thought through the centuries. They would argue that their real concern is not to do away with the tradition of Greek influence on Christian thought, but to *do justice* to the *transformation* of both Greek and Jewish traditions that occurred once they had been appropriated by the Christian community and applied to the incarnation and resurrection. Our authors would argue that the Christian *Logos*-concept, inextricably tied to the life and ministry of a single empirical man in history, represents the absolute freedom of God to interact with his creation, whereas the Greek concept, to the contrary, tied as it is to a spaceless-timeless eternity in antithesis to the differentiated material realm, prohibits any such possibility. To recognize the two concepts as incompatible is not hostile, so the argument would go, but simply realistic. Our three theologians' concern is not with the hellenistic-judaic synthesis itself but with the unwarranted intrusion of untransformed categories into Christian thought.

A further note of caution concerns the relational model's potential for subordinating human particularity to the collective creation – a sort of semi-monism in which creation as a whole relates to God in a communitarian relationship, but which does not account sufficiently for the distinctiveness of human persons.[62] Torrance, Gunton and Zizioulas make clear that such a view of creation is far from their intention;

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62 Readers familiar with the fictitious peoples of *Star Trek* lore may find in the Borg a splendid, if not entirely perfect, analogy: a race of organic/cybernetic hybrids whose self-identity is determined by implants linking their consciousness into a hive mind, the Borg's *being* lies entirely in the Collective, which exists *in toto* by the interrelation of *others*-as-*One*. Personal particularity, however, is not affirmed by the communion, but rather subsumed into the common consciousness, and bears meaning, but only as an adjunct of the hive. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, prod. Gene Roddenberry and Rick Berman, Paramount Pictures, 1987–94; *Star Trek: Voyager*, prod. Rick Berman, Paramount Pictures, 1995–2001.

ultimately the goal of a relational ontology is to emphasize the confirmation of unique, differentiated human personhood as a fundamental aspect of the dignity conferred on creation in Christ.[63] Nonetheless, in that their writings, Torrance's and Gunton's especially, often (and rightly) concern God's redemptive will and Christ's salvific action towards creation as a whole, we should be aware of the risk of failing to ensure a proper balance between the relational character of spatio-temporal existence and the particularity of the human person within the relationship. In this respect Zizioulas provides a useful counter-weight with his strong emphasis on the trinitarian communion-relationship with human persons in their differentiation, and we shall rely upon him more heavily in the chapters following. Similarly a strong pneumatological emphasis will also assist since the Spirit's role in the economy of salvation is actually to constitute the communion-relationship between Christ and humanity.[64]

This last thought brings us to one final point: the recognition of a certain scantiness to Torrance and Gunton's pneumatological and ecclesiological discourse. Both exhibit an awareness of their theories' implications for the doctrines of Spirit and Church, but usually are more immediately concerned, first, with christology's inseparable implications for ontology and, second, with establishing the importance of trinitarian-christological doctrine for the methodology of broader theological discourse. The bulk of their writing therefore deals with the development of Christian thought, the concept of revelation, christology, ontology and even the mechanics of space-time and eternity. To be fair, each writer does have a certain amount of ecclesiological and pneumatological writing to his credit. Torrance especially appears concerned with the ecclesiological implications of his thought. Nonetheless, given the extent of their collected volumes and the general thrust of their work, pneumatological implications are not as often addressed as we might expect, except where they most directly concern christology. Moreover, when ecclesiology does arise in their writings, much of it concerns theory and principle without significant commentary on practical application in the visible communities; they speak simply of 'the Church' generally, rather than the Presbyterian Church specifically or the Catholic Church or the Pentecostal Church of God in Christ – or, more directly relevant to our study, the many Church*es* in which real Christians worship daily. The problem does not seem to be a failure to appreciate the importance of their ideas for these areas of theological enquiry, but simply a matter of focus and personal interest. And, as before, Zizioulas provides some balance; of the three, Zizioulas is the most prepared to dive into the matters of Spirit and Church and this is hardly surprising, given his Orthodox background.

All this being said, Torrance and Gunton's work leaves ample room for exploration of pneumatology and ecclesiology; indeed the absence of more specific treatment seems almost an invitation to extrapolate and build upon their arguments. That all three authors do agree that pneumatology constitutes the *active principle* of God's self-presentation within a relational creative/salvific economy, even in respect of christology itself, suggests that drawing out the relational-ontology idea

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63 See, for example, Gunton's comments in ch. 3, n. 61, above.

64 Further discussion on pp. 90ff., below.

in pneumatological and ecclesiological terms may provide the sort of theological foundation the ecumenical movement requires. But beyond the immediate research problem failure to explore the place of Spirit and Church in the framework will leave the relational-ontological system unbalanced – for if indeed Christ's presence does establish hypostatic communion as the central fact of *being* and does make possible the world's involvement in that communion, only by the Spirit's power are those bonds effected and completed. Not to explore this aspect of the triune God's involvement in his world is to leave a major portion of the story untold. This task will therefore be the primary goal of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

The Spirit in the economy of being and salvation

Christ's 'Other Self'

Formulating a clear understanding of the Holy Spirit's role either within the Godhead's eternal triune dynamic or the creative/salvific economy has been from Christianity's beginnings a monumental task for those who have attempted to explain in words the faith of the Church. The Apostles' Creed, for example, devotes only a single article to the Trinity's third person with no further direct explanation: 'I believe in the Holy Spirit'. The Nicene Creed offers only slight though by no means inconsequential expansion:

> We believe in the Holy Spirit,
> the Lord, the giver of life,
> who proceeds from the Father … ,
> who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
> who has spoken through the prophets.[1]

To be fair, the Christian communities have generally interpreted the subsequent credal faith-claims – belief in the 'holy catholic Church' (Apostles'), 'one baptism for the forgiveness of sins' (Nicene), 'the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting' (Apostles') – as deriving from the pneumatological affirmation.[2]

In the end, however, the concept of God's Holy Spirit, by its very nature elusive, has often lent itself much more readily to metaphor and imagery as means of human understanding than to technical conceptual dissection: the 'divine wind sweeping over the waters' in Genesis (1:2), for example; the mystical 'child of the gods' appearing with the three young Israelites in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace (Dan. 3:24/91–27/94); the dove descending upon Christ Jesus at his baptism (Matt. 3:16–17, Mark 1:10–11, Luke 3:22); and tongues of fire empowering the Apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4).[3]

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1   Translations from Church of England, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London, 2000), pp. 141, 173; the *filioque* is here omitted because it does not appear in the canonical text of the First Constantinopolitan Council.

2   Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 279.

3   John 1:32–4 omits Christ's baptism, but retains the dove imagery: 'And John [the Baptist] declared, "I saw the Spirit come down on him like a dove from heaven and rest on him. I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, 'the

Nevertheless, in the last chapter we have posited certain arguments concerning the nature of *being* in the world and God's relationship thereto and action therein:

(1) God constitutes the historical world through his creative will as a realm ascended from nothingness into authentic, not analogical or allegorical, *being*.
(2) Meaning inheres in the events of space-time by virtue of that which God has created them to be.
(3) Christ's this-worldly presence as *Logos* stands forth as the quintessential phenomenon around which God orders the meaning of the world.
(4) The event-character (spatio-temporal fleetingness) of worldly phenomena is fundamentally constructive; meaning inheres in historical phenomena because of their event-character, not despite it.
(5) The purpose and ordering of the cosmos is more specifically a *theosis*-event by which creation is brought into relationship with the Godhead through its *Logos*, Jesus Christ, in a manner like that in which the *Logos* itself exists in relation to the Godhead.

Implicating the Holy Spirit into this epistemological system and defining more clearly his role within it will be crucial to our study of the separated Churches, of their authenticity as communities in which God works out his creative/salvific purposes and of the authority by which they proclaim and actualize this Good News of the world's redemption in *theosis*.

Beyond imagery the Old Testament develops the concept of the Spirit as that grand force of God acting towards his creation which relentlessly drives on the work of the chosen People.[4] In the biblical histories of ancient Israel the inrush of Yahweh's Spirit constituted the very sign by which judges and kings took up the mantle of leadership and by which their mighty deeds were directed: consider Gideon's rout of the Midianites (Judg. 6:34); the constant torment inflicted by Samson upon the Philistines (Judg. 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14); Saul's reign as Israel's first king (1 Sam. 10:6, 11:6); and most especially the establishment of a permanent royal line in David (1 Sam. 16:13), the beloved of God, from whose descendants the Messiah would one day arise.[5] Conversely abandonment by the Spirit of Yahweh left the leader bereft of any authority, either moral force or political power, and generally abandoned by the people of Israel as well: Samson's ultimate capture by the Philistines (Judg. 16:20) and Saul's familial, psychological, moral and regal degeneration (1 Sam. 16:14) again provide examples. The prophets too are driven by Yahweh's Spirit to

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man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is to baptise with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that he is the Chosen One of God"'.

4   Old Testament passages often describe an angel or apparition performing actions that Christianity has since come to understand as pneumatic: e.g. Gen. 32:23–31, Judges 13:3. Elsewhere pneumatic action comes as God's 'word' – for example, 1 Kings 21:17 – which in the judaic context does not seem to prefigure the hellenistic *Logos*-concept directly but is consistent with Christ's ministry as God's own voice personalized in history – made man, not spoken through a prophet, yet still constituted fundamentally by pneumatic presence.

5   Cf. Judg. 3:10, 11:29; contrast 9:23; see Matt. 1:1–17, Luke 3:23–38.

announce God's message to the Israelites, as did Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10–11, 8:7); to condemn the unfaithful, whether the royalty in particular or the people of Israel as a whole, as did Nathan (2 Sam. 7:4–7, 12:1–4), Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 21:17–19, 2 Kings 2) and Jeremiah (Jer., passim); to proclaim God's faithfulness to the outcasts and exiles and announce the coming of the Messiah, as did Isaiah (11:1–2, 40:1–8, 61:1). Although the concept of the Holy Ghost as a distinct *hypostasis* could not have emerged prior to Christianity's development of an explicitly trinitarian faith, Old Testament literature certainly sets as precedent the clear vision of a divine spirit that sustains and organizes the world according to Yahweh's final prerogative and by his direct action.[6]

Indeed Old Testament pneumatological thought set the stage for later expansion by the Gospel writers so that in the person of Jesus we see fully and perfectly realized the Spirit's operation as the force enacting God's earthly work. John Zizioulas argues that only in the Spirit does the Christ-event become possible, indeed that pneumatic presence is so constitutive of Jesus's core identity that without the Spirit there actually could be no Christ.[7] Even his conception in the Virgin's womb is attributed to the the Spirit's miraculous work (Matt. 1:20, Luke 1:35). More importantly the synoptic Gospels each describe the Spirit as the irresistible power that drives Jesus to the desert to be tempted shortly after his baptismal anointment (Matt. 4:1–2, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1–2) – the latter event itself being a sign entirely consistent with Israel's regal anointments, especially the Davidic inheritance. Similarly Luke's description of the Spirit's presence at the outset of Jesus's public ministry draws a direct parallel between Christ's prophetic voice and the tradition of Isaiah as one anointed by God to 'proclaim a year of favour from the Lord' (4:14–19).[8] Indeed the advent of the incarnate Christ, the promised Davidic Messiah, marks the final melding of both the regal and prophetic histories of the Israelites, two streams so often at odds in Old Testament witness. In the incarnation the Son of God walks the earth, a blessing to the Jews and the world culminating perfectly, conclusively, in the resurrection. Yet this joining can only be because of the Son's eternal life, shared in communion with the Father in the love of the Spirit.

Zizioulas, however, highlights another, equally important line of New Testament thought: that the Spirit is a gift given *by* Christ – more specifically given by Christ following his resurrection and ascension – for the Church's constitution and the continuation of his work on earth through his People.[9] One critical juncture towards

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6 Noteworthy is that even those who abandon Yahweh are subject to his will in doing so. For example, 2 Samuel attributes Saul's rages and terrors to 'an evil spirit from God' (16:15–16, 23; 18:10; 19:9). Of course, because these and similar passages represent a primitive stage in the development of pneumatological thought, they sit uncomfortably with later talk of Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, insofar as such passages treat the created world as a realm firmly directed and sustained by God's will, they remain important.

7 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 127.

8 Cf. Is. 61:1–2. Matthew also draws the Isaiah parallel, but without direct mention of the Spirit (4:12–17).

9 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 127. Zizioulas cites in particular John 7:39: '[Christ] was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified.' See also John 16:7. Zizioulas goes on to point out

the close of the Fourth Gospel affords a more explicit view of the Spirit as a *personal* divine operative than scripture often gives, and it is to these *ekklesia*-building functions, particularly the revelatory functions upon which the Church is founded, that the Johannine author directs our attention. As the time of crucifixion rapidly approaches Christ's final prophecies to his disciples juxtapose revelation of both Holy Spirit and coming Kingdom:

> Still, I am telling you the truth:
> it is for your own good that I am going,
> because unless I go,
> the Paraclete will not come to you;
> but if I go,
> I will send him to you.
> And when he comes,
> he will show the world how wrong it was,
> about sin,
> and about who was in the right,
> and about judgement:
> about sin:
> in that they refuse to believe in me;
> about who was in the right:
> in that I am going to the Father
> and you will see me no more;
> about judgement:
> in that the prince of this world is already condemned.
> I still have many things to say to you
> but they would be too much for you to bear now.
> However, when the Spirit of truth comes
> he will lead you to the complete truth,
> since he will not be speaking of his own accord,
> but will say only what he has been told;
> and he will reveal to you the things to come.
> He will glorify me,
> since all he reveals to you
> will be taken from what is mine.
> Everything the Father has is mine;
> that is why I said:
> all he reveals to you
> will be taken from what is mine. (16:7–15.)

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on p. 128, taking John's Gospel and Luke's two narratives as his example, that in scripture both views sit happily side-by-side. He also suggests that liturgically – crucial for Eastern ecclesiology, in which doxology is the essence of ecclesial *being* – the two approaches diverged early on in history because in ancient Syria and Palestine, chrismation (the sacramental sign of the Spirit) preceded baptism, whereas elsewhere chrismation followed baptism, as is now standard. Zizioulas suggests that these practices indicated theological priority (respectively, pneumatology over christology or the reverse) in the ancient Church's worship. Yet he concludes that, because baptism is and was fundamentally impossible to conceive without the gift of the Spirit, both rites were essentially unified doxologically and therefore theologically.

In this passage Christ explicitly – and importantly – assures his disciples of a point we have already visited: that creation's final outcome, the *Eschaton*, is no matter for debate, but is fixed and assured by the promise of God. It will culminate in cosmic reconciliation to God and condemnation of 'the prince of this world'. In the christological context the passage foreshadows only vaguely the crucifixion and resurrection, the means by which God's eschatological victory is won. However, it does make strong allusions to the incarnation as the intersection of eschatological reality and historical existence in that Christ links the final resolution of sin with his own temporal mission and knowledge. Moreover, he claims possession of essential ontological and cosmological knowledge that he shares co-terminally with God the Father. It follows that in Christ eschatological reality is somehow decided and then presented as truth that can be known within history by those who in the Spirit's action come to appropriate the significance of the Christ-event.

However, with regard to specific pneumatic function in this economy the scripture interpreted in the negative points out that the third of the triune persons brings no unique disclosures in addition to those actually established in Christ.[10] Yet interpreted in the positive the passage affirms that, whilst Son and Spirit serve unique functions, the action of each nonetheless remains an aspect of one activity, namely God's gracious revelation of himself to the world, of the world to itself and of the salvific significance of God's personal act of solidarity with his creation. Thus, the Spirit's presence in and towards creation mirrors, complements and fulfils Christ's own and, moreover, endows God's People with the ability to approach the world in Christ's image, a point repeated more explicitly at the conclusion of John's Gospel.

> The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.
>
> > 'As the Father sent me,
> > so am I sending you.'
>
> After saying this he breathed on them and said:
>
> > Receive the Holy Spirit.
> > If you forgive anyone's sins,
> > they are forgiven;
> > if you retain anyone's sins,
> > they are retained. (20:20–3.)[11]

T.F. Torrance draws these points to a logical extreme: 'The Spirit is so intimately one with Christ in his *being* and activity as the incarnate Son of God that he is, as it were, Christ's *Other Self* through whose presence in us Christ himself is present to us'.[12] The implication is that, like the incarnation itself, the Spirit's revelation of Christ in and through God's People consists of divine self-identification with

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10 Cf. Barth, *FC*, p. 109.

11 Cf. Matt. 16:19.

12 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, [2d edn] (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 117; cf. Rom. 8:9-27; Küng, pp. 220–1; Barth, *FC*, p. 109: 'The Holy Spirit distinguishes himself from any other Spirit by his absolute identity with the person and the work of Christ'.

specific, unique historical phenomena by which God mediates himself into the heart of created *being* by integrating himself into the very *being* of humanity.

Even with such a bold claim as that which Torrance sets before us, we must not make the mistake of confusing the roles of Son and Spirit, each with a unique, distinctive function in the economy by which God creates and redeems the historical world. Yet by associating the Spirit's *being* and work so intimately with the incarnation Torrance's claim together with the previous chapter's arguments and the scriptural evidence just presented raises three important suggestions about God's pneumatic involvement with creation that we may find valuable to explore further:

(1) *The Spirit involves himself fully in the christological mediation* by which human persons *as* human persons come into the eternal communion of the Godhead (bringing with them the creation over which they have stewardship), yet without losing their essential grounding as creatures generally and as historical creatures specifically.

(2) When the Spirit involves himself within space-time as a personal agent of divinity, *his manifestation is of a genuinely historical character*. However else we may describe pneumatic activity, it is not and cannot be the imposition of some kind of idealized, theoretical and static perfection across some ontological *chorismos* onto the sensible realm; what God does on earth God simply does, not despite his perfect will, but *because* of his perfect will – his absolute freedom to express himself however he desires and to interact with his world according to his own terms.

(3) Because of the manner in which God has chosen to relate to the world he creates, the Spirit's this-worldly manifestation is a phenomenon truly involved with history, but is *not such that he leaves behind his general omni-spatial, omni-temporal presence*, to borrow Colin Gunton's terminology – that is, the divine, eternal life in which creation itself subsists.[13]

To these matters, then, we now turn for further clarification with the longer-term goal of better understanding the Church's *being* from within the broader context of the means by which Spirit appears and works amongst us.

The responsive dynamism of creation's 'perfecting cause'

Brian Horne, whose approach to these issues is of a more conceptual nature than the self-consciously scientific style of Torrance and Gunton, provides for that very reason a useful perspective from which to view the Spirit's role in the divine economy. Horne suggests in an essay on artistic self-expression as a necessary human response to the creativity 'revealed to us as the very structure of the life of God' that

> the Hebraic notion of dialogue with the Creator – a kind of absolute freedom to answer back [to God's creative self-expression] – is … as far as the Christian is concerned, superseded by the notion of a dialogue which – if the term may be permitted – precedes

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13 Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 118.

the original act of creation: a conversation of the persons within God the Trinity. *God speaking Himself in His Word and hearing Himself in His Spirit: expressing Himself in His Son and receiving Himself in His Spirit.* It is not by any other than a Trinitarian action that the world is brought into and sustained in being. The answer the creatures make is, like prayer, not so much a reply to God – our dialogue with Him – but a participation in a dialogue which already exists – the eternal conversation of God Himself. The Incarnation of the Son carries the divine expressiveness into the material of the created order *where the Spirit is already 'groaning and travailing' in bringing that order to its predestined end.*[14]

This notion of Spirit, this force of God in whom creation makes its response and indeed comes to participate in the divine triune life, traces its origin to the Hebrew scriptural tradition, which employed the term *ruach* (*wind* or *spirit*) to describe a transcendent God's immanence towards creation, his moulding of human consciousness, indeed his participation in both the corporate and personal lives of his People.[15] Although the larger aims of his paper are not primarily pneumatological, Horne calls our attention to two important insights that Christian tradition brings to the ancient Hebrew understanding which we have not yet considered fully:

First, Horne sets up a contrast between the Hebrew concept of an externalized *Other*ness that typifies God's interrelation with the created world and a trinitarian view, by which God's *Other*ness, whilst in no sense losing its external attributes, becomes internalized within creation as well – transformed into a sort of *Other/together*ness (a concept often expressed in contemporary theology with the term *kenosis*, a divine self-emptying). He then applies this internalized characteristic not simply to God's Word 'spoken' into the world as Christ, but also to the 'hearing' and the 'answer' offered back by God's Spirit and by the world *in* God's Spirit.

To elaborate from Hebrew understandings of God's awesome transcendence and final dominion over the world that he has made, the human being, on the one hand – he or she who is *not-God* – has the prerogative, indeed obligation, imposed by his or her very *other*ness, to enter into creative conversation with the one who has creatively willed him or her into *being*: 'God', says George Steiner in a passage cited by Horne, 'is capable of all speech-acts except that of monologue,' a point demonstrated admirably, Steiner claims, in the book of Job.[16] On the other hand – and this point Horne does not raise – the depiction of Yahweh as the Utterly *Other*, whose Spirit explodes onto the historical scene as the stage for his mighty acts, suggests

14 Brian L. Horne, 'Art: A Trinitarian Imperative?', in Schwöbel, *TTT*, pp. 87–8, emphasis mine; see Rom. 8:22–3.

15 See C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit*, Mowbrays Library of Theology, ed. Michael Perry (London, 1978), pp. 7–8, 12; cf. p. 22. Moule indicates on pp. 1–2, 7, that the canonical use of *ruach* tends to be 'strikingly specialized and restricted' compared with the nebulous English usage of *spirit* or indeed the broader usage of *ruach* in later extra-canonical Jewish writings. He further notes that Old Testament concepts such as *word* and *wisdom* served similar mediatory functions.

16 George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago, 1989), p. 225, quoted in Horne, p. 87. Steiner, however, as Horne points out on p. 86, refers to a unitarian God 'as some kind of undifferentiated transcendent reality, [that] cannot provide the model for the "real presence" that Steiner argues for'.

the Spirit of Yahweh's *imposition* of divine *Other*ness upon his chosen People and chosen persons (a point underscored by God's wilful infliction of evil spirits upon those whom he then goes on to reject as enemies). Yet although throughout the Old Testament the two conflicting views are held in tension, thus creating some form of genuine human-divine interrelation, neither leaves room for humanity to experience in an ontological sense the kind of *dialogical participation* in God's own life to which Horne refers.[17] In the end humanity either is left on its own to speak back to God or else is overwhelmed by his immanence.

In contrast a trinitarian reading in which the ancient Israelite histories describe stages in the developing theo-consciousness of God's People culminating in the complete Gospel revelation in Christ suggests an interpretation in which God does not force his Spirit upon the ancient kings and prophets. Rather, in his Spirit he engages them in such a way that he *enables a divine response to well up from within them* in reply to God's call to faithful worship, personal holiness and steadfast action: a sort of prophetic prefiguring within flawed humanity of the response that wells up in Christ's perfect humanity. In fact Torrance goes so far as to argue that we must view this pneumatic-yet-human reaction to God's presence as a function of Israel, Yahweh's chosen People, as a whole:

> In seeking to understand the role of Israel in the mediation of revelation, therefore, we must consider … not just this or that prophet … , but Israel as a whole, 'all Israel', to use St Paul's expression, that is, Israel as a coherent entity before God. God mediated his revelation through the totality of Israel's existence and mission, for Israel came into being and has continued to remain what it is precisely as the corporate counterpart to the self-revelation and self-communication of God to mankind. This means that we must think of Israel itself as *the Prophet* sent by God, not just Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, but Israel.[18]

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17 That the two views are indeed held in tension – engage in nuanced interplay – may be shown by further examples of Saul and David. Saul initially serves as God's anointed – he in whom Yahweh's Spirit takes up residence – and conducts wars for Israel in this context (1 Sam. 10:1–8). His later rejection of God's holy will is sometimes regarded as personal delinquency, for example, he spares the Amalekites' choicest possessions in direct defiance of Samuel and to Yahweh's personal regret (1 Sam. 15:1–23); other times Yahweh himself sends evil spirits over which Saul has little control, for example, Yahweh inflicts Saul with fits of terror (1 Sam. 16:14–23); still other instances are ambiguous, for example, Saul attacks young David in his court partially because Yahweh sends an evil spirit, but also because he maintains through his madness some instinctive awareness that Yahweh has abandoned him for David (1 Sam. 18:10–12). David, for his part, assumes the anointed role even prior to the end of Saul's reign and, rising through the royal court despite Saul's conspiracies against him, wins great victories on Israel's – indeed Saul's – behalf, precisely because 'the spirit of Yahweh seized on David' (1 Sam. 16:13). Yet he too exerts some degree of personal freedom in respect of Yahweh's will; for example, he murders Uriah the Hittite in order to steal away Bathsheba, yet allows himself to be humbled in repentant response to Nathan's challenge on Yahweh's behalf (2 Sam. 11:2–12:15).

18 Torrance, *MC*, pp. 13–14.

With the apostolic and patristic community's gradual formulation of a fully trinitarian approach, God's Holy Spirit (*pneuma*) took on a distinct hypostatic identity, yet retained and appropriated as his own particular domain the dynamic function through which God presents himself within the historical particularities of personal human existence.[19] Indeed his personal qualities became such that the incarnate Christ's own *being* in the Father and the Father's *being* in Christ is a dialogue realized only in the Spirit's responsive love: God's *Logos* spoken into the world by the Father's creative will and reciprocated towards Heaven in love.[20] It is *this* dialogue into which the Paraclete implicates humanity, causing an intersection of eternity and finitude in which the divine life wells up within and pours out from our own human life in love, yet redeems our humanity in its own state, rather than overpowering it with God's.[21] Otherwise stated: just as in the person of the Son the inner life of the Godhead becomes *Emmanuel*, 'God-*with*-us', so likewise in the perfect giving of the Spirit the same divine dynamic effectively becomes 'Christ-*in*-us' or indeed, as Horne more directly implies, 'We-in-God'.[22]

Such claims do not mean that in the Spirit's action humanity in general acquires by any natural ability the relationship between created and divine *being* inherent in Christ's own person simply by virtue of who he is. Our *other*ness from God's *being* is *other*ness indeed, insurmountable by our own will or abilities or nature. Although, as we have previously suggested, the *theosis* principle is in some sense built into the fabric of created *being*, it is not such that humanity of its own accord can find it attainable, but rather is grasped only because the Spirit is in the world responsively receiving and enacting God's Word spoken into it. Hans Küng, moreover, wisely reminds us that 'the Holy Spirit is always entirely God's Spirit and is not absorbed into the individual Spirit of man'.[23] Humanity is not such that it may deny its *other*ness and usurp the *together*ness of the Godhead, even in the Spirit's action. Yet

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19 Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* [*De Spiritu Sancto*], in *ECF*/NPN, series 2, vol. 8, §49, declares that, even with regard to Christ himself, 'is there the [Son's] incarnate presence? The Spirit is inseparable. Working of miracles, and gifts of healing are through the Holy Spirit. Demons were driven out by the Spirit of God … . Remission of sins was by the gift of the Spirit … . The resurrection from the dead is effected by the operation of the Spirit'; see also §48. Barth, *FC*, pp. 107–8, echoes these ideas: '"Conceived of the Holy Ghost". The same Holy Spirit repeats this miracle of the virgin birth whenever someone comes to believe, to see the whole of his life "in Jesus Christ", to enter the Church, to receive remission of his sins, and hope of the everlasting future.' Cf. Mark 1:9–11; Luke 1:35, 4:14, 11:14–22; John 1:33-4; Rom. 8:11.

20 Cf. Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 111.

21 Cf. John 14:10–13, 16–21.

22 Beyond this study's general affirmation of *being* as relational, Horne's imagery is profoundly valuable for its concise expression of the *specific types of relationship* that exist between the triune persons in themselves and between God and the world: the Father's creative speech in his Word – received, reciprocated and proclaimed in his Spirit, thus enjoining the world's *other*ness to exist in God's *together*ness. The Church's life and work as redeemed community requires further exploration to come more fully into focus, but the concepts here presented express all key principles required to work the matter out.

23 Küng, p. 221; cf. Rom. 8:16, 13:12–14; 1 Cor. 2:10f.

simultaneously the Spirit's *Other*ness in no way precludes his full self-expression *within* humanity – the *Other/together*ness to which we have just now referred – to effect the world's sanctification. Küng continues:

> God's Spirit can win power and dominion over man, so that he becomes man's inner self, so that a man no longer lives by his own strength, but by God's (*cf.* Rom 8:9–15, 26f.). In this way God's Spirit does not work, as in the gnostic view, as an automatically divinizing substance. The Spirit is the power which creates faith, and the norm according to which the believer is constantly summoned to live: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25, *cf.* 6:8).[24]

Küng's suggestion that the Spirit does not endow creation with an automatic divinity, but that God transforms humanity into a holy People through the directed transformation of historical life, brings us to Horne's second insight, inspired by the eighth chapter of Romans: that even before the incarnation brings to fruition God's Word, spoken in and to the world as human person, the Spirit is *already* acting in creation, upholding the world in its *being* through his and thereby the world's responsiveness to the creative Word spoken in Christ 'in the beginning' (John 1:1–3) and preparing the created order, first, for the incarnation and, now ultimately, 'groaning' within us for the *parousia* (Rom. 8:23). To some extent our discussion has already begun to address this matter, first, by arguing that the Spirit's presence in ancient Israel's kings and prophets, and indeed in Israel as a whole, foreshadowed imperfectly Christ's perfect reign and ministry and, second, in our discussion of about the Spirit's involvement of humanity in a work that he has been building up in the world from the very outset of the created order. We shall need to develop these themes further, however, in order to appreciate more completely the characteristics of this phenomenon.

To this end let us return momentarily to Gunton's concept that the world exists as it does through the action of a spatio-temporally omnipresent 'divine field of force', the *Logos* of God, that, on the one hand, permeates all earthly *being* – exists creatively in and through the interrelated network of events that collectively make up the created order – but, on the other hand, distinguishes itself – himself – as Jesus Christ: 'very God of very God' pouring himself out tangibly into the world in the Christ-event and showing himself thereby, by virtue of who he is and by virtue of his relationship to creation, to be the very foundation of that order, the organizing principle on whom all its network of events hinges.[25] Christ therefore constitutes the singular *Event* around which all the events of the world ultimately, albeit progressively, resolve. This conception of the christological basis of both divine creativity and this-worldly *being* enables us to articulate some limited human understanding of God's free choice to exist in *together*ness with the *other*ness of that which he has made.

Especially germane to the present discussion, this manner of conceiving God's *Other/together*ness with creation suggests that we cannot approach soteriology as an optional adjunct to the doctrine (or, more pertinent, the act) of creation. Rather, we must conclude that *the redemptive work of divinity in the world signifies something*

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24 Küng, p. 221; cf. Phil. 3:12; Gal. 5:25, 6:8.
25 Gunton, *Y&T*, pp. 118–19.

inherent in God's creativity. God, the eternal triune (comm)unity, creates that which he saves; the two provisions go together: the Father forms the events of the world from nothing, his Word at the centre, that in the responsive reception (or receptive response) of his Spirit he may open out the dynamic *other*ness of the created order and bring it to participate fully in the dynamic love and life of the divine (comm)unity – in the conversation that, as Horne points out, ontologically 'precedes' all else that *is*. This affirmation is the very essence of the claim we have made previously that a *theosis*-process lies objectively at the heart of created, historical *being*.

However, in some sense *this talk of a 'divine field of force' applies equally well, if not in fact better, to the work of the Spirit in his own omnipresence toward the world of space-time*. For although as *Logos* the Son endows the universe with a *structural framework* – an 'inscape', to use Gunton's own phrase – the *dynamic qualities* of created *being* belong entirely to the Spirit's sphere of influence: from the actual mechanics of the material realm (the self-extension of historical events, of which space and time are functions) to the dynamic metaphysical orientation of history towards its inevitable, predestined resolution in Christ and in a special sense *as* Christ into eschatological (comm)unity within the life of the Godhead.[26]

In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* Basil provides a useful *schema* through which to approach the triune persons' unique but intertwined roles towards creation. The Father can be thought of as the 'original cause of all things that are made', the Utterly Transcendent at whose command the world comes into *being*. The Son is the 'creative cause' who by his immanence towards creation articulates and shapes the characteristics, the basis, the nature and the order of the cosmos. The Spirit is the 'perfecting cause' whose agency in accordance with that Word-articulated structure actually *sustains* creation in its very *being*, driving its events in their christocentric directedness; who forms and sanctifies the God's People to make public this basis of the created order; and who draws creation towards its eschatological climax in the *parousia*.[27] Such a view of pneumatic action towards the world will have important consequences.

First, when we speak of God's creative act, we cannot refer merely to a one-off happening, organized and set in motion at the Big Bang and then left to follow its course, not even with the proviso of a course already planned to detail and an end known by an infallibly omniscient God who can put in earthly appearances from

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26 Gunton, *BTR*, p. 43; Torrance, *ST&I*, pp. 58, 68.

27 Basil, *DeSpS*, §38; cf. §36: 'Through the Holy Spirit comes … our being brought into a state of all "fulness of blessing", both in this world and in the world to come, of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise here of, through faith, beholding the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, we await the full enjoyment'; the language coincides with the discussion on pp. 76ff., above: although eschatological blessing appears to the faithful *as though* already present, it is not ultimately removed from the larger temporal scheme of salvation; its final consummation is not yet. Cf. Rom. 8:24–5, Phil. 3:9–12; François-Xavier Durrwell, *Holy Spirit of God: An Essay in Biblical Theology*, trans. Benedict Davies (London, 1986), p. 25, who argues that, although the Spirit is himself neither the beginning nor the end of creation history—they being, respectively, the Father's creative will and the unity of all creation in the Son – the Spirit is nonetheless 'the fullness where everything has its origin, where everything is enriched and completed'.

time to time in one or more of his persons. Neither the Old Testament's depictions of God's all-powerful, directive transcendence breaking out occasionally in history as forceful, decisive immanence, nor the New Testament's ideas of God's solidarity with the world fits comfortably with the distance required by a clockmaker concept of creative deity. Indeed the very idea of a God who creates and then simply sits back to watch his creation unfold assumes a divinity subject to the passage of time in a way that a God who creates *ex nihilo* cannot be. To speak of the Spirit, therefore, as he who in transcendence sustains the dynamic characteristics of the created order, guiding it to perfect redemption in Christ, is to speak of a God who in 'immanent transcendence' causes himself to *be* towards creation and thereby *continually generates* the world, bringing its events into progressive *being* in their own right and sustaining them in their progressions from his own position of divine omnipresence: a dynamic, eternal act of *perpetually* creative construction – a 'divine field of force' – stemming, as Horne argues, from the very nature of the triune Godhead.[28]

Second, the 'perfecting cause' suggests that we must approach the Spirit in his immanence as the engine that drives the mechanics of this-worldly dynamism. In a sense this notion follows directly from the points just made. However, whereas above we have spoken of an 'immanent transcendence', we speak here of a 'transcendent immanence' by which the Spirit moves in and through *all* earthly things in both physical and metaphysical senses: the Spirit is he who actually animates the world order dictated by the *Logos*, directing even the laws of physics themselves, not merely the significance that by God's will inheres in earthly events (as if the two aspects of creaturely *being* were in fact separable). We identify his immanence especially in the unique sign of his People's Gospel proclamation, a simultaneous engagement with the Godhead-(comm)unity doxologically and with the entire world order prophetically. Here we see here a 'divine field of force' at work so that in the fullness of events humanity and with humanity the world as a whole may be brought to act out *in the very fabric of its material being* the redemption that the *Logos*, by his very presence as the this-worldly Event-*par-excellence*, necessitates. 'For as the rain cometh down', says Isaiah, addressing the point in poetic imagery,

> and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

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28 Horne, p. 86: 'In the making of a work of art the human being exercises a peculiar kind of mental and emotional energy. *It is a drive to externalise*; a compulsion to express, to symbolise, to embody in material form the visions of the interior eye. *This energetic expression is nothing less than the reflection of the divine life of the Trinity … .* The revelation of Christ: incarnation: a life lived by the Son of God in the power of the Spirit, is the revelation of exchanged love, absolute relatedness and creative energy within the Godhead itself. The image in which we are created and understand ourselves refers back to a life in which there is the eternal self-expression of the Father in His Son or Word and the eternal self-knowledge received in the flowing out and returning of the Spirit'; emphasis mine.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. (55:10–13, AV.)

Third, implicit in the claim that the Spirit is the 'perfecting cause' is a world actually in need of perfecting. This recognition highlights the concept of fallenness, or at the very least incompleteness, inherent in the concept of *theosis*: a corollary always implicit, now stated explicitly. Whatever else we might say about the world's vocation, by recognizing that it remains a work of perfection-in-progress we acknowledge that in the midst of this-worldly events working out we are now only somewhere along the way to the completion of eternal life's fullness in the *Eschaton*. As in the third chapter we borrowed the phenomenon of music to illustrate the constructive, meaningful character of *being* that inheres in the event-nature of historical phenomena, here we may form an analogy: if we may view the created order as a grand oratorio sung into *being* by God in his Word, then we from our perspective exist only mid-way through its movements, interacting with one another in progressive chords fashioned by the Singer and received in wholeness by the Hearer: chords that transform and are being transformed by the notes that precede and follow until in the end we resolve wholly into the final chorus. If we claim, as does Horne, that humanity in response to God becomes caught up in that divine conversation between Father and Son in the Spirit, we must also conceive the created order first and foremost as that fallen realm which by the Spirit's immanent transcendence and transcendent immanence *longs* for God in Christ and – progressively, in its own historical contingencies embodied by God's 'divine field of force' – is indeed redeemed from fallenness to be *given* God in Christ.

Therefore, to summarize, the Spirit is none other than he whose unique action in the creative, dynamic economy of *being* is receptive love in perfect responsive consonance with, but distinctive from, the Father's will to speak his Son the Word as the ontological centre of the created order. The Spirit is he who for the sake of the *Logos*

(1) sustains that order – that *other* – in its *other*ly, but *Logos*-centric, historical *being* and shapes the world's events, which, guided in interrelation by both his general omnipresence externally and his particular immanence internally, become in effect a pneumatic *meta*-event;

(2) offers the world back to the Father in love – or, more precisely, enables God's People, by presenting Christ among them in solidarity, to offer creation back to the Father in love with Christ's divine responsiveness welling up within them, thereby involving them in the *together*ness of the Godhead as Christ is involved in the *together*ness of the Godhead;

(3) works out *theosis* within the world, not instantaneously endowing human persons with consummated perfection, but rather opening humanity out to the *theosis*-event that he has been developing in the world from its beginning; that is characterized in the present as the inherently active, progressive and

irreversibly determined – in short, the *eschatological* – promise of the fullness of personal life in God; and that will one day culminate in the *parousia*.[29]

These are the terms in which we must conceive the Spirit's implication of himself into the christological mediation by which humanity is brought, and the world with it, into the eternal community of God's *being*.

The Spirit 'incarnate'?

If in the preceding section we have conveyed through image and concept a trinitarian view of the Spirit's presence towards creation and the principles by which we speak of his operations in history, still the question of means remains. Having responded to the question, *What does the Holy Spirit do in the economy of being?*, we now must ask, *How, then, does he do these things?* For if indeed, as we have claimed, the Spirit makes real God's choice to *be* in *Other/together*ness with that which he has made; if indeed he sustains, animates and directs the created order around the *Logos*-event; and if indeed through transcendence and immanence he opens out material, historical *being* from the inside into the eternal life of God, then we shall need, despite our human finitude, to articulate something about the actual phenomena by which we identify his action and the processes by which he integrates history into eschatological truth. The first step is to ask what we actually *mean* when we say that the eternal Spirit of God involves himself with the world, manifest in history.

To begin addressing the *how* of the Spirit's immanence, his appearance in history, and (humanity's finite comprehension notwithstanding) the *how* of the relationship between pneumatic immanence and transcendence, the eschatological interplay of eternity and history, we may find initial value in returning to the more scientifically-orientated approach of Torrance and Gunton.[30] Although these two lean more heavily towards the christological than the pneumatological, their concern to juxtapose the insights of post-Einsteinian cosmology and the doctrine of the Trinity suggests a system in which, because

   (1) they treat the Son and Spirit's this-worldly presence as integral counterparts
      – indeed integral ontological counterparts;

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29 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 22, suggests that the Spirit (in the eucharist) '*dilates history and time* to the infinite dimensions of the *eschata*' as his unique and particular work in the divine economy; emphasis mine. *N.B.*: although Zizioulas argues forcefully that the Spirit's work (in the Church) is the historically manifest eschatological promise of personhood completed in the Trinity's communion, he (in contrast with Torrance and Gunton) does *not* accept that the Spirit works out redemption *as* history, but prefers a model whereby the Spirit liberates humanity from its captivity to historical finitude. Further discussion on pp. 99ff., below.

30 Zizioulas certainly recognizes the importance of twentieth-century physics for religio-philosophical ontologies and cosmologies – see, e.g., *BC*, pp. 119–20, in which he points out that post-Einsteinian relational cosmologies enable us to speak of a unique universal truth, consistent within itself whether approached from either the scientific or the theological perspective; nonetheless, in no way does he give these issues the kind of prominence that Torrance and Gunton do. Cf. Torrance, *ST&I*, pp. 58, 68.

(2) they root their descriptions of space-time in scientific observation; and

(3) they insist that God's real presence towards creation, rather than counteracting or undermining the spatio-temporal processes of history, actually affirms, fulfils and redeems the material order *in its own being*,

then some of their precepts concerning the nature of Christ's this-worldly action and its inherent meaning will have direct bearing, despite the distinctive roles of Son and Spirit in the creative/salvific economy.

At this stage Torrance's reference to the Spirit as Christ's 'Other Self' takes on special resonance, for

> we must bear in mind here not only the coinherent and reciprocal relations between the Father and the Son, but the *coinherent and reciprocal relations between the Spirit and the Son in opening access for us to the Father, and in sealing the efficacy of his atoning propitiation within us*. … The Paraclete, whom [Christ] sends to act in his place … is the living and life-giving Spirit of God who actualises the self-giving of God to us in his Son, and *resonates and makes fruitful within us the priestly, atoning, and intercessory activity of Christ on our behalf*. Thus, it is worth noting that when St Paul, in the eighth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans speaks of the interceding or intervening activity of the Holy Spirit on our behalf, he actually employs strengthened forms of the very terms used to speak of the vicarious activity of Christ.[31]

We must view Torrance's identification of the Spirit's activity with Christ's in the context of his nearby statements about Father who in the utter unity of the Godhead shares in Christ's work so that 'we cannot but speak in a significant way of the sacrifice of the Father in and with the sacrifice of the Son', whilst yet acknowledging that the Son is immanent in a way that the utterly transcendent Father is not.[32] In much the same way Torrance states that although the *facts* of the incarnation – birth, ministry, death, resurrection—belong, strictly speaking, to the Son, nonetheless no discrepancy exists between the Son's being and activity and the Spirit's.[33] In a sense, therefore, Torrance initially appears to regard the pneumatic presence too, though identified with Christ, as nonetheless distinct from Christ's historicity. (We shall return to this matter when we consider Zizioulas's exposition of the Spirit's relationship to history).[34]

However, in a more substantial sense the atoning intercession to which Torrance refers bespeaks an act in which the Spirit enters history *as* history to effect the eternal communion of God in himself – to bind historical events in their own *being* to the eternal. In this latter sense, therefore, we must view his work as a fundamental act of *harmonization* in which eternity and historicity are drawn together, rather than an overwhelming imposition of eternity upon history or a lifting of history out from its own context to be eternalized. Torrance's use in particular of the term *vicarious* and the phrase *on our behalf* suggests a *schema* in which history does not so much

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31 Torrance, *MC*, p. 117, emphasis mine.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 118.
34 See pp. 99ff., below.

transcend itself as transcend *in itself*: to wit, he speaks of the Spirit's 'vicarious operation … in indivisible conjunction with the vicarious activity of Christ' on humanity's behalf to build up an ontological bond that enables humanity, 'quite astonishingly and beyond any worth or capacity of our own, to participate, creaturely beings though we are, in the eternal communion and inner relations of knowing and loving within God himself'.[35]

Moreover – and here we take our first direct steps towards linking the trinitarian ontology and cosmology here described with the ecclesiological questions we posed in the early part of the study – the Spirit accomplishes these ends, just as he did in the regal and prophetic voice of ancient Israel, *through the tangible, concrete doxological acts of his gathered People*: 'Through the Holy Spirit the heavenly advocacy and intercession of Christ our great High Priest are made to echo inaudibly within us, so that our praying and worshipping of God in the Spirit are upheld and made effective by him through a relation of God to himself'.[36] This passage suggests that, because of the Spirit's actualization of the Church's unity with God by a gracious identification with human worship and indeed by his direct causal relationship with our earthly adoration of the divine, his unique involvement with the world, although distinct from Christ's *being* and work, *emerges in trinitarian thought with fundamentally historical characteristics*.

From these premises, then, we may describe the Spirit's manifest action in and towards the world, his presence in the several hearts of his people and most importantly his binding-together of those people into a holy community of praise and thanksgiving, as a *type of incarnation* analogous in some respects to the Son's.[37] Regarding the latter, Torrance argues in a description of Origen's christology that

> The incarnation means that He by whom all things are comprehended and contained by assuming a body *made room* for Himself in our physical existence, yet without being contained, confined, or circumscribed in place as in a vessel. *He was wholly present in the body and yet wholly present everywhere*, for He became man without ceasing to be God. He occupied a definite place on earth and in history, yet without leaving His position or seat (εδρα – it is Plato's term that is used) in relation to the universe as a whole.[38]

If, therefore, we employ a similar line of reasoning pneumatologically, we must identify the Spirit too with a *particular empirical reality*, namely his manifestation

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35 Torrance, *MC*, pp. 118, 119.

36 Ibid., p. 117. Cf. Horne, pp. 87–8, quoted on pp. 88–9, above.

37 Cf. 1 Cor. 12.

38 Torrance, *ST&I*, p. 13; cf. Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 119: 'When we repeat the story of the events of Jesus's life, death and resurrection we are telling not just a story of happenings immanent to the universe, but of those immanent events as also the place where God differentiates himself, becoming present within one piece of finite reality (he in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily", Col. 2:9)' without depriving his divinity of eternal divinity or humanity of created historicity. The notion that God can and does *make room* for himself, as do all historical events within the larger network of historical events – see *ST&I*, pp. 58, 68 – suggests a certain fluidity or at the very least a complete absence of discontinuity between the eternal and the historical, their substantial *other*ness notwithstanding; discussion of God as also an *eternal* room-maker follows on pp. 104ff., below.

of Christ within a chosen People, and affirm that *in this particular phenomenon of space-time* we also find the unique presence of uncircumscribed divinity who, making his response to the Father's love expressed in the Word and identifying that response with the body of God's People, thereby leads the world, as is his fundamental role in the economy, into all truth. Thus, concludes Torrance, the Church becomes the spatio-temporal *locus* in which awareness of, understanding of, and

> union and communion with the Holy Trinity *becomes embodied within the human race*. Expressed the other way round, the Church is constituted by the Holy Spirit as the *empirical counterpart* of his sanctifying presence and activity in our midst … . The 'one holy Church' is thus, as it were, the complement of the 'one Holy Spirit'.[39]

And this, the 'incarnation' of the Spirit – his active, dynamic manifestation of Christ's overarching dominion – within a historical community to which he is sent and to which he binds himself should provide the foundation of our ecclesiology.

When we introduce Zizioulas's thought to Torrance's, however, complications arise. If Torrance's comments have thus far seemed broadly consistent with the ontological and cosmological ideas presented in this study, in Zizioulas we find an immediate rejection – in some ways equally consistent – of any suggestion that the Spirit's historical presence can come to humanity *as* history in itself, for to Christ alone belongs the incarnation. Father and Spirit, of course,

> are involved in history, but only the Son *becomes* history. In fact … if we introduce time and history into either the Father or the Spirit, we automatically deny them their particulars in the economy. To be involved in history is not the same as to *become* history. The economy, therefore, in so far as it assumes history and has a history, is *only one* and that is the *Christ event*. Even 'events' such as Pentecost which seem to have an exclusively pneumatological character at first sight should be attached to the Christ event in order to qualify as a part of the *history* of salvation: otherwise they cease to be pneumatological in the proper sense.[40]

Zizioulas appreciates fully the essential unity of the Godhead's three persons in the action of any one of them towards creation. To distinguish between the three who are so thoroughly one, he therefore argues in tones very similar to Torrance's, is a task which requires considerable delicacy and subtlety, for it 'involves the risk of separating when we should be only distinguishing'.[41] Yet Zizioulas leaves no room for doubt that, despite the difficulty, distinguishing between the triune persons' roles is an utter necessity, for Patristic theology holds the unity of God's persons and operations to be 'indivisible but *not undifferentiated*'.[42] Therefore, the affirmation of divine unity in no way contradicts his view that the Spirit's role in the creative/salvific economy is such that temporal categories can in no sense be applied.

Quite the opposite obtains: the tri-unity of divine persons obviates any need for historical pneumatology, not merely as a result of the Spirit's being with and in Christ

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39 Torrance, *TrinF*, pp. 256–7, emphasis mine.
40 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 130.
41 Ibid., p. 129; cf. Zizioulas, 'OBP', p. 41.
42 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 129.

by definition, but because in the explicit context of the Father and Spirit's unity with Christ's historicity the Spirit's role is to *liberate* Christ *both in himself and in his Body the Church* 'from the bondage of history'. It is the Spirit, Zizioulas reminds us, who effected the resurrection – who raised Christ from the dead – after Christ had given himself over to death, to the inevitable conclusion of historical being. 'The Spirit is *beyond* history, and when he acts in history he does so in order to bring into history the last days, the *eschata*'.[43] In this line of thought, then, the Spirit does not act to bring about a continuation of God's omnipresence in the world in historical differentiation in the sense that Torrance implies. Rather, any visible pneumatic presence towards the historical world signifies the *return* of God's omnipresence in Christ to the eternal communion of the divine persons from whence it came. Moreover, in that the Spirit constitutes Christ as 'at the same time "one" and "many" – not "one" who *becomes* "many", but as "one" who is inconceivable without the "many", his "body"'– 'the one Christ event' taking 'the form of *events* (plural), which *are as primary ontologically* as the one Christ event itself" – he liberates the Son from history with the community of Christian faithful in tow.[44]

Amidst the liberation talk, as the last paragraph's citations quietly suggest, Zizioulas does not deny that at some level pneumatic presence transpires in the spatio-temporal context. The Spirit, he insists, is *beyond* history, not *against* it.[45] Yet in the most basic of ontological senses he does not regard the events by which that presence is signified as being essentially *of* space-time. Rather, he sees the historical events of Christology – both in the person of Jesus himself and in the worship of the Christian faithful – *transfigured* into the communion of the eternal, freed '*from the causality of natural and historical events* implied in our natural biological existence'.[46]

Zizioulas certainly does *not* claim that the Spirit involves the Church in an automatic divinization of history in that same sense that, like Küng, we have already rejected.[47] The institutional Church and the coming Kingdom are not identical; strictly speaking, what the Spirit creates in Christ's Body and *as* Christ's Body is premonition, albeit substantial premonition, in which he lifts the mundane, limited *being* of humanity beyond itself into a participatory experience of the glorified and free communion of the Trinity: the human being exists in the Church – the ontology of the human being in the ecclesial gathering – is 'not as that which he is but as that which he *will* be'.[48] Nonetheless, in that the pneumatically-conditioned events of history are essentially an institutional *reflection* of the Kingdom, their essential *being* – the underlying ontology – finds its basis not in what they are as institutions but in that to which they are related: the Father or the Son. 'All ecclesial institutions

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43 Ibid., p. 130.
44 Zizioulas, 'PrCh', p. 118; Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 132–3.
45 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 138.
46 Ibid., p. 22.
47 See Küng, p. 221, quoted on p. 92, above.
48 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 59.

must have some justification by reference to something ultimate and not simply to historical expedience'.[49]

Zizioulas underscores this point in his claim that although the Church's ministries can and do meet the needs of humanity in historical existence, 'these cannot claim ecclesial status in a fundamental structural sense'.[50] Even the Spirit's activity in inspiration and personal sanctification amongst the Christian community is secondary, a legitimate function of pneumatology and ecclesiology, certainly, but still an adjunct to the more elemental role by which the Spirit enables human persons in effect to escape their createdness, a state defined by homogenizing ontological necessity: for example, spatio-temporal causality; natural laws; instinctive behaviour; the fact of createdness itself; fallenness; and finally death, that ultimate *depersonalization* of the human being – in a word, the absolute and final reversal of creation *ex nihilo*. In this view the Spirit's primary action is that which enables humanity to emerge, regenerated constitutionally, 'born anew' (John 3:1–8), into the fullness of truly personal *being*, each human person being affirmed in his or her unique personhood by the *absolute ontological freedom* inherent in the eschatological state to engage in boundless interpersonal love, communion, with and in the infinite God: an attribution to the human being of what God is in his own nature.[51]

Thus, whereas Torrance and Zizioulas both speak comfortably of pneumatology as that which in the historical Church prefigures doxologically 'the divine life and the Kingdom to come'; causes the believer to 'cohere with and in [Christ] as one Body'; and engages humanity sacramentally in 'the dialectic between history and eschatology, between the already and the not yet', their visions, first, of history itself and, second, of the Spirit's manner of engagement with the creative/salvific economy mean that their interpretations of such statements in the end differ radically.[52]

Torrance imagines in these phrases the connotation of redemptive action by which the Spirit sanctifies the created order's actual conditions, enabling humanity effectively to make the self-same response to the Father as the Son, especially in the 'economic condescension' by which he becomes human in history.[53] History becomes a realm that, although limited and fallen, is yet in its cosmic bearings open to eternity in such a way that it may be regenerated in itself, although only by the pneumatic presence towards it.[54] That which we have called *theosis* is for Torrance

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49 Ibid., p. 138.

50 Ibid.

51 Zizioulas's use of such terms as *constitutional regeneration* and *born anew* do not imply the destruction of hypostatic particularity, but of that which limits humanity's freedom; indeed personal particularity is *strengthened* by being opened pneumatically to freedom in God's communitarian life; Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 131; 52–4, passim; cf. Torrance's concept of Christ the personalizing Person in ch. 4, n. 55, below, and Gunton's concept of particularity on pp. 105ff., below.

52 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 22; Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 254.

53 Torrance, *ST&I*, p. 3.

54 That is, neither history in general nor humanity in particular is in any sense such that apart from the Spirit (if in fact the world could even be conceived apart from the Spirit) they could evolve naturally in a *theosis* pattern; cf. Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 59.

essentially a movement through history of the Spirit's *transforming redemption*, actualized tangibly in the Church.

Zizioulas supposes, if not a sharper, then at least a more final distinction between historical *being* or more accurately the 'biological *hypostasis*' (person), tragically enslaved by its ontological limitations, and the 'ecclesial *hypostasis*' as which the Spirit frees humanity to subsist in transcendence even whilst existing in history until the day the *Eschaton* shall surely come.[55] For Zizioulas history is open to the eternal insofar as the Spirit can and does engage humanity in an 'outwardly-directed' *dilation* of the this-worldly to the dimensions of the eternal and, moreover, enables human persons as ecclesial beings to stand out visibly in history as foretaste of the world's christological, eschatological destiny and confirmation of humanity's capacity in God to transcend all tendencies to isolation and death.[56] Nonetheless, in that the Church's structures and ministries are validated ontologically and existentially not by their historical existence as such, but rather by their complete reliance upon the Spirit's activity within them, *theosis* becomes fundamentally a movement out of history by the Spirit's *transfiguring* redemption, signified tangibly by the Church.[57]

Turning finally to Gunton we find that, although he is less discursive on pneumatology than christology, when he does address the former he follows a line of thought broadly consistent with Torrance's and in some important respects describes more precisely the relationship of the Spirit with history, particularly in his descriptions of the historically dynamic qualities of pneumatic activity. Importantly too he takes a position on the Spirit's historical relevance harmonious in principle with that of Zizioulas but largely opposed in execution.

Like Zizioulas, Gunton embraces the eternally-directed character of the Spirit's action: 'It must be emphasised', he argues,

> that, as christology universalises, the direction of pneumatology is to particularise. The action of the Spirit is to anticipate, in the present and by means of the finite and contingent,

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55 Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 52–8, passim. Torrance's discussion of Christ as *personalizing Person* in his presence towards humanity, *MC*, pp. 67f., suggests concepts related to Zizioulas's distinction between biological and ecclesial *hypostases*; p. 68: 'With the Incarnation there took place an acute personalising of all God's interaction with us … . In Jesus Christ we have embodied in our humanity personalising Person and personalised person in one and the same being, in whom the personalised person is brought to its fullest reality. Thus, far from being emptied or overpowered by the divine Person, the human person is reinforced and upheld in its indissoluble oneness with the divine.' However, by linking God's personalizing action more firmly with incarnational christology (that is, God *as* history) than does Zizioulas and subsequently developing a concept of Christ the *humanizing Man*, pp. 69f., who brings to the world the intense personalization of the Trinity 'without overwhelming his human nature or damaging its integrity', Torrance implies that the distinction between Zizioulas's biological and ecclesial *hypostases* is not an innate fact of *history*, but of *unredeemed history*.

56 Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 22, 58; on p. 51, Zizioulas sets the term *individuality*, defined as a dehumanizing state of isolation, over against the concept of differentiated personhood, defined as a unique *hypostasis* in ontological communion with other unique *hypostases*.

57 Ibid., p. 138.

the things of the age to come. This is true even christologically: it is only through the Spirit that the human actions of Jesus become ever and again the acts of God.[58]

Gunton's term *particularize* takes on a special meaning much like Zizioulas's ecclesial *hypostasis* over against the biological *hypostasis*.[59] In this sense the quality of personal particularity built up within humanity by the Holy Spirit's direct action in his fundamental salvific role towards history stands not as a sign of radical individualism, but the opposite: a community of *others* in which persons mutually constitute one another, make each other what they are.[60] For Gunton, therefore, as for Zizioulas and Torrance, the primary essence of personhood lies in 'relation which does not subvert but *establishes the other in its true reality*'.[61] He goes on to note that this point emerges in scripture particularly in respect of the Spirit's action in the divine economy. Moreover, by his particular employment of the term *anticipation* Gunton acknowledges in different terms the essentially eschatological function of pneumatology to which Zizioulas refers.[62]

However, when spelling out the manner in which the Spirit realizes eschatological personhood in the human being, the manner in which the Spirit involves himself with history, Gunton's position is markedly different from that of Zizioulas for reasons stemming as much from his concept of eternity as from his vision of history. For, although Torrance and Zizioulas emphasize an ontology of active eternity – atemporal rather than timeless – in which *being* itself is fundamentally defined by the dynamic interrelation of the three divine persons, Gunton draws the concept to a logical extreme (in a way that Torrance and Zizioulas do not) in his detailed development not solely of the personal particularity requisite for relational *being*, but also of tri-unity's other critical characteristic: *perichoresis*, the presence, previously mentioned, of all the triune persons where any given one of them is.

The doctrine of *perichoresis*, Gunton argues, when approached in the appropriate context of personal particularity, with due care to frame our theological constructs so that the three persons will not finally collapse into one another,

> is a concept heavy with spatial and temporal conceptuality, involving movement, recurrence and interpenetration; … it is [also] an *implication* of the unity-in-variety of the divine economic involvement in the world. Because the one God is economically involved in the world in those various ways, it cannot be supposed other than that the action of Father, Son and Spirit is a mutually involved personal dynamic. It would appear to follow

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58 Gunton, 'ChE', p. 61, emphasis mine.

59 Cf. Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2d edn (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 115; particular personhood or personal particularity is for Gunton, as for Zizioulas, fulfilled only in eschatological terms.

60 Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity: The Bampton Lectures 1992* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 169; cf. John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London, 1961), pp. 17, 69.

61 Gunton, *OT&M*, p. 182, emphasis mine; cf. Gunton, *PTT*, pp. 95–6, 128.

62 Indeed in *PTT*, p. 50, Gunton denounces the dearth of eschatology in Augustine's pneumatological account as 'one of his worst legacies to the Western tradition'.

that in eternity Father, Son and Spirit share a dynamic mutual reciprocity, interpenetration and interanimation.[63]

We must proceed carefully at this point, for Gunton most certainly does *not* claim that spatio-temporal concepts can or should be applied indiscriminately to eternity. In fact he builds his argument squarely on the notion that *perichoresis* is 'a human rational construct which has been developed under the constraints of revelation and inspiration' and that the spatio-temporal imagery we read back into eternity by means of the doctrine are based analogically upon our own historical observation of space-time as well as God's economic presence therein.[64] Nonetheless,

> because God is involved economically in space and time, he cannot be conceived to be merely timeless and non-spatial. Perichoresis implies an ordered but free interrelational self-formation: God is not simply shapeless, a negatively conceived monad, but eternal interpersonal life. *There is thus a richness and space in the divine life, in itself and as turning outwards in the creation of the dynamic universe that is relational order in space and time*.[65]

In the present context the vital point to which Gunton draws attention is that fundamentally God must be conceived as *Being* who after his own free fashion makes some kind of 'space' and 'time' for himself. That is, the perichoretic concept of relationship in tri-personal, particularized differentiation that lies at the heart of our *theo*-consciousness – the Father, together with the Son in the Spirit, and the Son together with the Father in the Spirit – carries innately the implication of a God who even in his own transcendence *makes room in himself for himself*, indeed *extends* himself in such a way that *the three persons make room for one another*. This assertion means that we must regard eternity in its simplest terms as a free expression in unity of interpersonal relationality which, although not spatial and temporal in the sense by which we express and understand such concepts in and for our this-worldly context, yet exists and forms the root of all existence in a fashion from which these earthly aspects of relationality must be ontologically derived. In sum – although Gunton himself does not state this, the implication can hardly be avoided – the very *ousia* of God is *Event*.[66]

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63 Gunton, *OT&M*, p. 163.

64 Ibid., p. 164; crucially Gunton applies the term *analogy* to conceptual discourse and emphatically *not* to *being* itself.

65 Ibid., emphasis mine.

66 To expand and clarify this proposition, if, as discussed on pp. 74ff., above, space and time are functions of events – if the dynamic, interrelated self-extension of phenomena as events determines our experience of space-time, not the other way around – then we need not regard space-time as strictly necessary for the *being* of events in their self-extending, room-making activity, except that God simply has willed the created order so (at least until the *parousia*). We are therefore free to regard God as eternal *Event*, with all the term's dynamic, self-extending connotations, yet without demanding spatio-temporal categories of him. Nor do we create any disparity by holding that the same God in immanent this-worldly presence chooses to extend himself in a way that *does* involve spatio-temporal properties, but without loss of who he in himself eternally *is*; we can make this claim without doing philosophical

The conclusion that we must draw from this line of argument, juxtaposed with our foregoing discussions of the event-character of historical *being*, is that a *genuine and substantial kinship* exists between the kind of *being* we see both in history and in the eternal dynamic of God. The suggestion is that, despite its true *other*ness, the created order's *being* as the self-extension of events as history is not simply formed according to God's will, although it certainly is that, but indeed is patterned after his very life.

Such a claim will mean, in the first instance, that the world's internal structure is bound up in *perichoresis* and the interrelation of particularities. In the perichoretic God, argues Gunton in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*,

> we have a conception of *personal space*: the space in which three persons are for and from each other in their otherness … .

> What is the outcome when we turn in the light of such a doctrine of God to the theology of creation? Creation becomes understood as the giving of being to the other, and that includes space to be: to be other and particular … . The point is that the world's otherness from God is part of its space to be itself, to be finite and not divine. But as such it also echoes the trinitarian being of God in being what it is by virtue of its internal *taxis*: it is, like God, a dynamic of beings in relation.[67]

In the second instance, the claim binds up with the same concept creation's external involvement with the creator and therefore the world's meaningful character, a point that Gunton explores in *The One, the Three and the Many*: 'the dynamism of mutual constitutiveness derives from the world's being a dynamic order that is summoned into being and directed towards its perfection by the free creativity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.' The mitigating factor of sin and evil, of course, indicates a corruption of creation's directedness such that it may be righted only by the incarnation and the Spirit's perfecting, redeeming intervention. 'But evil distorts the dynamic of being, does not take it away'.[68] The world, in sum, is called in all its ontological and cosmological bearings to exist not only perichoretically in itself but ultimately with God: God and creation making space for one another in *Other/together*ness.

All this being said, however, the primary question yet lingers: what does Gunton's development of these concepts bring to our understanding of the Spirit and the manner of his involvement with history? The answer begins with his view that the Spirit's functions both in the internal dynamic of the Godhead and in the economy of God's this-worldly presence are fundamentally similar, that what he is in himself he is toward us: namely, the 'focus of the distinctiveness' of personal particularity. What the Spirit does, argues Gunton, is to 'particularise the *hypostases*', to free both Father

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violence to (or affecting in any way) the fundamental nature of God's eternal *Being* and without the need for a radical distinction or *chorismos* between God's transcendence and his immanence. If anything, such a claim strengthens our view of his absolute freedom of *being*, relationality and creativity.

    67 Gunton, *PTT*, pp. 110–11.
    68 Gunton, *OT&M*, p. 166.

and Son to be wholly themselves – to be *distinctively* themselves – in the context of one another's presence and love. 'Accordingly, the Spirit's distinctive mode of action in both time and eternity, economy and essence, consists in the constituting and realization of particularity'.[69] These comments in themselves contain little that we have not already covered in our analysis of Zizioulas; although the terminology differs, the principle remains: the Spirit's unique activity towards history is first and foremost a movement by and in which humanity comes to experience the fullness of eschatological personhood (ecclesial *hypostasis* or perichoretic particularity) offered in God's free expression of his will to commune with his creation.

Yet bearing in mind the concept of God-as-*Event* and its corollary, the substantial kinship of God's *being* and creation's, both of which we have derived from Gunton's identification of *perichoresis* as the room God makes for himself, we find a rapid conceptual divergence between the two authors. Specifically Gunton's thought requires no suggestion that any disparity arises by characterizing the Spirit's action as genuinely historical. Whereas Zizioulas emphatically asserts that to implicate the Spirit in history *as* history indicates a failure to appreciate his proper role in the economy, Gunton offers no such argument. Of course, Gunton acknowledges the eternally-*directed* character of the pneumatic work, for what else could humanity's movement into God's perichoretic life be but eternally-directed? ('Human life', he says, 'is to be offered *to the Father* in Christ and through the Spirit, agents alike of divine creation, redemption, and perfection'.)[70] But a claim that the Spirit forms the *eternally-directed* presence of God on earth and a claim that the Spirit in his work is *beyond time*, without remainder, are not synonymous. The former conception may entail the latter, but not of necessity.

In fact Gunton's pneumatological discourse is peppered throughout with brief turns of phrase that bring the Spirit's eschatological activity properly *into* and not simply towards space-time: 'In the economy', he states, for example, 'it is the action of the Spirit not simply to relate the individual to God, but to *realise in time* the conditions of the age to come'.[71] Although the Spirit's historicity is not always a primary concern in the larger context of these mostly sporadic statements, a closer examination of his more direct discourse bears out the initial impression.

When, for example, Gunton speaks of the Spirit's perfecting action on this-worldly phenomena, far from Zizioulas's vision of freedom from history, Gunton's liberation is effected *primarily* and *essentially* in history by the very means and material – space, time, *room* – of the historical process. Pneumatology, he argues, as it touches upon the doctrine of creation and this-worldly realities, fosters

> an ontology of the material particular as that which is destined to achieve a distinctively finite completeness or perfection in space and through time. … It is a conception of finite realities as they are directed to the eschatological perfection that is promised, and sometimes realized from time to time in anticipation. Through the Spirit that which was

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69 Ibid., p. 190. Gunton is quick to point out, however, that it is not enough simply to view the Spirit as a 'unifying link' between Father and Son; indeed in *PTT*, p. 50, he takes Augustine to task for a tendency to give the Spirit 'inadequate hypostatic weight'.

70 Gunton, *OT&M*, p. 208, emphasis mine.

71 Gunton, *PTT*, p. 50.

and is will through Christ be in its own way completed, albeit, under the conditions of fallenness, only through redemption.[72]

Even in his description of the point at which humanity touches upon the *Eschaton* Gunton chooses a term (to which he returns time and again) that has no meaning apart from a spatio-temporal context: *anticipation*. Even eschatology is tied up in the event-character of historical *being*.

'Substantiality', Gunton then goes on to argue – full particular personhood in perichoretic relation with the eternal *Other* and indeed the finite *others* – is

> given in Christ in whom all things cohere. But, considered in the light of the Spirit's distinctive form of action as the perfecting cause of the creation, that substantiality is not fully given from the beginning but has to achieve its end. It is something that *by divine and human agency is to be perfected through time and space*, and so is given from the concrete future that constitutes the promise of particular perfection.[73]

Thus does Gunton drive home a point not simply about the economic and conceptual relatedness of God and history, but in fact an *existential* relatedness. In all fairness we cannot but recognize the equation of personhood with existential relatedness inherent in Zizioulas's thought: 'For Zizioulas', points out Paul McPartlan, '"ontological" and "existential" are synonymous'.[74] But whereas both Zizioulas and Gunton can speak of a relatedness whereby the Spirit brings humanity to *taste* 'the future as our destiny', Gunton *involves* historical life *as history* in that act of tasting in a way that Zizioulas simply does not.[75]

Never forgetting, of course, that whilst the created order depends on God, God himself is entirely self-dependent (or, more precisely, his persons fulfil one another in mutual interdependence), here we find nonetheless a vision in which pneumatic operation fosters a true perichoretic openness to the divine: an openness of the richest kind which, flawed though it may be in humanity's fallen condition, yet exists and is known not solely by means of creation's eschatological destiny made present but also most significantly *through what creation is here and now in relation to the eschatological destiny* towards which, in itself, it moves. With this view of history we do not damage the Spirit's role in the economy if we say he is involved in genuinely historical fashion. Indeed the context of human *perichoresis* that takes shape as historical event will mean that we actually deny the Spirit's role in the economy if we separate him from space-time, for we deny him the *freedom* to make room for humanity in God and God in humanity in history and not simply beyond history.

Although of our three main writers Gunton has produced the smallest body of explicitly ecclesiological content, when he does apply his principles directly to the Church as the seat of the Spirit's visible historical activity, his conclusions draw

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72 Gunton, *OT&M*, p. 206.

73 Ibid., p. 208, emphasis mine.

74 Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue*, with a foreword by Edward Yarnold (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 128.

75 Ibid., p. 129, emphasis altered; see Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 64.

history powerfully into the process. Indeed in direct contrast with Zizioulas Gunton holds that the Church's temporal ministries, rather than being additional to that which is properly ecclesial or secondary to the Spirit's eschatological presence, are in fact the core means by which the Spirit manifests visibly his saving presence in the world and draws creation into perichoretic particularity. Rather than releasing history from the bondage of finitude, the Spirit frees the dynamism of history to be not solely a reflection of eternity (although *anticipation* does assume this aspect of pneumatic presence), but to be also – perhaps primarily—a realm that relates to God by means of the very particularities of earthly *being* and persons. In Jesus, argues Gunton, the Spirit forges *through earthly contingencies* a particular relationship with both the Father and Christ's

> own people, a relationality subsequently worked out in temptation, teaching, works of power, suffering and death. It meant that he was this kind of messiah, not that, the instantiation of one way of being the holy people of God rather than another.

> *A similar function can be seen to be performed by the Spirit in the ministry of the church* after the ascension, when, according to the theology of the Fourth Gospel, the Spirit takes up the work of Jesus by relating believers – particular believers – to the Father through him. The Acts of the Apostles is full of instances of how one course rather than another was chosen under the impact of the Spirit's guidance. Another focus is provided by Paul's conception of the Spirit of the Lord as the giver of human freedom. According to this conception, *the freedom of Christians derives from their institution into a new – particular – network of relationships: first with God through faith in Christ, and then with others in the community of the Church*.[76]

Therefore, whilst Gunton and Zizioulas both recognize the inability of the fallen biological or historical *hypostasis* to attain its fullness as ecclesial and ultimately eschatological *hypostasis* apart from the Spirit, for Zizioulas the distinction between fallen and redeemed humanity finally entails certain ontological restrictions inherent to historical *being* which, in order for humanity to find (inter)personal fulfilment in God, must be transcended entirely whereas Gunton envisages transcendence worked out historically.[77]

Zizioulas holds that, whilst the material historicity of the human person is not *opposed* ontologically to God's perfect eternity, nonetheless the intrinsic limitations of historical finitude mean that history as we know it can never embody the ecclesial *hypostasis* without making a pneumatic leap beyond itself. In contrast Gunton's characterization of the Spirit as he who at the foundational level of ontology forms God as *Event* and human beings as *events* means that the concept of *spirit* generally – conjoined as it is in Christian thought with the material reality of humanity's spatio-temporal existence (that same materiality brought forth *ex nihilo*) –

> is of wide and illuminating significance. Theologically, it is a way of speaking of the personal agency of God towards and in the world; anthropologically a way of speaking of

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76 Gunton, *OT&M*, p. 183, emphasis mine.

77 Zizioulas, 'OBP', p. 41; note: *restrictions* rather than *distinctions*.

human responsiveness to God and to others, cosmologically a way of speaking of human openness to the world and the world's openness to human knowledge, action and art.[78]

For Gunton, then, redemptive transcendence is by the Spirit's action the final aim of the historical process and is, moreover, *worked out* in the historical process – and *seen* to be worked out historically in the Church precisely *because* the Spirit exists at the heart of the interrelated, perichoretic network of the divine *Event* in communion with and progressively enacting perfection in the particularities of historical *events*. Thus is Gunton's distinction between the ecclesial and biological *hypostasis* not of an ontological kind; rather, the distinction lies qualitatively between historical *being* that exists in fallenness and historical *being* that in the Church has begun fully to appropriate its eschatological destiny and, through the agency of the Spirit together with the openness of the human spirit, to enact that destiny in and towards the rest of the created order in constructive anticipation of the day when that destiny shall be fulfilled.

Conclusion: towards pneumatological resolution

What, then, shall we make of the notion that the Spirit implicates himself into Christ's mediation of salvific actualities and the proposal that his involvement with history is genuinely historical whilst not undermining the general omnipresence towards history inherent in his divinity? Conclusions will not be so simple as they might have seemed at the outset, for, as our analysis demonstrates, our three authors' development of pneumatology with reference to its historical bearing presents one of the most significant points of divergence between Torrance's and Gunton's trinitarian systematics and Zizioulas's. Moreover, although we have not yet discussed in full the ecclesiological ramifications of trinitarian thought, we have already seen to some degree that disagreement attending these conceptions of the Spirit's historical action will have no small effect on the conclusions about the Church's earthly constitution and purposes.

Torrance's view of the Spirit as 'Christ's Other Self' together with Gunton's language of perichoretic openness in divine and earthly events suggests a radical immanence of the Spirit within historical conditions and the progressive outworking of creation's eschatological destiny. Consequently the Church, viewed as the seat of the Spirit's activity and the sign of his work, becomes that visible place in which God *mediates* salvific realities into the created order. Zizioulas, however, with his vision of the Spirit as the divine person who liberates humanity from ontological necessity, describes pneumatology in terms of a radical freedom from history, a freedom in which creation itself is caught up. Consequently his view of the Church is principally *iconic*: a sign standing in the world as the proclamation of God's perfect redemption of the human *hypostasis* in Christ, the mark of humanity's hope in God's promise and most importantly a foretaste of communion in the eschatological Kingdom.

Moreover, the authors' conceptual differences become most obvious at the exact point of their translation into the most concrete expression: the recognition

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78 Gunton, *OT&M*, p. 187.

of pneumatic presence in the core signs of true ecclesiality and visible marks of humanity's adoption into the divine community: the sacraments. Gunton's sacramental commentaries are fairly minimal; Torrance's and Zizioulas's, however, are substantial – and notably both operate from the premise that the Spirit's formation of the Church as the *locus* of God's eschatological promise takes basic shape in only *one* of the sacraments: baptism in Torrance's case, the eucharist in Zizioulas's. Each contends that his one sacrament *holds priority* over all other sacramental activity. Ultimately, therefore, the very *being* of the Church itself must be conditioned by the one, which stands alone as the perfect concrete expression of Christ's Gospel in its fullness.

Torrance, for example, points out Irenaeus's argument that in baptism '"the rule of truth" … is transmitted in such a way as ever to be one and the same'. Origen, he goes on to state, referred to this same rule of truth as '"the supreme summary of the faith", … not least in respect of belief in the Holy Trinity included in baptism'. Likewise, he continues,

> Athanasius claimed that it is in baptism that 'the fullness of the mystery' … is lodged, for it is given in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That helps to explain why the Creed spoke only of 'one baptism', and not also of 'one Eucharist', as might have been expected … . The Eucharist was regarded as celebrated *only within the Church's participation in the great mystery of baptism* and properly included within it.[79]

In strikingly similar language Zizioulas argues that the eucharist ensures the Church's continuity with the eschatological 'rule of truth', through which the Church is made to join in the life of the Trinity itself:

> The eucharist was not the act of a pre-existing Church; it was an event *constitutive* of the being of the Church, enabling the Church to *be*. …
>
> Consequently, the eucharist [unites] in one unique experience the work of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit … . The eucharist manifests the historical form of the divine economy, … the life, the death, and the resurrection of the Lord, … through the 'form' of bread and wine and a 'structure' practically unchanged since the night of the Last Supper. The eucharist realizes in the course of history the continuity that links each Church to the first apostolic communities and to the historical Christ: in short, all that was instituted and is transmitted.[80]

To be sure, neither Torrance nor Zizioulas finally denies the necessity of both baptism and eucharist for the life of the Church. But the crux of the matter lies in their conceptions of the transcendent God's action in the person of the Spirit calling out and forging a priestly community to stand out from within its own worldly context as a sign of creation's *theosis*-purpose and to bring forth palpably the revelation and redemption humanity finds in Christ Jesus: *in both cases one of the sacraments inevitably becomes marginalized, relegated to a secondary role conditional upon and conditioned by the presence of the other.* Simply put: for Torrance baptism can

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79 Torrance, *TrinF*, pp. 289–90, emphasis mine; see also Eph. 4:4–6.
80 Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 21–2.

be called constitutive of the Church's *being* in a way that the eucharist – a reflection, albeit a necessary one, of created persons' *baptismal* incorporation into the triune life – cannot; whereas for Zizioulas the reverse obtains: baptism – a participation in Christ's death and resurrection – exists primarily as the mode of initiation into a People whose involvement in the life of the Godhead is *eucharistically* defined, and is thus a means, albeit a necessary one, to a particular ontological end.

However, if we review the articles of pneumatological faith upon which Torrance, Zizioulas and Gunton do generally concur, we find that, despite their differences, their points of agreement are not insignificant. In the accounts of each, four main themes form the centrepiece of a pneumatological discourse in which the Spirit becomes

(1) the *continuing salvific presence of the divine towards the created order* (if not for Zizioulas *in* the created order), who actualizes the *Logos* and, as Basil claims, enables humanity to recognize Jesus Christ as *Logos* and to participate in the truth revealed in him, by which God calls humanity into the life of the Godhead;[81]

(2) the *eternally-directed response of God to himself spoken in his Word*; however else these authors may understand the work of the Spirit in relation to created historicity, its meaning is wrapped up wholly in eschatology: the Spirit in all his bearings towards creation is God's personal sign and seal of his promise that Christ has overcome the grave in solidarity with humanity and the one through whom God realizes that promise substantially as a foretaste of the Kingdom;

(3) the *actual means of redemption* by whose presence God joins human persons to Christ's atoning work whilst maintaining and strengthening their personal distinctiveness; accords the Son's priesthood to all humanity, forming them into ecclesial *hypostases* (personalized or particularized persons); and sets the world on the path to the final outcome, *theosis*: the binding of creation into the divine conversation of Father, Son and Spirit;[82]

(4) *the realization of Christ's 'corporate personality' – the Body of Christ – as the doxological proclamation of the Church*; that is to say, the Church stands forth not as a phenomenon added to the work of salvation, nor as a pre-existing assembly which God motivates towards the *Eschaton*; rather, in the Spirit's action the Church simply *is* the *perichoresis* effected by God in the relationships of human persons to one another and to God as Christ: the firstfruits of the Kingdom (Rom. 8:23, Jas. 1:18) and the visible presence of God's salvation in the world, by which he implicates the this-worldly network of events into his life.[83]

Pneumatology thus emerges in the thought of all three as an integral counterpart to christology in the economy of creation and salvation; the personal focus of

81 Basil, *DeSpS*, §46.
82 Cf. John 16:13, 20:22; Rom. 8:1, 15-7; 1 Cor. 4:1–5; 2 Cor. 4:4–6, 13–15, 18.
83 Cf. Rom. 8:29.

their relational concepts of *being*, the foundation of humanity's experience of the transcendent God according to the 'rules' laid out in the Christ-event and most importantly for this study the cornerstone of ecclesial ontology.

However, because the manner in which we must ultimately characterize the Church's *being* rests squarely on the way in which we draw out the implications of these four general principles for our understanding of historical and eternal interrelatedness, the distinctions between the authors' accounts take on primary importance. Two questions therefore arise. First, given our authors' broad agreement on the core conception of both eternal and created ontology as relational constructs, including some basic aspects of pneumatic activity within this system, why do they finally produce such different accounts of the Spirit's and Church's visible expression? Second, can these differences actually be harmonized or resolved in some fashion and, if so, what benefit would this resolution bring to the larger study?

In response to the first question, the distinctions amongst Torrance's, Gunton's and Zizioulas's 'historical pneumatology' hinge upon three main factors that we shall need to address:

(1) The authors' depictions of *the Spirit's dynamic characteristics* – the nature of his involvement with history and even the world's dynamism in itself: whereas Zizioulas holds the relational *being* of history *as* history to be predicated on the Spirit's personalizing action, Torrance and Gunton view history as more substantially integrated into this action. They concern themselves more directly with the finer scientific points of 'cosmological mechanics' than does Zizioulas; that is, both seek to bring the insight of modern physics to bear in their ontological, cosmological and epistemological systems. By in effect building the concept of *Event* into the heart of his conception of God's own *being* Gunton in particular describes a system in which God's historical self-extension, whether as Son or Spirit, represents the freedom of God's self-expression in communicating himself to creation.

(2) Their differing approaches to *the concept of eschatology* in general: in Zizioulas's work eschatology signifies the Spirit's direction of history *beyond itself* towards the eternal; in Torrance's and Gunton's it signifies the Spirit's direction of history *through itself* to the *parousia* and thus to the eternal. In one sense they all build metaphysically upon distinctions between pneumatic (redeeming) and historical (fallen) dynamism; however, in another sense Zizioulas depicts the Heavenly Kingdom as more immediately tangible than in Gunton's and Torrance's descriptions.

(3) Divergent *sacramental emphases* in their treatments of the Church's constitution: Torrance treats the Spirit's action in baptism as principally constitutive of the Church, whereas Zizioulas assigns that function to the Spirit's eucharistic presence. In both cases the remaining dominical sacrament seems to function in an auxiliary role, and in both cases the primary sacramental activity is considered the fundamental, integral expression of the Spirit's self-manifestation (or manifestation of the Risen Christ) towards the world – his ecclesial manifestation.

The question of harmonizing and resolving the differences requires further analysis and evaluation. In the matter of the Spirit's relationship to the historical process Torrance's and Gunton's discourse is, frankly, stronger than Zizioulas's. Zizioulas affirms, first, that the constitution of both Christ-event and Church are inconceivable without a dynamic pneumatology that 'operates as a force of communion (2 Cor. 13:13) and … distributes the charismata and personalizes the Christ-event' as the anointed *one* and *many* and, second, that the Spirit is the divine person who constitutes the Church as the historical phenomenon in which God proclaims salvation's culmination to humanity.[84] Yet he is surprisingly weak at describing the Spirit's *manner* of co-presence with the finite realm, preferring instead to emphasize Christ's function as the spatio-temporal presence of God: he whose work is wholly tied up in 'the outpouring of the Spirit, [by which] the "last days" enter into history' but who nevertheless alone can actually *become* the 'here-and-now reality' of divine this-worldliness.[85] In contrast Torrance argues (here borrowing from Cyril of Jerusalem) that the divine presence of the Holy Spirit brings grace and indeed life to the world in a way that 'like rain does not change when it comes down but *adapts itself to the nature of each thing that receives it*'. Whilst utterly consistent in himself, in the dynamic of the Trinity and in the divine economy the Spirit nonetheless meets each person and situation (and *all* persons and situations) with a unique, distinct act of grace and by God's will in Christ's name 'works many excellencies. We must think of the Holy Spirit, then, as the creative, energizing, enlightening presence of God who *freely interacts with his human creatures* in such a way as to sustain their relation to himself as the source of their spiritual, personal and rational life'.[86]

In fairness, Zizioulas's great emphasis on identifying the Church's core *being* with the *corporate nature* of the Christ-event circumvents at least initially the immediate need for a historical pneumatology in that the Spirit's action on the Church is precisely the same as his action on Christ. This integral aspect of the creative/salvific economy, although present in Torrance and Gunton, comes across with less strength: their use at key junctures of such terms as *vicarious* and *anticipation* suggests a less direct association between Christ and his People and therefore a greater epistemological need for the Spirit as a personal (and personalizing) link *in* history, not solely *beyond* history.

This question of the Spirit as history, however, cannot finally be avoided, for Zizioulas leaves open-ended the question of *how* the community comes to *be* in relation to Christ in the first place. Additionally, although he takes an emphatic stand concerning the ecclesial *hypostasis* as an eschatological phenomenon and hence representative of creation's destiny, he does little to clarify how God will bring history to arrive at that outcome and in fact relegates the sanctifying work of the Spirit to a secondary status derivative of his iconic formation of ecclesial

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84 Zizioulas, 'PrCh', p. 118.

85 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 112.

86 Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 227, emphasis mine; cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, in *Early Church Fathers*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 7, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, online edn, Lecture 16, §§11–13; 1 Cor. 12:1–11.

life (whereas Torrance and Gunton place the Spirit's sanctifying presence right at the heart of his eschatological work).[87] The result is a curiously static vision of the Church that, we might infer from the language of relational ontology, Zizioulas does not actually intend. In the final analysis, even with the explicit stipulation that the Spirit's activity towards creation is thoroughly distinct from Christ's, the idea that the Spirit can become present in the realm of history and forge the historical, worshipping Church as an integral mark of that presence without actually taking part in history comes across as a profoundly difficult proposition to defend.

Moreover, the historical dynamism in Torrance's and Gunton's pneumatological thought appears more basically consistent than Zizioulas's with the scriptural witness of the Old Testament, which holds the Spirit to be that great divine wind who not only articulates but realizes in his People – with decisive power – Yahweh's irresistible, holy will on earth and of the New Testament, which speaks of that same divine person who in the Virgin's womb creates the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity, who drives Christ's ministry through from his baptism to his ascension, and who remains in the Church in Christ's stead.[88] The essential problem with Zizioulas's ahistorical pneumatology is this and nothing less: when he argues that to implicate the Spirit into history is to deny his unique function in the economy of creation and salvation, Zizioulas leaves the Spirit very little room to *engage* divinity with history and history with divinity in the manner consistently borne out in scriptural pneumatology.

The Apostle Paul, for example, in his first letter to the Corinthians, speaks of the Spirit's presence in terms of the gifts he bestows upon the members of the Church 'for the common good': wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues (12:3–13, NRSV). Each of these *charisma* is rooted by definition in the knowledge, will and activity of God. Therefore we would not be in error to say they express the kind of openness to the eternal that signifies a liberation of historical persons from their historical limitations. Yet the Spirit brings forth these gifts in humanity to be exercised in history *as* history – liberated history – precisely because in that capacity they serve as the sign of God's presence, a means of sanctification and a catalyst for the creation of community. Likewise, we see a similar principle at work at Pentecost, when the Spirit takes up his dwelling in the Apostles and enables them to preach in all the languages of the Roman Empire (Acts 2:1–21). Again we see an act rooted in the utterly free power of God to transcend any and all human limitations. Yet the act itself derives its effectiveness not from a Spirit abstracted from history, but because in this, the Spirit's first sign of residence in Christ's Church, divinity breaks out in the most unexpected historical context and persons to proclaim the Good News to all creation.

The Pentecost story also raises a second problem in Zizioulas's thought: his attempt to preserve Christ's absolute historicity and the Spirit's absolute freedom from history results at times in difficult leaps of logic and unusual scriptural interpretations. Zizioulas argues, for example, that the Pentecost event must be seen

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87 See pp. 101–2, 106–7, above.

88 See p. 85, above.

primarily as a christological happening, with pneumatology as an attachment, in order to meet the demands of salvation *history*.[89] But the claim simply does not ring true. In the first instance, the logic employed goes directly against the plain-sense reading of a very unsubtle section of the Christian canon. In the second, the interpretation fails to account for a wider canonical context in which we find, for example, Christ's promise in the Fourth Gospel that at his departure from earth he would send the Paraclete in his place. Similarly Zizioulas argues elsewhere that the resurrection is essentially an ahistorical act of the Spirit in the sense that Christ's self-identification with humanity – up to and including the point of death – means that he succumbs to the ontological necessities of historical bondage and human fallenness with only the Spirit to liberate him.[90] But whilst there is definite value in this statement, for certainly in death Christ did give himself over to fallen humanity's natural outcome, would not the *ascension* serve better to illustrate the Spirit's action in raising Christ *beyond* history? May we not in fact consider the resurrection to be Christ's last great sign of *redeemed* historicity, the perfect culmination of his entire incarnate ministry, the irrefutably conclusive act linking historical ontology with divinity? Whilst, all in all, Zizioulas's statements express a valid concern of trinitarian dogmatics – namely, the preservation of the Son's and Spirit's differentiation – nonetheless his readers at times must wonder whether, in order to preserve the distinctiveness of christology and pneumatology in their directedness to and from the eternal, he does not in fact distort the distinctiveness as it simply *is* in the realm of space-time.

Nor indeed does such a critical separation of history and eternity need to occur in our treatment of the Spirit's earthly presence. For if in fact Gunton's implication is valid and we may view God in his own *being* as *Event* – the interpersonal *Event* primary to all *being* – then this approach in itself promotes the concept of a God whose self-extension *as* Event loses nothing when we see one facet of that act of making room for himself as an occurrence given spatio-temporal properties.[91] A crude analogy may illustrate the point: if we were to place our own hands into an aquarium, that action would enable us to interact with the fish therein and to do so fully as ourselves without loss to our own selves and without detriment to the larger dimensions of our own *being* beyond the aquarium's parameters; the action would be simply an extension of a human-event into the aquatic environment that is the fishes' entire world. So it is with God's this-worldly presence: when seen according to this analogy, the qualitative distinction of purpose between the earthly-directed role of Christ's action and the heavenly-directed role of the Spirit's in no way precludes the legitimacy of an earthly self-extension of the Spirit into history *as* history, nor does the self-presentation cause damage to the wholeness of the Spirit's dimensions (or those of the triune *Theo*-Event in general) beyond history.

This same aquarium analogy also gives rise to the second matter we have raised, eschatology, where our thought comes closer to Zizioulas's than to Torrance's or Gunton's. For, to continue the analogy, we find that given the wholeness of our

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89 See Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 130, quoted on p. 99, above; cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 (London, 1966), p. 331.

90 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 130.

91 See p. 104 and ch. 4, n. 66, above.

bodies – lifting Paul's words to the Corinthians out of context we recall that 'indeed the body consists not of one member, but of many' (1 Cor. 12:14) – we may legitimately argue that by making room for our hands within the aquatic context we can in some limited sense foster amongst the fish a direct, interactive experience of a phenomenon that lives most fundamentally beyond the limitations of their world and that otherwise exists far beyond their comprehension. The analogy falls down, of course, in the fact that, whereas God the Spirit in his ecclesial manifestation introduces to history himself in his fullness without remainder, in the aquarium there exists merely a phenomenal continuity between the hands and the body beyond. Moreover, the pneumatic manifestation is one that occurs by God's integration of his *being* into the gathered community – the *Other/together*ness about which we have spoken earlier – whereas the hands in the aquarium can never exist in the same kind of *together*ness with the fish.

Yet the illustration emphasises the point that, of our three authors, Zizioulas best captures the Other-worldly essence of ecclesial eschatology: that is, he best delineates the experience of life in the Spirit's power by which the worshipping community 'transcends in herself the world and offers it to God'.[92] Torrance, however, best captures the immanence by which the Spirit's personal *being* intersects the world, sustaining it in its own *being* and making possible human participation in God's saving mysteries, but without loss or compromise of creaturely *being*. Similarly Gunton stresses the utterly harmonious co-presence of two levels of reality, the eternal and the finite, in God's earthly self-revelation, the mediation of eternity through (not in spite of) temporal events, and the anticipatory nature of eschatological experience without loss to spatio-temporal continuity. However, without Zizioulas's eschatological *liberation* and *freedom* held in tension with these concepts Gunton's language of *anticipation* sounds relatively weak. The latter, although it may ultimately bear out the same eschatological aims as the former, does not convey the sheer force with which God makes the fullness of the salvific interrelation of persons *tangibly* present, *palpably* real.

At this point we may find some value in turning for elaboration and clarification to an outside source, Hans Küng, who together with Zizioulas affirms and indeed insists upon the completeness of the eschatological presentation in the Church's life. in contrast with Zizioulas's Eastern approach Küng's Catholic language does not convey quite the same sense of *iconic* liberation; nonetheless he does capture fully the *immediacy* of a Coming Kingdom that presents itself in wholeness to humanity:

> The reign of God, which is to come in the future, is already irrupting into the present … . The *direct confrontation of man with the reign of God* is not something that will happen at some determinate or indeterminate future time, but is something that is happening now, in these last days: the time is fulfilled *now* (Mk. 1:15), the hour of decision has struck *now*.[93]

Although Küng employs temporal concepts more liberally, like Zizioulas he succeeds more easily than Gunton or Torrance in conveying the concrete character of the

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92 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 162.

93 Küng, p. 92, emphasis altered.

'future consummation' of God's reign 'precisely because it is *the consummation of something that already exists*'.[94]

> Since the reign of God has been preached, has begun, and is *already effective* – through and in Jesus – in the *present*, the hope for a consummated and revealed reign of God is not an empty and unfounded hope directed to the future alone; but a hope, rooted in already fulfilled realities, for the future consummating of this present reality through the eschatological saving act of God, which is the same and yet new. The decisive moment of the final period of time has already occurred, and so the ending of that period is inevitable. The present reality of the reign of God is already open to man's experience, and so its future is assured; it has begun with Jesus, it will be consummated in Jesus. God acts in the present *and* in the future; *the one is dependent on the other*, and hence faith and hope belong together as different perspectives of one and the same acceptance of God's gracious will in the present and in the future.[95]

Küng, whilst so firmly maintaining that 'the reign of God is a future which confronts us as present', nonetheless succeeds better than our main authors in bringing together the eternal character of the Christ-experience offered in the Spirit with the *meta*-event that is the history of creation. He does so by developing the concept of a '*presentist-futurist* eschatology' in which he employs temporal terms that serve not just as analogous phrases, but delicately chosen descriptions of substantial actualities: a dialectic between the 'already' and the 'not yet' in which the fullness of salvation's final, eschatological outcome takes up residence, but not in such a way that it fails to play itself out as the *history* of salvation.[96] Küng therefore describes a present that

> points to the future … a time hastening to its end. Only our expectations of a future *eschatological* action give us, in the darkness of the present, the certainty of faith; faith that God's saving act is not exhausted in the imperfect, the temporary and uncertain present, but is directed towards a perfect, permanent and revealed future (I Cor. 13:9–12).[97]

Likewise, he shows us a future that also

> points back to the present … . the present time is not a time without salvation, a time of mere waiting, but a time of salvation, the time for a unique decision [between belief and unbelief]. Precisely in the light of a future goal, not something that has *begun*, but something that *will be completed*, the future reign of God, man in the present is challenged to a radical decision, the present is for him the 'last days'.[98]

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94 Ibid., p. 101, emphasis mine.

95 Ibid., pp. 101–2, emphasis altered. Although Küng argues in terms more christological than pneumatological, we must approach his language of *faith* and *hope* bearing in mind his statements on p. 221 on the Spirit's role in faith-formation, quoted and discussed on pp. 91–2, above. Although not named explicitly in this particular passage, pneumatology is implicit in the discussion's larger context.

96 Ibid., pp. 86, 99.

97 Ibid., p. 101.

98 Ibid., p. 102, emphasis altered.

From this perspective, therefore, we can make a legitimate case that reconciliation between Torrance's and Gunton's conceptions of the Spirit's action towards the world as history and Zizioulas's affirmations of complete pneumatic freedom from historical categories is not entirely out of the question. This will not mean that we may effect a *complete* reconciliation according to the terms laid down by our authors – for we cannot but admit that the historically inherent Spirit and the historically liberated Spirit seem to be concepts in diametric opposition. Nonetheless, the essential truths that our authors wish to convey, as Küng demonstrates, may be less fundamentally incompatible in themselves than in the manner in which they work them out.

Drawing, then, upon the foregoing analysis, recalling the difficulties with Zizioulas's ahistorical Spirit, and seeking some consistency with the ontology outlined in the third chapter, we must characterize the Spirit's dynamic divine *being* in his interaction with creation as something that – like Christ's personal presence – comes to the world by means of an *actual, visible chain of events* with spatio-temporal parameters, not through mere *gnosis* with no concrete correlate.[99] When, for example, we speak of Christ as *Logos*, the structural theme of creation, we argue not for a timeless, static motif appearing over and again, generation after generation, but rather a creative order identified with the dynamic life and work of Christ Jesus, appearing as it does always within a spatio-temporal context (whether creation, incarnation, resurrection, *parousia*). In the Christ-event, argues Torrance, God

> locates Himself in our space and time as one with us, and in accordance with the nature and activity of the earthly and temporal existence in which He has become incarnate. Yet that earthly and temporal location cannot be so defined and delimited as to define and delimit the priority of God over created space and time, so that the place of God in Jesus Christ must be an *open concept rooted in the space and time of this world yet open to the transcendent presence of God*.[100]

In a similar manner must we consider the 'Spirit-event': a historical expression of divinity through which God saves creation by means of a self-presentation according to and definitive of its very own operational terms. Indeed, as we have said many times by now, the central purpose of the Spirit's presence is to *bring the revelation of the* Logos *to fruition*, making effective the *theosis*-vocation that the Father wills and the Son defines for the world and making manifest that purpose in and as the Church.

The *dynamism* of this-worldly existence, therefore, finds its ultimate source in the *Spirit's guiding sustenance of the created order* which the Father wills to be shaped around the lordship of Christ Jesus. In this context *theosis* cannot refer *solely* to the salvific end-game of created existence; indeed quite the opposite: to abstract salvation from the concrete processes by which it is achieved is to render the economy meaningless (or to assign it a radically different meaning). Thus, to affirm the Spirit as the 'perfecting cause' of creation is to insist that God's dynamic co-presence with the cosmos cannot be seen solely as a function of christology but must equally be seen as a function of pneumatology: whereas Christ the Word embodies

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99 Cf. pp. 91–2, above.
100 Torrance, *ST&I*, p. 78, emphasis mine.

God's *world-defining* omnipresence, the Spirit, affirmed in the Nicene Creed as 'the Lord, the giver of life', embodies God's *world-animating* omnipresence.[101]   In a word, the Spirit's involvement with creation, although never to be confused with Christ's function in the economy, must be conceived as permeating space-time, remaining active therein and differentiating itself tangibly as historical event.

Eschatological language, therefore, whilst certainly pointing to the Christian worshipping community's transcendent experience of *theosis* in the Spirit, cannot do so entirely in abstraction from that community's experience of the knowledge and power of the *process* of salvation nor can it finally abstract the community itself from its spatio-temporal context within that process. The language of historical liberation may be rightly applied to the Spirit's work, but not at the expense of his authentic, life-sustaining presence in and towards history.

However, if we continue to draw out as a source of pneumatological insight Torrance's discussion of the historical Christ, his description of Christ as the one in whom history becomes open to the transcendent communion of the Godhead brings us face-to-face with the inevitable realization that we cannot legitimately depict the Spirit's historicity in such a way as to do violence to his essential nature as the eternally-directed face of God on earth: an Event that *as* Event exceeds, indeed *pre*cedes, the limitations of its spatio-temporal properties and ultimately in some fashion causes the network of historical events to do the same. Seen in this light, the Spirit becomes the one who develops the truth of Christ, in Zizioulas's words, as a 'vertical dimension' brought out from and transcending linear history: 'a pentecostal event which takes linear history up into a charismatic present-moment'.[102] By the same token Küng argues (with different temporal phrases) for the concept of a 'reign of God which has begun, but nevertheless belongs to the future'.[103]

The tentative conclusion, then, is that, in addressing the manner in which the Spirit implicates himself – implicates God – into the historical order, the three authors bring not entirely contradictory but often complementary points to the discussion. Here let us seek a key in Horne's imagery of the divine conversation of persons, specifically in the portrayal of the Spirit not simply as the facilitator of conversation between Son and Father, but as one who in his own right actually hears the conversation and responds. Whereas the Son – the Word – is God's historical action directed towards creation, the Spirit is God's historical action directed towards the eternal. Thus does Horne distinguish fully the roles of Son and Spirit without needing to deny the real historicity of either one or to mis-assign any particular historical function either to Christ or to the Spirit.

These principles, however, remain as yet relatively general in that, whilst having spoken of the Spirit as effectively eschatology 'incarnate' – that is, having sought to establish the *principle* of pneumatic 'incarnation' and having aimed to tie it into the emergence of Christ in solidarity with his Church – we have left largely unaddressed

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101   Worth noting, however, is that whilst Basil speaks of the Spirit as a perfecting force behind the universe's animation, Athanasius, *DeIncar*, §17, ascribes the 'quickening' of the universe to the Son.

102   Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 116.

103   Küng, p. 98.

the question of the *form* that 'incarnation' would take. We have been indefinite about the phenomena in which we see this Event, this mighty act of God, emerge. For, on the one hand, we have referred to the essentially sacramental character of pneumatic activity in space-time, the same activity in which the Church emerges as Church. Yet, on the other, such reference has underscored the opposition of Torrance's and Gunton's conceptions of the Spirit in history to Zizioulas's, for the differences become most evident when the three theologians work out in practice the principles they aim to defend.

Our attempt to reconcile the positions, then – and with it the study's search for an ecclesial ontology that will provide the context for evaluating the situation of the multiple Churches – remains unfinished. If in fact a more complete reconciliation is possible, it will need to take shape in the course of a more detailed exploration of the sacramental 'mechanics' by which the Spirit transforms and transfigures the event-network that is the created order into a foretaste of the eschatological Kingdom of God. For it is precisely at that point – the actual historical sign of the Spirit's 'incarnation' – that the thoughts of our three authors solidify and indeed become the most entrenched.

PART 3

Event-ecclesiology and -ecumenism

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Chapter 5

Ecclesiological principles

Introduction: on pneumatic-ecclesial action

Whereas in the previous chapter we attempted to clarify the epistemological framework by which we understand the Holy Spirit as he *is* towards history, we now turn to search out the principles by which we understand history as it *becomes* in the Spirit: we must develop a clearer understanding of how God forms history itself in such a way as to incorporate, manifest and exemplify the Holy Spirit's life-sustaining, salvific activity – and in fact to embody the perichoretic relationship with the Father for which, together with the Son, it is destined. If the trinitarian epistemology expounded in the course of the last two chapters' examination is now to bear fruit in this chapter and if we are to affirm and employ a correlation of Torrance's and Gunton's concepts of a historically-engaged Spirit with Zizioulas's historically-unshackled Spirit, the key will lie in the resolution of Torrance and Zizioulas's ecclesiological conflict and the issues leading up to it.

Towards that resolution and towards an understanding of history as it forms in the Spirit we must seek to ascertain and articulate *the nature of the action that transpires in the Church*. If, as we have argued, the Spirit acts in history to effect in humanity God's response to himself spoken in his Word, the questions still remain: what actually transpires, what specifically is accomplished, in the Spirit's constitution of the Church as the Body of Christ? What function does the Church serve in the economy of salvation that is not served by any other historical phenomenon?

We must also determine *the relationship of the Church in its eschatological directedness with the realm of creation*. In what way does the community of 'personalized persons' bound together in the Spirit stand out as something distinct from those persons outside the Church? What impact does the pneumatic presence have upon them as persons, specifically as persons continuing as they do under the aspect of history, and what sort of relationship does this presence form between, first, ecclesial persons and the created order; second, ecclesial persons and the eternal order; and third, history in general and the eternal order?[1]

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1 *Continuing under the aspect of history* need not here imply a presupposition immediately contradictory to Zizioulas's notion of the Church's freedom from historical necessity. The present point is that, whatever ontological or cosmological characteristics we ascribe to the Church as the seat of the Spirit and to humanity in its new, ecclesial 'hypostatic constitution', the phenomenon does not remove humans from historical context, but rather transforms their historical life and confirms their *being*-in-God as public proclamation to history. See Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 58.

And we must find *a means of bringing Torrance's and Zizioulas's differing views of the Spirit's sacramental self-expression further into dialogue*. How, in other words, does the Spirit's salvific revelation of Christ in the Church take shape? The two preceding questions will require an approach with this larger end-goal in mind: for if finally we cannot formulate from the answers we discover a clear understanding of the Church's concrete marks and the meaningful signs of the Spirit's presence therein, then any hope of identifying the authenticity and – is lost.

The Church in Christ in creation

Since the Church is neither epistemologically nor empirically separable from the creative/salvific act of God towards the created order, but is rather the creation and continuing focus of his action, let us review briefly the cogent points of the christological and pneumatological discourse previously conducted, establishing more clearly what we may *already* say about the Church as the instrument of God's purposeful presence. Foremost we assert from scripture the concept of the Church's formation as Christ's Body in the Spirit's presence towards the world (1 Cor. 12: 12–27).

We have argued that the fact of *ex nihilo* creation, together with the incarnate Son's act of *being* in solidarity with that creation, an act by which, according to the Father's will, he takes upon himself the life of the created order and thereby brings forth tangibly the world's structure from within itself, indicates that historical *being* – the event-nature of worldly phenomena extended progressively as space-time – in constructive, christocentric self-extension bears out the specific meaning that creation in its *other*ness is called ultimately to participate in the *together*ness of the Godhead. We further argued that the Spirit presents himself both eternally and historically as God's perfecting agent, who – far from the nebulous, depersonalized and intangible presence so often implied by English use of the word *spirit* – is in himself the means by which God personally and purposefully sustains humans in their dynamic state of *being*-as-event and engages the event-character of human life with personalized, perichoretic openness towards the divine.[2] Even the Christ-event is what it is because of the Spirit's unceasing symbiotic presence in the life of the Lord, the presence that on earth and in heaven realizes the responsive communion between the Father and the 'first-born of all creation' (Col. 1:15). In the *Spirit's* dynamic power and presence the Son forms the cosmos, is conceived on earth, becomes incarnate, exists together with the Father in perfect love, receives power to heal and to forgive, takes the world's sin into himself unto death, rises from the grave and ascends into glory.[3] In short, the Spirit empowers Christ to shape the world and in that act to reveal *theosis* – eternal life – at its centre. Likewise, the Spirit in his ecclesial action implicates the Lord's gathered People by grace into the event of Christ's divine humanity (or human divinity) by means of the world's own conditions.[4]

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2   Cf. Gunton, *TrCr*, p. 178; Gunton, *OT&M*, p. 185.

3   Basil, *DeSpS*, §49.

4   Although Torrance and Gunton differ from Zizioulas as to whether the Spirit's action is itself essentially historical, the relevant point presently is that the Spirit acts *upon* history.

To speak of the Spirit, then, as we do in the Nicene Creed, as 'the Lord, the giver of life' is to speak of God's personal presence towards creation in three distinctive but related ways. First, in the Event of God's general omnipresence by which he sustains the events of the created order in their very *being*, the Spirit continuously generates and animates all that *is* in the lordship of Christ. Second, the pneumatic 'incarnation' implicates God's omnipresent life as an Event differentiated into the network of worldly events and opens out the events of the world to himself so that his children 'might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' (John 10:10ff., AV). The Spirit's activity, then, takes on fundamentally historical characteristics so that *theosis* plays out dynamically in history as a *meta*-event occurring within humanity as the Church before the world. If the Son is God who defines the overarching structure and final outcome of spatio-temporal *being*, the Spirit is God who facilitates the divine presence and publicly calls the world in its internal directedness towards eschatological communion in the divine life by involving humanity perichoretically in the Christ-event. Thus, whereas in Christ incarnate the Spirit *mediates* to earth the communion of the Godhead, in the Church he *radiates* Christ's *being* 'always and everywhere' so that in the fullness of time all the events of the created order may draw together in perfect communion with and in God. Third, perfect communion itself – the eternal, eschatological life given by God not simply through historical progression but as a transfiguration of history – appears as sign and foretaste of the world's eternal condition realized substantially in the present in God's People liberated ontologically to *be*-in-love freely with God, with one another and towards the created order.

From these three concepts together we can move towards an ecclesial ontology that will enable us to address our central questions about Church and ecumenism, in that according to this approach the Church's primary authenticity is to be found in the Spirit's formation of a Body that we recognize ontologically as that historical place in which created *being* – both materially and metaphysically – *comes into focus*. Moreover, ecclesial authority derives from the Spirit's in-dwelling of a community in which cosmologically we witness *creation's outcome taking shape*. Underpinning both aspects of ecclesial life is humanity's *being*-as-communion. The communion of humanity with divinity and of humanity with humanity in the presence of divinity *is* the Church. All other ecclesiological categories spring from this sole premise.

On this last point, at least, our three foundational theologians all agree. The Church *is* because the Church is the communion of humanity with one another and with God in Christ by the Spirit; without Christ and Spirit in communion the Church *is not*; apart from the Event of God's own perichoretic presence no human collective or society can *be* as Church. Zizioulas regards the Spirit's guidance not merely as the basis for

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Zizioulas refers not to action whereby humanity leaves behind its natural *being* to partake in a *higher* or *purer* reality, but rather to action whereby God redeems the very essence of humanity's own condition so that humanity may partake in its relationship to God more *fully*. See, for example, John D. Zizioulas, 'La vision eucharistique du monde et l'homme contemporain', *Contacts* 19 (1967): 91–2, quoted in McPartlan, p. 131: 'A vision of the world derived from experience of the Eucharist leaves no possibilities for dissociating the natural from the supernatural'.

the Church's claims to authenticity and authority in its action, but identifies pneumatic action synonymously with ecclesial *being* itself; the Spirit forms a community that, consonant with relational ontology's equation of interpersonal communion with *being*, *exists* as – *is* – the *dynamic* presence in the world of the last day:

> The Spirit is not something that 'animates' a Church which already somehow exists. The Spirit makes the Church *be*. Pneumatology … is not about a dynamism which is added to the essence of the Church. It is the very essence of the Church. The Church is *constituted* in and through eschatology and communion. Pneumatology is an ontological category in ecclesiology.[5]

Torrance, of course, holds the view that the Spirit builds up the interpersonal communion of the Church progressively as a matter of history in a way that Zizioulas apparently does not. However, Zizioulas's affirmation of the Church as the seat of *animated* (not static or 'timeless') eschatology indicates a certain general consonance between the two men's descriptions, even if the out-working of the details is not harmonious. Moreover, both identify the essence of ecclesial *being* with the communion of persons in the Spirit: relational *being* that not only implicates the *perichoresis* of both divinity and humanity into the Church, but is in fact the *being* that it is and, moreover, *is dynamically* at the centre of all created ontology precisely *because* the Spirit constitutes *as Christ* the *perichoresis* of both divinity and createdness as the Church's base nature:

> It is through the κοινωνια of the Holy Spirit … sent by the Father in the name of the Son and who himself receives from the Son, that Christ continues to be mediated to his Church. It … is in and through [the Spirit] that the reciprocity between God and man established in Christ is progressively deepened and realised … .[6]

Gunton, like Torrance, builds upon the concept of the Church's *being* as communion in the Spirit by drawing out further the christological dimensions addressed in Torrance's statement. Additionally he deals more explicitly with the perichoretic involvement of human being with human being in the relational *schema* and affirms the centrality of the Church to this communion and this communion to the Church:

> According to the New Testament, human community becomes concrete in the church, whose calling is to be the medium and realization of communion: with God in the first instance, and with other people in the second, and as a result of the first … .

> … The baptized are brought into relation with God and with each other in the same act, by virtue of sharing in communion with the one Father, mediated by the Son and realized by the Spirit. … Paul's near identification of Christ and the church derives from his theology of community. And it brings with it implications for human community in general, reinforcing … that to be human is to be created in and for community.[7]

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5   Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 132.
6   Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 291.
7   Gunton, *OT&M*, pp. 217–18.

The implications of these statements are profound indeed, for in them the claim that *the Church is* becomes in some sense synonymous with the empirical, this-worldly expression of the dual claim that *the Lord is* (remaining in earth by the Spirit) and that *the Spirit is* (in action on earth revealing the risen, ascended Christ); with the notion that true community amongst human persons finds its roots entirely in the economic presence of God towards the world; and with Christ's pneumatic completion of his saving work: the fulfilment of his promise to reveal 'complete truth' to all the world (John 16:13). In the end the claim made for the Church is that not merely in its action, but in its very *being* as creature of the Spirit, the perichoretic interrelation of the faithful serves as the sole 'voice' through which God *consistently* reveals and realizes the fullness of eschatological truth to creation *in* creation. Thus does Torrance summarize the nature of the Church in a comment on ecclesiology in the immediate post-Nicene era. The ancient Church, he writes – the empirical Church on earth' – understood its life and being as rooted solely and exclusively in Christ's Lordship – Christ who, as the Word, created heaven and earth – Christ who as the Word was united, equal, and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit.

> What gave concrete shape and structure to the faith of the Catholic Church was the incarnation, the economic condescension of God in Jesus Christ to be one with us in the concrete realities of our human and social life, and his saving activity within the structures of our creaturely existence in space and time.[8]

The argument presented here is quite simply a claim that the Church embodies cosmic realities that are neither appropriated by nor exemplified in any other community; that by embodying these cosmic realities the Church actually becomes *community* in a fuller sense than is possible for any other human society or institution. It is effectively a claim to be nothing less than God's uniquely crafted mechanism for the continuance of Christ and his salvific work throughout the ages in the power of the Spirit.

This claim that the Spirit's ecclesial activity identifies the Son of God with the community of faith must not be made without the denial of any line of thought that leads to divinization of the institutional Church or its people. In and of itself the community of faith is not, strictly speaking, subsumed into Christ nor is it a 'second Christ' nor is it the eternal Word spoken into history.[9] Indeed, as Zizioulas has suggested, the Church purely in and of itself simply *is not*; it must have Christ and Spirit implicated into itself in order to *be*. More directly relevant, the Church in this world in no sense loses the characteristics of creaturely *being* simply because the Spirit implicates the faithful into his holy work. Therefore, 'the supreme and final thing to be said of' the Church, as Karl Barth states matter-of-factly in the *Church Dogmatics*,

> is quite simply that it is His body, his earthly-historical form of existence … . But it is not, as He is, the Word of God in the flesh, the incarnate Son of   God … . Its distinction

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8   Torrance, *TrinF*, pp. 273–4.
9   Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, part 3.2, trans. G.W. Bromiley, eds G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh, 1962), p. 729.

from the world is not the same as His; it is not that of the Creator from His creature. Its superiority to the world is not the same as His; it is not that of the Lord seated at the right hand of the Father.[10]

Yet, despite these vital disclaimers, we cannot divorce the Church from some significant identification with the Christ-event in the context of the pneumatic 'incarnation', for as Paul the Apostle proclaims to the Galatians, 'I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to the limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:19– 20). If the Church cannot presume to identify itself with Christ, nonetheless Christ graciously identifies himself with the faith of the Church. From this perspective we must say that the Church is indeed *in its own special fashion* and purely by God's will made to exist as a dimension of Christ's own *being* in earthly expression, but not in a fashion identical with the unique Christ-event.[11] Hans Küng therefore argues that the People of God exist

> according to the Church's understanding of faith through the powerful historical action of God himself, acting through Jesus Christ among men and for men and so finally through men. God's salvific act in Jesus Christ is the origin of the Church; but it is more than the starting-point or the first phase of its history, it is something which at any given time determines the whole history of the Church and defines its essential nature. So the real Church can never simply leave its origins behind or ultimately distance itself from them. Those origins determine what is permanently true and constantly valid in the Church, despite all historical forms and changes and all individual contingencies.[12]

The Christian Church thus appropriates the historical *Logos*: God the Son fashioned in it – extended into it – and preserved by the direct action of the Holy Spirit in receptive response to the loving 'speech' of the creator God.

Moreover, Gunton argues, the *Logos*-revelation in the *being* of the Church-as-community does not stand apart from the world in which it finds itself: 'Despite what is often said,' he argues, the Church's 'setting in the wider world was of interest to it'. The Johannine theology of Christ as he through whom the world was created and the many miracle narratives in which Christ takes command of the elements themselves spring from a deep-seated conviction on the part of the early Church

> that the gospel was not merely one of human sociality, but with that in its cosmic context. The much-cited eighth chapter of Romans depicts some form of community with the created order as a whole as does Revelation's promise of a new heaven and new earth as the context for the community of the new Jerusalem. *Community is not context-less: it*

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10 Ibid.

11 See ibid., p. 754; by coming to *be* in a perichoretic relationship in Christ, the faithful are assumed into the unity of God and humanity made present in the Christ-event whilst retaining their own personal distinctiveness as Christ retains his.

12 Küng, p. 34.

takes shape in a world which is not irrelevant to its being, as the garden was in some way integral to the being of Adam and Eve.[13]

Beyond serving simply in a declaratory role the Paraclete serves as the force through which God actually drives creation towards resolution into a holy kingdom using the body of the faithful – the Church – as his instrument. The Church, therefore, in its very nature exists not simply to *be* in God, but to be freedom in and for the world; the community of faith is defined *as Church* equally because it exists towards the world and the world exists towards it. We cannot actually conceive of the Church *as Church* in isolation; such is not its *being* as a perichoretic event. To argue that the Church realizes God in the world describes not simply the *being* of God or even the *being* of a community in God, but also the *being* of the world in relation to God and to his community.

The immediate observation to draw from these arguments, then, is that the Church, as a historical community constituted by and as the Spirit's perichoretic implication of human persons into the Christ-event, exists in the world and engages with it from the unique vantage point of a cognisant appropriation of and public association with the foundational realities of the created order in itself and in relation to its creator. When we ask what function the Church serves uniquely in the economy of salvation and how the Church is distinguished from all other historical phenomena, the answer lies in that statement – a point which Barth makes in his small treatise on the Apostle's Creed:

> The Church is not the sole place of Christ's Dominion. Still, she is quite a special place: the place where God in Jesus Christ is not only present, but *declared as being present*, confessed as being present … . The Church and the world under the Dominion of Christ must not be confused. The Church is the body of Christ in the world. She spreads his light, she declares his grace, she proclaims his judgment … . *The only advantage of the Church over and against the world is that the Church knows the real situation of the world*. Christians know what non-Christians do not … . It happens that a simple person is met who is not a church-goer, who does not read his Bible, but who lives in the manner one should live, in this acceptant and peaceful manner in which the Dominion of Christ is noticeable. Only, he does not know it, he does not witness to it consciously and intelligibly. *It belongs to the Church to witness to the Dominion of Christ clearly, explicitly, and consciously*.[14]

Whether or not we, like Barth, consider this revelation peculiar to Christianity to be the Church's *only* advantage, the crux of Barth's commentary is that the Christian community's unique cognisance of 'the real situation of the world' is a *participant cognisance*: participant in that knowledge of the world's real situation correlates necessarily with the pneumatic Event whereby the Dominion of Christ becomes manifest in specific, public, historical phenomena. The proclamation to which Barth refers is enacted not *merely* in words (although Barth sets considerable store by verbal

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13 Gunton, *OT&M*, pp. 218–19, emphasis mine.

14 Barth, *FC*, pp. 121–2, emphasis mine; cf. Gunton, *BTR*, p. 58; for criticism, Gunton refers his readers to Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, trans. B. Cozens and J. Bowden (London, 1972), p. 393; George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London, 1984), p. 94.

proclamation as ecclesial sign), but also in God's constitution of a People set apart by God 'in order to reveal himself in them' through their communion with one another '*in sacred things*, communion created *by sacred things*'.[15] Barth has specifically in mind those traditional Protestant marks of the Church, word and sacrament, together with the evangelistic commission to do God's work and proclaim his message. Yet however these 'sacred things' are to be identified and categorized – a point we shall address shortly – the Church bears revelation uniquely in the world *not as knowledge disembodied*, but as a statement of the world's 'real situation' *borne out as the very fabric of its being* in a specific kind of relationship to both the world and its creator: 'The Church forms a body distinguished by the call that founded her, by the promise given to those who are the constituents of this body, by the goal they seek after and the service they accomplish in it'.[16]

The core proclamation of the Church, then, is not simply an offering up of Christ's creative primacy for intellectual assent or dissent. Rather, the Church's proclamation means that in the power of God's Holy Spirit the Christ-event remains present in creation in its historical, temporally-directed character, experienced by the gathered community and lodged within the very historical fabric of that community's *being*: 'In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them' (Matt. 18:19–20). The principle of *being* around which creation orders itself can be known and experienced by humanity solely because in the Spirit Christ is identified thoroughly with the community of faith.

The Church and the 'real situation' of the world

Barth goes on to describe the actual relationship of the Church with the world in terms of holiness: 'Holiness, in the Bible,' he writes, '*is the fact of being set apart*.'[17] Knowledge of the Word and the world – knowledge of the Word *in* the world – embodied in the community of faith by the Spirit's active presence, means that

> the holiness of the Church will purely and simply consist in the fact that the Church has both the benefit of *listening* to the Word of God and that of *hoping*. The Church is the place that God wants to bless, where God wants his work to be praised and declared to the world. Holiness means: separation from all that is not the Church. In the world there are other communities than that of the Church: family, school, society, State. None of these communities is identical with the Church, and the Church is limited by none of these distinctions. She pervades them all. A limited church is a sick church. A 'bourgeois'

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15 Barth, *FC*, p. 117.

16 Ibid., p. 116, emphasis mine; cf. WARC-BWA, par. 36: '*The church is first and foremost an event*, rather than an institution; the church "exists" in that it continually "happens", namely where the Lord effectively exercises his rule and where it is recognized and accepted; i.e., where the Word is proclaimed and believed, where the sacraments are administered and received, where the communion with the Lord and with each other is celebrated and upheld, and where the church in the name and in the power of the Lord goes out in witness and service'.

17 Barth, *FC*, p. 116, emphasis mine.

church is as sick as a 'proletarian' church. Indeed, because of her holiness, the true Church [is] limited neither on one side nor the other. She is free. Indeed, she may have very close connections with these other communities. But she should never confuse herself with any of them.[18]

But, according to Barth, being set apart in holiness does not consist of the Church community's *isolation* from the world as a conventicle producing in itself a bulwark against creation (a view held *in extremis*, for example, by the Branch Davidian cult of Waco, Texas, under David Koresh).[19] Rather, by the very fact of its separated distinction the Church is freed to *interpenetrate* the world, unbound by the limitations of people and things and societies in which Christ's Dominion is not otherwise known.[20] The Church's holiness is akin to the Levites' separation from the House of Israel: a community bound together in God's blessing presence, called out from their culture to *be-in-togetherness* with the Almighty (for 'to the tribe of Levi alone no heritage was given; Yahweh, God of Israel, was his heritage,' Josh. 13:14), yet spread throughout the tribes, infusing, on the one hand, the whole of the larger society with their own holiness and knowledge of God and, on the other, bringing that society back to God and offering their own worship to Yahweh on the greater culture's behalf – indeed incorporating the worship and *being* of the larger culture into itself (Num. 8, Josh. 21:1–8).

Moreover, the correlation of the Church's act of *listening* with its act of *hoping* is another way of indicating the faith community's eschatological orientation; by expressing this notion in conjunction with that of a holy Church which interpenetrates society, Barth implies that *theosis* in the *Logos* by the Spirit is not a salvific heritage that the Church may arrogate to itself alone, but is the property of all the world, an integral part of God's will to create: 'For God so loved the *world*, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but *that the world through him might be saved*' (John 3:16-7, AV).[21] With Christ the Church too becomes a 'light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel' (Luke 2:32, AV).

Torrance similarly concludes that the Church's holiness must be identified thoroughly and completely with catholicity, for the incarnation and the atonement— the holy things with which the Church has to do—belong rightly to all that has been made, because Jesus Christ incarnate is none other than the eternal, cosmic *Logos*, without whom 'nothing was made that was made' (John 1:3, AV).

> That implied that the Gospel of redemption through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ proclaimed by the Church had a completely universal range. As the fathers of the second century saw so clearly, *to separate redemption from creation was to limit*

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18 Ibid., pp. 116–17.

19 James D. Tabor, *Patterns of the End: Textual Weaving from Qumran to Waco*, paper presented at the Symposium on Messianism, Princeton University, March 1996, online edn, u.e.d., examines in detail Koresh's apocalyptic vision and scriptural interpretations.

20 Cf. Torrance, *MC*, pp. 27, 32, 72.

21 Emphasis mine.

the saving range of the incarnation and atonement and thereby to destroy the essential message of the Gospel.[22]

Zizioulas too argues that the eschatological communion realized in the Church's worship (specifically in the eucharist) '*does not leave history behind it, it involves it*'.[23] The movement of the Church in history towards the Last Day is, therefore, *not simply in its orientation, but in its being, an ontological and cosmological confluence of God's dynamic eternity and creative will – expressed and embodied in the set-apart community – and the creation-at-large*.

From this preceding argument we may draw out four key implications about the Church as the herald of the world in its 'real situation' – each having direct bearing upon the ontological and cosmological understandings this study will finally require. (*In other words: here are the epistemological keys with which we must ultimately unlock the problem of authenticity amongst the plural Churches*).

First, by refusing to identify Christ's Dominion in the world exclusively with the Church, but instead recognizing that the *being* of the Church is the substantial *articulation* of Christ's reign, we suggest that *what goes on, indeed what is, in the Church is not existentially dissimilar to what goes on and what is in the world*. That is, approaching the Church as an eschatological community, whether historically progressive or historically liberated, emphasizes that *the being of the Church as God's Holy Kingdom is in fact the being of the world made explicit and in some sense made complete*. *Theosis* becomes not simply the property of the Church, but the nature of the world uttered and actualized in and by the Church. A fundamental harmony exists between, on the one hand, the general omnipresence of Christ the *Logos* and the Spirit's sustaining generation of the created order in its *otherness* and, on the other, the perichoretic differentiation, the pneumatic extension of the divine Event-in-*togetherness*, into the created order as the incarnate Son and his Body the Church. Thus does Zizioulas argue that the Church's ministry

> *exists as an expression of the totality of the Economy*. We cannot, therefore, understand the nature of the ministry by seeing it simply in terms of a *past* (Christ's ministry in Palestine) or a *present* (ministry as service to the needs of today) but of the future as well, namely as *sustaining for creation* the hope of the *eschata*, of sharing God's very life.[24]

We shall shortly address in further detail the manner in which the Church expresses the total economy and the idea that the Church exists in the times between Christ's coming and his return. For the moment the crucial point is that although we may not identify the Church directly with *the one eternal Logos*, yet as Christ's Body mediated in the Spirit the Church may distinctly be considered *a logos of sorts*; the *actual history* of the Church is in a specialized sense the summation of creation's history. In that the priestly (levitical) character inheres in the holy community, the

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22 Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 284, emphasis mine.

23 John D. Zizioulas, 'Eschatology and History', in *Cultures in Dialogue: Documents from a Symposium in Honour of Philip A. Potter*, ed. T. Weiser (Geneva, 1985), p. 34, emphasis mine.

24 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 211, emphasis altered.

Church is called out from its own this-worldly context to be the icon and medium of dynamic salvation and the embodiment of earthly worship. Just as in the person of Christ God entered the created order and then called out something from within his creation to make explicit the presence and meaning of his work in all creation, so too does this same work in the Spirit's 'incarnation' take place in the Church. The Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission makes this same point beautifully:

> The tradition of the Church flows from the Father's gift of his Son 'for the life of the world', *though the sojourning of the Holy Spirit in the world to be a constant witness to the truth* (John 15:26). The Church draws its life and being from this same movement of the Father's love; that is to say, *the Church too lives 'for the life of the world'.* Its tradition is the living force and inexhaustible source of its mission to the world.[25]

Thus, the *meta*-event of personhood-in-communion in the Church cannot finally be seen apart from the *meta*-event of creation as a whole: they interpenetrate ontologically and cosmologically. The primary distinction is that whereas the Church, as Zizioulas claims, expresses in itself – in its faith, worship and action – the totality of the universal event of creation and salvation (yet without abstracting that or itself from its four-dimensional character), creation is still being called to appropriate its own significance in salvation. The Church is for this reason to be conceived as the 'first-fruits of all [God's] creation' (Jas. 1:18): the tangible sign of *all* creation's history (both past and future history); that which prefigures *full* eschatological unity of humanity and God; and the actual historical phenomenon by which God in the Spirit continuously presents Christ to the world, empowers the world actively and thankfully to receive Christ's presence and to become implicated into the redemptive eternal communion of the Son with the Father. The Church is the empirical *event* – the self-extension of the divine *Event* – in which the Spirit himself breaks out from within creation to complete within all the created order the community of persons in a specific kind of relationship (as Children of One Father and Siblings of the Lord), to make holy what is not holy, to bring hope in the resurrection from the dead and to pronounce and effect God's omnipresent redemption of creation as a whole – *but to do all this without abstracting Church or world from their own being as events extending themselves spatio-temporally in relation to other events.*

Second, if the Church does indeed know the world's 'real situation', then the question of fallenness and sin cannot finally be avoided, for the Spirit, we still recall from John's Gospel, constitutes the Church, amongst other reasons, 'to show the world how wrong it was' (16:8). Our concept of the Spirit's action in the world – and by association the Church's – as a dynamically *redemptive* or *perfecting* presence (according to the Father's will spoken in the Word) necessarily implies an impairment in the world's 'real situation' that must be and is being put right. As Zizioulas has pointed out, this impairment has everything to do with the ontological primacy of perichoretic personhood or more specifically the misdirection and in-built limitations of humanity-in-itself to fulfil personhood apart from a perichoretic

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25 Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission, *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984* (Slough, 1985), par. 50, emphasis mine.

relationship with the Godhead, from whom and in whom true personhood – full *being* – springs.

Zizioulas holds that the great ontological tragedy of the human condition is that the human being is born 'as a hypostatic fact' ('in the image and likeness of God'), but that the attempt of the human to actualize his or her own unique *other*ness apart from the communion of the Godhead – to root personhood solely in the *biological hypostasis* – amounts to a futile attempt at self-deification that leads to an individualism in which *other*ness from the rest of humanity and from God, the triune source of life, finally erodes the person inevitably and literally unto death.[26] Personhood, he therefore argues – created by God ultimately to afford the person created an existential freedom of his or her own in the divine likeness – presents a choice of two types of freedoms to the human being: either the positive freedom to exist in love or else a negative freedom tending toward oblivion and (self-)destruction. Either path chosen is most certainly an expression of personhood, but the latter leads ultimately and inevitably to a negation of all ontological content.[27]

Zizioulas therefore presents implicitly a view of the world's fallenness whereby sin is conceived fundamentally as the ontological separation of human persons from one another and from God: that which hinders *theosis* and disrupts the harmony of the world's *being* in *other/together*ness. In precisely this context we must view Barth's condemnation of a 'bourgeois' or a 'proletarian' Church as a 'sick Church'. Indeed we may extend that judgement to include any ecclesiastical identification with a human societal grouping when such identification works to the exclusion of other persons: the verdict might therefore apply equally to a 'black' or 'white' Church or a 'gay' or 'straight' Church. Zizioulas expands upon this thought, arguing that in the case of perichoretic personhood 'otherness and communion are not in contradiction, but coincide'. The difference, he argues, between the truth of personhood, the ecclesial *hypostasis*, and that of the 'natural' biological *hypostasis* is that, whereas the latter tends toward isolation and existential disengagement, 'in the context of personhood, *otherness* is incompatible with *division*'.[28]

Cast positively, the 'real situation' of the world is such that we may not conceive *theosis*, strictly speaking, as an exalted state *added to* a created form of *being* that already exists in fullness. Rather, we must take the view that in *theosis* we find the exalted *being* of the world as a normative state that the creator intends and enacts in his original creative Word and dynamic Spirit. This is because, as Zizioulas has argued, sin-and-death is not something with positive ontological content set against the eternal God. Sin is an actuality devoid of ontological content (if the paradoxical language may be pardoned) and set against humanity in its finite attempts to realize itself *as* humanity.[29] Escape from sin and death thus becomes the opening out of historical *being* to the *full* perichoretic ontology in eternity for which God explicitly created the world. Insofar as we may view Christ's and the Spirit's presence as Event

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26 Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 50, 52; cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, (Oxford, 1981), p. 118.

27 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 46.

28 Ibid., pp. 106–7.

29 Cf. Torrance, *D&CO*, p. 119.

extended into the network of worldly events and interpenetrating them in divine, life-giving *perichoresis*, we underscore once again the point that the concrete realities of the material, historical world are, despite all impairment, *normative* for created ontology. For humanity the escape from sin and death is not an escape from materiality and *event*ness – a gnostic-style leap across some kind of cosmological *chorismos* from an ontologically inferior but 'finished' *being* towards a higher *being* and meaning in eternity. Rather, meaning inheres in the world *because* of material creation, not despite it: therefore, the impairment of humanity's *being* in its sinful state is not an innate, definitive property of materiality nor of the event-nature of worldly phenomena.

Thus does the Church point to the 'real situation' of the world by bearing in itself *theosis* through the Spirit's presence and disseminating the same throughout earth, offering creation up to God in its levitical function and thereby effecting true *being* in the world dynamically and interactively as *otherness without division*. In other words, by actualizing in itself something of the *Kingdom community* to which the world is called the Church both institutionally and in its persons (each of whom uniquely '*becomes* Christ and Church' in his or her own bearing towards creation and God) engages with the world 'as a confirmation of man's capacity not to be reduced to his tendency to become a bearer of individuality, separation, and death'.[30] And as an expression of the incarnate Christ the Church re-affirms the historical nature of the created order as fundamentally constructive.

Cast negatively, however, the inescapable fact of sin in the world as the negation of human *being* means that we must also approach *theosis* as a personal and communitarian ontology as yet *unrealized* in creation-at-large. Zizioulas therefore concludes that, from the patristic perspective, sin and the fall of humanity

> is not to be understood as bringing about something new (there is no *creative* power in evil), but as *revealing and actualizing the limitations and potential dangers inherent in creaturehood, if creation is left to itself*. … Viewed from the point of view of ontology, the fall consists in *the refusal to make being dependent on communion*, in a rupture between truth and communion.[31]

Relevant at this stage is Zizioulas's argument that the ontological necessity and causality inherent in the spatio-temporal expression of historical *being* (that is, of the biological *hypostasis*) must be shed by the ecclesial *hypostasis* in order for that dependence on communion to be realized.[32] For even if, following Gunton, we conceive of God's *being* as a dynamic Event in which the Three make some eternal sort of 'time' and 'room' for one another, nonetheless true *being* cannot be *bound* by space-time, even though it may be extended economically and freely as a spatio-temporal phenomenon.[33] Therefore, insofar as humanity comes, or rather shall come, to exist perichoretically with and in the Godhead's life as the final, full expression of its own personal nature, human persons too must ultimately become

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30 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 58.
31 Ibid., pp. 101–2.
32 See p. 100, above.
33 See p. 104 and ch. 4, n. 66, above.

free events, or rather a network of free events, the like of which is not yet seen in the world apart from Christ himself or the foretaste of paradise realized in the Church. Therefore, whether we consider the Spirit's eschatological presence as that which iconically transfigures human history or that which progressively transforms history, space-time *must* finally resolve into something beyond itself: free, dynamic, *eternal* communion.

Simultaneous, then, with the proclamation of *theosis* in the world, the Church, by existing as a People set apart – as something *distinct* from the common state of the world, a community of persons unhampered in their involvement (as events) with the Event of God's presence and catholic (by pneumatic symbiosis) in their communitarian bearings towards the world – highlights implicitly the world's own separation from God and the isolation of its persons from one another as a fundamental ontological and cosmological aspect of the world's 'real situation'. If, on the one hand, the historical character of empirical events may be considered a constructive mark of God's creativity, still, on the other hand, space and time signify inherently, by the very fact of procession and development, the *unfinished* character of the events of which they are a function. Looking at the completion of those events from the perspective of the Last Day, the constructive spatio-temporal function will not itself have been a hindrance – indeed quite the opposite, for space-time marks the activity whereby Christ and Spirit bring created persons out of nothing, out of ontological negation, processionally – but neither will it any longer be necessary for the *being* of created persons. Until then, however, there is sin and separation: theosis *remains in process*; *this* is the fact to which time and space point; and to the extent that full personhood is not yet realized in the created order the ontological negation to which we refer as sin, division and death inevitably infringes upon the world's 'real situation'.

Third, although we have identified the world's sinfulness as division and separation and Christ's act in the Spirit as that which heals all division and the Church as that place in which communitarian personhood is realized in the faithful on behalf of and for the salvation of the world, nonetheless the community of faithful is *not* in itself exempt from sin or the divisive fallibility of the human condition in its 'real situation'. This notion is implicit, for example, in the very fact that Barth entertains the possibility of a 'sick' Church too exclusively identified with the societies or sectors of humanity when instead it should interpenetrate society freely without hindrance or prejudice. Although, stated in the positive, we may recall Zizioulas's statement that 'man appears to exist in his ecclesial identity not as that which he is, but as that which he *will* be'; stated in the negative, the unavoidable implication of the eschatologically-directed character of ecclesial redemption means that humanity – all humanity, even in the Church – is *not yet* what it will be.[34]

For this reason Barth presents the setting-aside of the Church from the world not as dependent upon the actual holiness of the persons therein, but on the will of God:

> The term 'holy' applied to the Church, to God's work, and to believers has then no direct moral meaning. It does not mean that these people are particularly suited to come near to

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34 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 59.

God, to deserve his revelation, that these things [the 'sacred things' of which Barth has previously spoken] are particularly adapted to represent God. Rather, *holiness is conferred upon them as a matter of the fact that God has chosen them, both men and things, in order to reveal himself in them*.[35]

Viewed in this light the Church does not point solely to the *world* as the place of sin as if it were an accusing prosecutor, but also to *itself together with the world* as equally the place of sin. The uniqueness, the holiness and the catholicity of the Church therefore consist not in proclaiming an already-perfected, fully divinized community in opposition to the ontological negation of sin in the world. Instead the Church becomes the exemplar of the world's 'real situation', set aside for God precisely because *it consists of a sinful, worldly people in whom the promise of salvation is being worked out visibly*. The Church stands in solidarity with the world: any accusation of sin in the world reflects upon itself; yet, unlike the world, the Church offers the hope of redemption from sin, for as Christ's Body its solidarity with the world is also that of the *Logos* – the God who as human person has conquered sin and death – and as the seat of the Spirit it becomes the home of sanctification. The Church bears out the 'real situation' of the world not because in its persons sin is absent, but because in its persons sin is a distinct reality known and named – recognized for the ontological negation that it is – but also a reality being conquered in communion. For this reason Zizioulas suggests that his description of 'the ecclesial hypostasis as something different from the biological corresponds historically and experientially *only to the holy eucharist* … , a network of relations, in which man … transcends every exclusiveness of a biological or social kind'.[36]

Whilst, on the one hand, this statement raises once more to consciousness the as-yet unresolved discrepancy between Torrance and Zizioulas on the sacramental character of the Church's constitution, yet, on the other, the broader implication is crucial: that the holiness and indeed the unity of the Church are *imputed* holiness and unity – faith *reckoned* as righteousness – for a People who nonetheless *continue* to work out their separations and divisions in the context of that imputed promise.[37] Holiness in the Church is based entirely on the prerogative of God in his presence towards humanity in history, in the promise and out-working of the communion of the Last Day.

Torrance makes a similar point with explicit regard to the Church's faith in the Lord and implicit regard to his grace, thereby casting faith and grace as normative categories for the ontological and cosmological interrelation of God and humanity:

Faith has to do with … the polarity between the faithfulness of God and the answering faithfulness of man. Within the covenant relationship of steadfast love and truth, the covenant faithfulness of God surrounds and upholds the faltering response of his people.

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35 Barth, *FC*, p. 117; the assumption is not, of course, that sanctification does not occur as a critical ecclesial function, but rather that sanctification derives from the holiness God imputes to the Church.

36 Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 59–60, emphasis mine.

37 Cf. Rom. 4:9–25.

> … We must think of Jesus as *stepping into the relation between the faithfulness of God and the actual unfaithfulness of human beings, actualising the faithfulness of God and restoring the faithfulness of human beings by grounding it in the incarnate medium of his own faithfulness so that it answers perfectly to the divine faithfulness*.[38]

In Torrance's view, therefore, as in Barth's – and stated in thoroughly similar language – the holiness of the Church 'does not derive from any moral goodness or purity of its members', but finds its root solely in the holiness of the Trinity who desires, and so has determined, to dwell amongst his creatures in fellowship. Holiness, thus, is

> objectively grounded in the … Holy One who dwells in inapproachable light … , whose awful presence among [his people] opposes and judges their impurity and sin, yet in such a way that he does not annihilate them but gathers them to himself within the embrace of his covenant mercies and grace. Thus in the language of the Old Testament revelation, *God sanctifies himself in the midst of his people*, implicating them in his own divine holiness and constituting them on earth as the living sanctuary where he has put his name.[39]

The *fourth* and culminating point is that if in fact to speak of the Church either as icon of the creative/salvific economy (Zizioulas) or its medium (Torrance, Gunton) is to say

(1) that the Church does not simply speak of the world's 'real situation' in relation to its creator in the form of propositional knowledge, but rather that it in its very *being* the Church is and does what the world is and does – the Church's participant knowledge of the world's 'real situation' is a kind of *logos* to be identified pneumatically with the historical out-working of creation's *Logos*;

(2) that the Church engages dynamically and relationally (perichoretically) with the created order in solidarity both with God, who imputes to the faith community Christ's holiness – indeed his wholeness – and with the world on the behalf of which, from which and in the interpenetration of which the Church offers that holiness back to God in the divine conversation of Father, Son and Spirit;

(3) that the Church is the place in which God works out human sinfulness as both sign of his this-worldly action and means whereby he brings creation into a *theosis* conceived as a process of coming into the fullness of *being* promised for the Last Day,

then the ultimate conclusion about the crux of ecclesial ontology and cosmology must be located not simply in the *being together* of persons-in-communion, but in the *coming together* of persons-in-communion. To speak as we have done about the Church as a *meta*-event is to highlight this fact and none other.

Heretofore we have described the dynamic, relational character of material events in the created order as indicative of *being* and, likewise, the *being* of material phenomena as inherently dynamic and relational. Yet viewed in the context of a Church and a world that exist as that which God continually generates and forms

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38 Torrance, *MC*, p. 82.

39 Torrance, *TrinF*, pp. 280–1, emphasis mine.

ex nihilo (*nihilum* now being defined as the non-ontology of separation, of apartness from the divine *being* of communion), *we find that in the most basic sense the dynamism of creation might best be described as becoming rather than being as such*. This description will not mean that created dynamism signifies a world in a *perpetual* state of *becoming* ('a moving image of eternity', as it were), for indeed the *becoming* of creation must always be recognized, first, as rooted in the eternal and definitive *being* of God and, second, as a *becoming* borne out in the context of the Last Day. Thus does the world exist in a state of *directed becoming* that results finally in the fullness of eschatological *being*: *being*, that is, at the right hand of God. Yet this concept leaves no room for a static model of *being* (if the notion of *being* applies in fullness only to the shared life of God or, in humanity's case, to shared life in God), for that *being* itself is, as we have consistently argued, *Event* – indeed the *Event* in whose image the *events* of human personhood are patterned. In the end the worldly network of created events is being formed into a new creation in which dynamism will not be tied necessarily to *becoming*, as is presently the case for the world, but in which dynamism will be synonymous with *being* in a manner that from our present perspective is barely comprehensible. Humanity – and all creation with it – will exist as something freed to *be* in *other/together*ness dynamically and in the fullness of perichoretic interrelation.

To the extent that the Church's worship in God and love in the world serves as the *icon* of that perichoretic promised land, we see there presented the dynamism of *being* in fulfilment of the dynamism of *becoming*. To the extent that the Church's worship in God serves as the *medium* of that promised land, we see there presented the dynamism of *becoming* understood in the context of a larger (four-dimensional) whole: the active transformation of human persons into that which will finally *be*, and *be* freely. In the end neither aspect of the Church's eschatological calling and Gospel message can be ignored: they are both inherently *of* the Church. The Church, to re-state and re-emphasize, is not simply that place in which God calls *the world* to come together in him; it is also a place that *in itself is coming together*. Indeed, to put an even finer point on the matter, the Church exists as that which *comes out of separation* – ontological negation, sin, the 'frustration imposed' upon creation – *into communion*.[40] That is to say, *if the Church is not actually and actively coming together – indeed if the Church is not* seen *to be the coming together in God of real, flesh-and-blood, human persons – it is not doing what the Church does*.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans summarizes in one fell swoop each of the principles we have just now discussed – namely, the Church as the priestly exemplar of creation-history; the place in which sin is recognized for the ontological corruption that it is; and the house in which history is redeemed by God's grace and by sanctification, not by abstraction from the actualities of created *being* – and arrives (in considerably richer prose) at this same conclusion:

> All that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory that is destined to be disclosed for us, for the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed. It was not for its own purposes that creation had frustration

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40 Rom. 8:20; larger text quoted next par.

imposed on it, but for the purposes of him who imposed it – with the intention that the whole creation itself might be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God.

We are well aware that the whole creation, until this time, has been groaning in labour pains. And not only that: we too, who are the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we are groaning inside ourselves, waiting with eagerness for our bodies to be set free. In hope, we already have salvation; in hope, not visibly present, or we should not go on hoping – nobody goes on hoping for something which is already visible. But having this hope for what we cannot yet see, we are able to wait for it with persevering confidence. (8:18–25.)

Even in those acts whereby we see the Church most clearly as the phenomenon prefiguring the eschatological Kingdom (embodying hope in that which is 'not yet visible'), the faith-community does not and by definition cannot simply *rest* in the communion of the 'not yet'; it exists, rather, as that which actively *comes* together in and as the communion of persons ('groaning inside ourselves, waiting with eagerness for our bodies to be set free', but only as the 'first-fruits' of the universally creative act of God). *It is not solely the eschatological unity of God with humanity and of humanity with one another, the final goal to which the Church points and which in some sense it embodies, that forms the basis of ecclesial ontology and cosmology; of equal importance are the processes by which it arrives at that goal.* The ontological fact with which and as which humanity engages under the name of *Church*, then, is four-dimensional: the *being* of the Church that we see before us in history is, as we have said, a *meta*-event. But given the unfinished nature of God's final purpose in the act of creation/salvation, together with the understanding that the Church is that which *comes* together in order that it may one day *be* together, *we cannot avoid the conclusion that the* meta-*event of Church – indeed Church-with-creation – is yet, from our own perspective as humanity in its midst, an event-in-process*.

The sacramental signs of the Church-coming-together

In the preceding sections we have sought to describe more fully the character of history as it actually *becomes* in the Spirit's dynamic presence and activity. Beginning with pneumatic 'incarnation', we have explored that proposition's implications for history as the medium of God's redemptive activity within and upon creation and more particularly have considered question of the Church's unique *being* in the world as creature of the Spirit: what it actually *is* and *does* in relation both to God and to the world, the role it plays in the economy of salvation and the manner in which the dynamics of the eternal realm intersect those of the created order in the Christian community's worship. We have also developed our view of interpersonal relationships established in the Spirit's perichoretic, room-making presence towards persons divine and human and between persons human and human.

Now we arrive once more at the problem of the Church's *constitutive* marks – the 'sacred things' of which Barth has spoken – for we cannot treat the communion established in the faith-community as a disembodied, purely metaphysical construct without empirical correlate. Quite the opposite: throughout this study we have

consistently upheld a view of the physical world and the actual history of creation as the media of God's salvific acts; we have built up a systematic approach to describe as fundamentally constructive the nature of historical *being* (*becoming*) in Church and world and to present the *being* and activity of the eternal Son and Spirit as extended into the historical world harmoniously – that is, in actual, tangible phenomena. The question, then, that must be considered is a simple one: *which phenomena in particular*? 'What', as Gunton challenges,

> is the relation between the ontology of the church – the so to speak theoretical framework with the help of which it is thought – and its actual being? That is to say: the source of our *ontology* of the church is a doctrine of the Trinity; but how is God the three in one related to the actual historical and visible community?[41]

To answer, we must consider the discrepancy between our primary sources' understandings of the dominical sacraments as the earthly acts in which *being*-as-communion is grounded. This chapter's attempts to reconcile the underlying metaphysical concepts should enable us to address more constructively this ecclesiological divergence.

To review the matter as we left it: both Torrance and Zizioulas agree that the most basic expression of ecclesiality consists of two irreducible, inseparable and indispensable elements:

(1) the actual faith engendered in and proclaimed by the Nicene community through the Spirit's revelation of Christ – the Son of God and *Logos* of creation – and of the created order's communion through Christ within the eternal life of the Godhead, this *truth* – an existential category – appropriated not by propositional affirmation but by the actual experience of the perichoretic relationship, first, with the Almighty God in whom all things find their *being* and, second, with the cosmos in union (coming into union) with its creator;[42]

(2) the embodiment of that same existential truth as the worshipful self-expression of the faith-community – the realization in tangible signs of the creative/salvific grace offered by the Father to the world in Christ and its simultaneous reception by the faithful in their loving response to the Father through the Spirit; a reality actualized in the employment of those most common means of human sustenance – water, bread and wine – in the initiatory rites of baptism and the communal sharing of the eucharistic meal.

If the concept of a pneumatic 'incarnation' – present on earth, receiving and responding to God's Word together with and on behalf of creation, engaging substantially the world's own life within the dynamic *being* of the Trinity – does indeed provide a legitimate starting-point for the development of ecclesiological thought, the doxological confluence of faith and sacrament in the Christian assembly provides the

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41 Gunton, *PTT*, p. 81.

42 Torrance, *MC*, p. 88; Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 115; John D. Zizioulas, 'The Ecumenical Dimensions of Orthodox Theological Education', in *Orthodox Theological Education for the Life and Witness of the Church* (Geneva, 1978), p. 39; cf. McPartlan, pp. 126–7.

this-worldly phenomenon to which we must point in evidence. '*There*', we may say, 'is the distinctive, historical presence of the Holy Spirit in whose power humanity becomes wedded to the eternal, through whom we see God "in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation"' (2 Cor. 5:19).[43] Or stated conversely: if we are to view the Church as that unique occurrence, like none other in space-time, in which human *hypostases* are seen to be coming together into God's holiness as a *meta-*event, bearing out as community-in-process the lordship of the Risen Christ in the world and calling creation publicly to its eschatological fulfilment, then only in the sacramental expression of this experiential truth are these fundamental ontological and cosmological realities made full, plain and effective.

Such affirmations will not mean that the Church's identity will be exhausted in the sacramental rites of the congregation – that we must view all Churchly activity beyond those parameters as merely afterthought or addendum. To the contrary: the prophetic voice that demands justice in society, the hands-on ministries of compassion and healing, the exposition and exploration of theology and ethics in the pulpit and on paper, the history of religious contribution to literature, the inter-generational prayers of religious orders for the world and its people, the joining of two human beings in life-long union – in each of these roles, to name but a few, the Church shines forth brightly indeed as creature of the Spirit. Yet, as Torrance reminds us, the Church, first and foremost, is 'the corporate manifestation in space and time of the divine covenant of redemption fulfilled in the Incarnation and of the oneness of communion of the faithful in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.[44] If this assessment stands true, it follows that the doxological proclamation is necessarily the wellspring and framework of all else identified as being 'of the Church', for in the end that living covenant is seen to take shape in history as the pneumatic 'incarnation', and the pneumatic 'incarnation' as the living covenant, because only in the *actual worship of the community* do we find the food of earthly life transfigured before the world into the food of eternal life. The wider ministries of the Church are by definition an expression of that same communion established in the experience of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Building upon this premise, then, once more we return to Barth's image of the Church as the community uniquely situated in the world to bear knowledge of the world's 'real situation' as creature called out of nothing into *being*, called into the communion of the divine. This same principle that Barth describes at the personal level in the example of the Christian and the 'simple person … who is not a church-goer' also obtains at the corporate level, in that a distinction must be drawn between, for example, the Church in its mission of healing, compassion, or stewardship of creation and the same types of mission when undertaken by, say, the Red Cross or Greenpeace or the National Anti-Vivisection Society. For, as Barth has said, the Church's vocation is to be the vehicle for universal (catholic) redemption: its mission and interest must not become limited only to a selection of issues, as is requisite for most secular organizations. More crucial, however, is a fundamental

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43 Cf. Rahner, *C&S*, pp. 14–15, quoted on p. 69, above.
44 Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 256.

distinction between the ultimate focus of the Church and of secular agencies. Gunton argues that 'the concrete means by which the church becomes an echo of the life of the Godhead are all such as *to direct the church away from self-glorification to the source of its life in the creative and recreative presence of God to the world*'.[45] We may not wish to deny that such secular institutions and the people who staff them, through their efforts to make better this world and its peoples, may well be complicit in God's overall activity in shaping and redeeming his world. Yet whereas they by nature concern themselves solely with earthly, temporal goals as ends in themselves, the Church ultimately and uniquely cannot do other than point, first, to the grace and mercy of the Risen Lord (as evidenced in the baptismal covenant) as the source of its life and ministries and, then, to the unity of God and humanity (as evidenced in the eucharistic feast) as the final outcome to be realized when all its life will be fully redeemed and all its ministries will on the Last Day be made complete. Sooner or later the action of the Church in society, whatever form it may take, must always return to 'the activity of proclamation and the celebration of the Gospel sacraments [as] temporal ways of orienting the community to the being of God. Proclamation', writes Gunton, 'turns the community to the Word whose echo it is called to be; baptism and eucharist, the sacraments of incorporation and *koinonia*, to the love of God the Father towards his world as it is mediated by the Son and Spirit'.[46] This, to repeat, is the 'real situation' of the world as it faces its creator – a situation known first and foremost in the sacred truth of *being*-as-communion, experienced in process and proclaimed sacramentally in and as God's People.

Moreover, together and *only* together do the elements of truth and sacrament forge the gathered body of people that acts them out in worship into the historical People of God which brings the world to focus on its *becoming* together with God. Both truth and sacrament are *essential* facets of the Church's life; where one is absent, the presence of the Church may be called into question. Two examples will help to illustrate this point:

First, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the LDS or Mormon Church), although it administers baptism and Lord's Supper in forms outwardly similar to those of any Christian Church, espouses truth-claims profoundly distinct from those of Nicene denominations.[47] Through adherence to a large, open extra-biblical canon and the word of living prophets the Mormons have effectively re-invented Christian theo-consciousness.[48] Although often couched in superficially trinitarian language, Mormon teachings about the Godhead – united in purpose but

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45 Gunton, *PTT*, p. 81, emphasis mine.

46 Ibid., pp. 81–2.

47 Although Mormons use water in place of wine at the Lord's Supper, their intentions are similar to those of Nicene Churches that use unfermented grape juice. Baptism (by immersion) occurs at the age of eight, the age of accountability, for those born into the LDS; Mormons reject infant baptism alongside the doctrine of original sin. See Articles of Faith 2 (in Pearl of Great Price); Moroni 8:5–16 (in Book of Mormon); Doctrine and Covenants 20:73–4, 29:46–7. References to LDS scripture are from the 1981 combined edn (Salt Lake City, 1981).

48 Mormon canon consists of the Old and New Testaments (AV), the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price.

not *ousia* – more closely resemble Arianism.[49] Simultaneously the doctrine of eternal progression (which holds the Heavenly Father once to have been human and humans to be seminal gods), the belief in continuing salvific revelation through modern prophets and a series of secret rituals required for attaining heaven and ultimately godhood bespeak an epistemology far more akin to Christian gnosticism and ancient mystery religion than to the faith of Nicaea.[50]

The almighty *ex nihilo* creator disappears from the Mormon cosmos, replaced by one of a long line of created god-men captive to the universal machine. Humanity's adoption into divine communion by God's free and gracious will is transformed into a series of contractual arrangements preparing each worthy male one day to become god and progenitor of his own world: baptism for remission of sin (a mechanism of grace, rather than sign of holy mystery); the obligation to live in holy submission to the living prophets' revelations; the endowment rite, at which the faithful receive literal passwords and signs for entry into the highest of three heavens; and the sealing of marriage in the temple for this life and the next.[51] The triune communion of consubstantial, co-eternal persons evaporates, leaving instead an infinite line of individual god-men, god-wives and spirit-children who, although living everlastingly in exalted familial networks, no longer share *life* at life's very source, but rather share *dwelling* and *holiness* at the pinnacle of the universal construct. In the end the Mormon experience of truth is sufficiently far removed from that claimed by trinitarians as to constitute an entirely different religion.[52]

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49 Articles of Faith 1; see Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, 1966), p. 270; Moses 6:51 (in PGP); Abraham 3:22–8, 5:7 (in PGP). In Mormon teaching Christ and Spirit are literal spirit-children of the Heavenly Father, as are all humans, who existed once in a pre-mortal realm prior to bodily birth.

50 Regarding eternal progression, see Lorenzo Snow, *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City, 1984), p. 1: 'As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become'; James E. Talmage, 'A Study of the Articles of Faith', in *LDS Collectors Library '97*, CD-ROM, 430-1: 'We believe in a God who is Himself Progressive … who has attained his exalted state by a path which now His children are permitted to follow'; McConkie, p. 577: 'There is an infinite number of holy personages drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation, and are thus gods … . If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that he had a Father also'. Regarding gnostic and mystery ritual, all Mormon 'temple work' is secret; rites include the endowment ceremony, the eternal sealing of marriage, proxy baptism for the dead and the sealing of marriage on behalf of the dead.

51 Chris Walker, *The Latter-Day Saints Temple Endowment Page*, world wide web site, 2001, u.e.d., compares endowment rites used through a 170-year history. James David, *LDS Endowment and Masonic Initiation*, world wide web site, 2002, u.e.d., compares the striking similarities between the endowment and masonic initiation rituals. Regarding the heavens and eternal marriage, see D&C 131:1–4: 'In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]'; bracketed text in original; women partake in the plan of salvation through marriage and procreation; in fact Mormons generally suppose that a Heavenly Mother must exist alongside Heavenly Father; see Snow, pp. 7–8; McConkie, p. 517.

52 Indeed Mormons claim that Nicene Churches became apostate shortly after the apostolic period and that the LDS Gospel is the true faith restored by God through their first

Not only do LDS sacraments proclaim a different truth, but this truth in turn transforms the sacraments, denying them even their centrality as dominical ordinances. Baptism must be supplemented by the endowment for salvation to be fully beneficial, whilst temple marriage and procreation supplant Lord's Supper as the foreshadow of Kingdom(s) to come. Consequently Mormon sacraments are not the Church's sacraments, nor are they interchangeable from either Mormon or trinitarian perspectives.[53] They do not – cannot – embody the existential truth of persons coming-to-*be* in the triune Godhead's perichoretic communion, nor can they reveal the Spirit 'incarnate', present as history, engendering in creation the eternal Son's eternal response to the Father and investing humanity in Yahweh's creative conversation with himself.

The second example will be the more complex case of the Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers, who, despite their radical origins and awkward history with other denominations, are generally held today to be Christians in some genuine trinitarian sense, but who do not employ material sacraments. Quaker organizations range from relatively conservative to liberal, and their thought does not lend itself to easy summary because of their renunciation of credal formulae and prescriptive theology. Nonetheless, Friends traditionally have followed many tenets common to most Protestant traditions: divine tri-unity, for example; the full divinity and humanity of the incarnate, resurrected Christ; the Holy Spirit's ministry in the world; repentance for sin; salvation by grace through faith; Christ's headship in his Body; the priesthood of all believers.[54] Indeed, far from a departure from the historic faith, founder George Fox's teaching about the divine 'Light of Christ' in all people suggests in its way precisely the sort of existential communion with God's own *being* that we have examined throughout this study.[55] In that sense Quakerism may be seen as an attempt to help every person own for him- or herself the *experience* of truth, the 'speech' of God in and to the believer and the dynamic response of the Spirit in his People to the Word. Moreover, in practical terms the Friends' presence on the World Council of Churches is at least partially indicative of the way in which Quakerism is viewed both by its adherents and by Christians outside.[56]

Yet with the absence of baptism and eucharist in external form the ecclesial status of Quaker worship remains problematic. Friends themselves argue that all life must be sacramental for the believer. The British Friends' published summary of their beliefs and practices accordingly states that

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prophet, Joseph Smith; see Joseph Smith – History 18–19, 33, 68–74 (in PGP).

53 That is, Mormons and Trinitarians do not receive one another into communion without new baptism, nor are their eucharistic tables open to one another.

54 Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity as the Same Is Held Forth and Preached by the People, Called, in Scorn, Quakers* (Glenside, Pennsylvania, 2002 [orig. pub. 1678]), online edn, passim.

55 Arthur O. Roberts, 'A Quaker Understanding of Jesus Christ', *Quaker Religious Thought* 29 (July 1999), online edn: u.e.d., gives a brief overview of Quaker christological traditions, including discussion of the 'Light of Christ'.

56 WCC, *Members*, u.e.d., lists three Friends bodies: Religious Society of Friends (USA), Friends General Conference and Friends United Meeting.

the whole of our everyday experience is the stuff of our religious awareness: it is here that God is best known to us. However valid and vital outward sacraments are for others, they are not, in our experience, necessary for the operation of God's grace. We believe we hold this witness in trust for the whole church.[57]

In the Quaker tradition the only truly significant aspect of baptism is God's transformation of the human being's spirit, as evidenced in that person's outward transformation of life: 'It is not a single act of initiation but a continuing growth in the Holy Spirit and a commitment which must continually be renewed. It is this process' (as opposed, presumably, to the initiatory rite with water) 'which draws us into a fellowship with those who acknowledge the same power at work in their lives, those whom Christ is calling to be his body on earth'.[58] Of the eucharist, some Friends hold that worship meetings are naturally Eucharistic – a communal experience of God, regardless of bread and wine's absence – whereas others say that every meal should be a time of communion, celebration and thanksgiving.[59] Both cases suggest that the traditional concept of sacrament as 'outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace' is not dismissed, but expanded to cover a broader outworking of spiritual phenomena in material life over the course of time.

Nevertheless, despite all tendencies to doctrinal orthodoxy, the Quakers' renunciation of sacraments means that at best the level of practicable communion that might exist between the Society of Friends and other Christian bodies is markedly impaired, whereas at worst Quakers are vulnerable to outright charges of heresy and indeed have been forced time and again throughout their history to justify whether they are truly Christian or truly Church.[60] Quakers themselves acknowledge the reality of the Church as Christ's body and its membership as all who have shared the experience of the Risen Lord in his Holy Spirit; however, consonant with their sacramental concepts, they do not identify the Church with any particular institution or worship form. As for their ecumenical counterparts, few mainstream Churches deny the Friends' claims that all of life must be sacramental for the believer; that the

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57 Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, *Quaker Faith and Practice: The Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain* (1995), online edn, §27.38. See Gerald K. Hibbert, *Quaker Fundamentals* (1941), quoted in New York Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice* (2001), online edn, u.e.d.: 'We do not say that to observe the sacraments is wrong, but that such observance is not essential to wholehearted Christian discipleship and the full Christian experience. We do not judge our fellow Christians to whom the outward sacraments mean so much. Rather do we wish, by prayerful fellowship with them, to be led unitedly with them to a deeper understanding of what underlies those sacraments, and so to share a richer experience of the mind of Christ'.

58 BYMQ, §27.40; cf. Acts 1:4–5; see Barclay, 'Theses Theologicae', Twelfth Proposition, in *Apology*: 'There is "one baptism … ", a pure and spiritual thing, to wit the baptism of the Spirit and fire, by which we … "walk in newness of life"; of which the baptism of John was a figure which was commanded for a time and not to continue forever'.

59 Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, *Quaker Views* (n.d.), online edn, u.e.d.

60 As recently as 1995, BYMQ spent roughly half of a chapter in *QFP* (UK), §27.1–20, engaged in introspection on these two questions.

Church as a whole is sacramental in nature; that baptism and eucharist must become ongoing events; and that the communion of ecclesial persons with God, one another and the world must be acted out 'always and everywhere'. Yet the overwhelming tendency of mainstream Christianity – Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox – has been to treat the sacramental character of ecclesial life in general as an actuality extending out of the specific kind of grace realized in the public proclamation through visible signs (baptismal and eucharistic) of humanity's eternal reconciliation to God. In short, the mainstream Churches' claim, in contrast with the Quakers', is that the Church is in fact Church because God explicitly constitutes by his Spirit a specific *kind* of community: a *baptismal-eucharistic* community. Consequently although the Friends' history of involvement with other denominations and present-day ecumenical activity suggests that few currently would wish to deny outright their status as Christians, the other Christian bodies remain, frankly, unsure about the way in which a non-sacramental body might otherwise qualify as Church.[61]

A credible argument could be made, for example, that because Quakers do not hold the Christian faith to be *essentially* sacramental, then in a subtle but significant way they do not actually proclaim same existential truth experienced by other Christians. However, a simple exposition of the actual, day-to-day behaviour of Churches provides the most telling demonstration of the Friends' difficulties with claiming ecclesiality on terms other than their own amidst groups for whom sacramentalism and ecclesiality are synonymous: Friends who have not come to Quakerism through some other denomination would not invariably find themselves in a position to enjoy the eucharistic hospitality of denominations with otherwise open-table policies, since such Churches generally offer communion on the supposition that eucharistic guests will by definition be *baptized* Christians in good standing with another trinitarian Church.[62] Nor could Friends wishing to join another denomination be received or confirmed directly into the new Church, for there is no baptism to confirm nor to provide the basis for reception. Without prior, valid baptism elsewhere both Quaker and non-Christian enquirer must undergo Christian initiation in exactly the same way. Thus, *praxis* shows that, however much we may wish to describe the Society of Friends as ecclesial in some real sense, the mainstream Churches – as a direct result of their ecclesiology – simply are not prepared on the whole to act as if this were the case.

Thus do we return to the thesis of Torrance, Gunton and Zizioulas: that the sacraments and the experiential truth constitute together – necessarily together – the

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61 For example, Staunch ecumenists Hanson and Hanson, pp. 35, 45–6, want to denounce any attempt to 'unchurch' the Friends as 'outrageous'; yet, insisting unequivocally that baptism is necessary for ecclesial life, they finally conclude (with an impressive degree of patronizing) that the Quakers enjoy ecclesiality as 'noble parasites' through vicarious association with other denominations' sacramental practice. The Hansons seem entirely unaware how strongly their approach echoes Vatican II's notion of graded vicarious ecclesiality, which they decry emphatically on p. 51.

62 Although it is not inconceivable that individual ministers or congregations would admit Quakers to communion either by a charitable interpretation of Church membership or economic hospitality, traditional practice in no way obliges this kind of hospitality – indeed far more likely discourages it.

historical instantiation of the Spirit and the community of persons divine and human that is the Church. To speak of the sacramental faith is to speak of the concrete historical phenomena by which and in which Christian believers identify, first, the authenticity of the Church as the pneumatic 'incarnation' that realizes and sustains the ongoing historical presence of the risen Lord in his Body; second, the empirical *locus* of God's gracious, processional implication of humanity into the dynamic of his own life; and, third, the authority of the community to proclaim and actualize the eschatological promise of God's Coming Kingdom in the atonement of Jesus Christ by existing together with the world and offering creation up to God.

And yet, as we have stated previously, neither Torrance nor Zizioulas acknowledges both sacraments as functioning in this *schema* on an equal footing. Instead each treats one of the sacraments as primarily constitutive of the Church and the second as deriving its meaning from the first. To Zizioulas, baptism attains significance effectively as means to the eucharistic end: baptism is the *manner* in which the iconic community of ecclesial persons is achieved, but 'from a structural point of view, *the ecclesiality of whatever individual or group in the Church depends upon their participation in the holy Eucharist*'.[63] The eucharist is that singular happening in which we experience *being* in its fullness – *being* in God – as relationship and love: 'Being means life, and life means *communion*. This ontology, *which came out of the eucharistic experience of the Church*, guided the fathers in working out their doctrine of the being of God', and consequently their doctrine of 'ecclesial being which "hypostasizes" the person according to God's way of being'.[64]

In Torrance's thought, by contrast, the eucharist, for all its importance in Christian worship, attains meaning because of its witness to the unity of a faith-community constituted primarily by baptismal mediation: the eucharist transpires as *a continuing result of the 'once for all union with Christ' accomplished most distinctively in baptism*.[65] It is baptism in the Triune name, Torrance claims, that joins humanity to Christ – enables humanity to *participate* in the *Logos* and the life of the Trinity – and, thus, it contains in itself the whole and complete 'rule of truth' – the Gospel proclaimed and even embodied in its fullness.[66] Indeed, assigning the self-same qualities to the Church through baptism that Zizioulas assigns through the eucharist, Torrance declares that, standing in Christ's presence, the Church tastes already and shares amongst its peoples the 'great regeneration' yet to come. Thus,

> proleptically conditioned by the future … due to its union with Christ through one baptism and one Spirit the Church cannot but look through its participation in the saving death of Christ to its participation in his resurrection from the dead … when its whole existence will be transformed and it will enjoy to the full the sanctity and eternal life of God himself.[67]

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63 John Zizioulas, 'Les groupes informels dans l'Eglise' in Yves Congar et al., *Les groupes informels dans l'Eglise* (Strasbourg, 1971), p. 271, quoted in McPartlan, p. 133, emphasis mine.

64 Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 16–17, 19, emphasis altered; see McPartlan, pp. 127, 133–4.

65 Torrance, *MC*, p. 90, emphasis mine; cf. p 91.

66 Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 297; cf. p. 137, above.

67 Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 300; cf. Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 95–6; McPartlan, pp. 135–6. Noteworthy is that in *MC*, pp. 90–2, Torrance gives baptism and eucharist more equal balance

To reiterate, the difference between Torrance's and Zizioulas's sacramental emphases stems directly from their understandings of the Church as, respectively, redemption mediated and the Kingdom iconized. Therefore, in seeking to bring the discrepancy to some resolution, and in the process recalling the earlier conclusion that mediation and iconography both represent real and valid functions of the Church, might not common sense dictate that we question not so much the actual propositions argued by Torrance and Zizioulas, but rather the balance of their accounts? Since neither's appraisal actually dispenses with either sacrament as necessary at some level for the Church's *being*, may we not question both the logic and value of their epistemological elevation of one sacrament at the other's expense? In the first instance, does not the act in itself seem flatly arbitrary? More significantly, in the second instance, if we truly take the view that the sacraments are the objective phenomena whereby God realizes himself in the faithful worship of his People, is the implication legitimate that one sacrament may effectively bear a greater or lesser portion of grace – or a more essential kind of grace – than does the other? Is not God's grace simply what it is, without qualification, by virtue of his absolute freedom towards the world? Is it not by definition an expression of *being* in its fullness presented to humanity on earth? Must not the sacraments therefore be understood in this context first and foremost?

To approach these questions, however, we shall need to establish more clearly the link between God's sacramental presence in the Church and created ontology. We shall need establish what precisely is accomplished in each sacrament – and, given Torrance and Zizioulas's attribution of similar sets of qualities to different sacraments, we may do well to ask what functions actually make each unique within the economy of creation and salvation.

'Baptism', the Nicene Creed states, is 'for the remission of sins', and Zizioulas, we have seen, describes the essence of sin as ontological negation: the tragic, futile, self-destructive demand for individual personhood (that is, *other*ness in isolation and division, apart from the creator's love) at the expense of the potential for true personhood in God's image (*other*ness actualized and affirmed by existential love-in-*together*ness), an act which leads finally to death: a wilful retreat into the oblivion out of which God has brought (and is bringing) his creation for the ultimate purpose of being together with himself.[68] Viewed from this perspective, baptism in the triune Name signifies, in the first place, the human person's act of repentance, a Spirit-evoked rejection of sin within the human *hypostasis* in response to God's love offered to humanity in Christ – offered in the very act of bringing forth the world *ex nihilo*, in his incarnation in solidarity with creation, in his kenotic death on the cross (whereby he takes upon his own divinity the oblivion to which every human tends) and in his resurrection as the victory over the grave. In the second place, baptism

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as expressions of the economy. However, because *TrinF*, pp. 252–301, presents a far more detailed analysis, the near-absence of the eucharist in the latter account and its prominent correlation of the Church's baptismal constitution with the atonement of Christ seem much more indicative of his overall thought.

68 Cf. Rom. 6:23: 'For the wage paid by sin is death; the gift freely given by God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

embodies the Spirit's historical action in binding the destiny of that repentant human being into the resurrected Lord's own eternal reign: 'All of us', says Paul,

> when we were baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so we shall be by a resurrection like his. (Rom. 6:3–5.)

And in the third place, baptism signals the entry of the human *hypostasis* into his or her own unique place within the four-dimensional ecclesial *meta*-event, the community of redemption-in-process: an act whereby through the Spirit's inspiration the human embraces his or her own vocation as person to *become*, together with creation, in communion with Christ until 'God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28).[69]

Zizioulas accordingly argues that baptism by its very nature entails a 'radical conversion from individualism to personhood'; in baptism the believer's existence is transformed from the non-communicant, isolated and 'individualized being' of the fallen world 'into the truth of personal being' – a new birth following Christ's own in the power of the Spirit 'so that each baptized person can himself or herself become "Christ"': Child to the Father, proclaimer of God's perfecting will to the world, witness to the world of its status as God's creature *becoming ex nihilo* into *being*.[70] Torrance, likewise, in phrases wholly consonant with Zizioulas's distinction between individual humanity and personal humanity affirms that the act of baptism releases repentant and believing human beings from self-centredness into Christ-centredness and thus

> seals to them the fact that their old selves with all their vaunted 'rights' have been crucified and renounced in Christ and that they have been given a new being through his resurrection in which they are freed from the shackles of the past. Baptism proclaims that Christ has made them his own and that they belong to him, and that it is on that ground and from that source that the whole life of faith in Christ and obedience to him develops. Thus with Baptism the Gospel is proclaimed by act and not in word only in a way that really corresponds to the actual content of the Gospel.[71]

In other words, the essence of baptism is the establishment of communion for the believer within the life of the Godhead: through the act of uniting the human being to Christ in his Body by baptism the Spirit brings forth in that person the reality for which he or she was created: the fact of *becoming* towards the Father what the Son himself *eternally is* towards the Father. We therefore witness in baptism a movement whereby God transforms the isolation of the human person into perichoretic personhood; we witness a divine gift of new life whereby the human *hypostasis* in effect *becomes externalized* or, more precisely, implicated substantially and explicitly in brotherly or sisterly communion with fellow human beings into the *Logos*-driven

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69 Cf. 1 Cor. 12:14–27.

70 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 113.

71 Torrance, *MC*, p. 96; cf. Rom. 6:6; note Torrance's identification of sacrament with truth. See Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 110, for commentary on the distinction between individuality and personhood.

ordering and Spirit-driven animation of creation towards the fulfilment all *being* within God's own life: we witness a movement, to use Gunton's terminology, that *establishes room* for the person in all of his or her uniqueness in, as the saying goes, the Grand Scheme of Things.

Yet, as Torrance and Gunton both insist, the personalizing action of God upon the human being transpires without cost to the person's own, actual spatio-temporal context: the communitarian movement signified in baptism is therefore not such that it subsumes any particularity of human existence, personal or historical. Indeed baptism is the means whereby God confirms history and created personhood as that place in which divinity and humanity uniquely meet. The catholicity towards both God and the world imputed to the believer through baptism – the externalization of *hypostasis* – is synonymous with Christ's revelation and establishment according to the Father's will of communitarian personhood as the primal ontological category both eternally and historically. In baptism, then, the Spirit brings to bear within the human condition the very *other/together*ness required for humanity to exist as authentic persons; the perichoretic life of Christ in his Father and Christ with his world, realized in the Spirit, calls forth the distinctiveness and particularity of each human person in question, confirming the unique character of his or her *being* – or rather *becoming* – and a unique involvement with the life of the Godhead.

A second way to visualize baptism, specifically in the context of our description of the Church as an *event-in-process*, would be as the sacrament of the present, in that baptism signifies the Spirit's progressive implication of all creation, person by person, into the reality of *theosis*. The community actualized in the rite of Christian initiation and the new birth of the persons-in-relation who make up that community are *present* realities – realities evident here and now as the Spirit causes persons to stand out from within creation in visible *other/together*ness with one another as Church – *a present event of reconciliation-in-process, an event of human-events coming together in God* – the visible mark of Christ's ongoing salvific presence within the world as, in the Spirit, he directs history and is directed through history. However, this present is one in which meaning is formed not by approaching the human persons in the static way we might approach the meaning of a still photograph, but rather by confirming each one in his or her place as event-in-relation within the four-dimensional *meta*-event that is the Church in the world and affirming his or her present as a place where, as Gunton says, past and future resolve into one another: each specific person existing *uniquely* within the framework of past (to the very temporal beginning of creation and to Christ's incarnation and resurrection) and future (to the world's parousiac glory with Christ) in a radical continuity with and *placement within* the spatio-temporally directed event, actions and purpose of the *Logos* and the community of creation that radiates around him.

Turning, then, to the eucharist, Luke's record of the Last Supper recounts that

> when the time came, [Jesus] took his place at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have ardently longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; because, I tell you, I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and share it among you, because from now on, I tell you, I shall never drink again until it fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Then he took bread, and

when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you.' (Luke 22:14–20.)

In these few words of the Evangelist's testimony lies a perfect summation of that in which the Church partakes in the eucharist – Christ's suffering, his reign, the new covenant in his blood and shared life (eternal life) in his name – for the sacrament is at one and the same time both memorial (*anamnesis*) of Christ's death for the world and first taste of the eschatological glory of God's Coming Kingdom.[72]

Accordingly Torrance characterizes the celebration of the Lord's Supper as

the sacrament of our *continuous participation in Jesus Christ* and all he has done and continues to do for us by his grace, whereby we live unceasingly not from a centre in our selves or our own doing but from a centre in Christ and his doing. It is the sacrament of *our union with the whole Jesus Christ*, the incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended Son, both in respect of his ministry from the Father toward mankind and in respect of his ministry from mankind toward the Father.[73]

Moreover, as Paul the Apostle affirms, the eucharist signals not only humanity's implication into God's own life, but the communion in Christ of persons human to human as well:

The blessing-cup, which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ; and the loaf of bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? And as there is one loaf, so we, although there are many of us, are one single body, for we all share in the one loaf. (1 Cor. 10:16–17.)

Whilst initially Torrance's words concerning the eucharistic transfiguration of humanity's ontological self-centredness into Christ-centredness follow directly from his discussion of the same in respect of baptism and therefore in some sense build upon the notion of the *hypostasis* externalized, yet ultimately in the eucharist a different movement transpires more fundamentally: a movement not of humanity towards God but, like the Christ-event itself (of which the eucharist is an expression), a movement of God towards humanity. The distinction lies in the sacramental experience of 'the whole Jesus Christ': the eucharistic feast is the sign in which the Holy Spirit binds up the *entirety* of the *Logos* – and with it also the entire network of human-events that is the Church through their baptismal connection with Christ and with one another in Christ – and effects these as a substantial presence within the local community's act of worship so that in a very real sense the local, historical Church becomes simply *the* Church: at one and the same time the company of the Twelve, citizens of the eschatological Kingdom who with Christ sit at the right hand of God, and all else in between. Indeed the local community effectively becomes the

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72 Cf. 1 Cor. 11:23–7, especially 26: 'Whenever you eat this bread, then, and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes'; Matt 26:26–9; Mark 14:22–5.

73 Torrance, *MC*, p. 92, emphasis mine.

economy of salvation made manifest in its entirety: 'as "flesh"', as Zizioulas claims, 'from *inside our own existence'*.[74]

The eucharist, then, from this perspective, embodies a movement whereby God *becomes internalized* in the human *hypostasis* in worship. In a sense the sacrament provides a counterbalance to the externalizing characteristics of baptism; yet this movement is not such that the divine immanence actualized therein becomes exclusive in nature for the human persons involved. That is, because in baptism the essence of human personhood fully realized becomes bound up in perichoretic life, the notion of God in the eucharist bringing forth the economy from 'inside our own existence' cannot be seen as a reality brought to bear upon *individuality* as such – not according to the connotation of isolation and death that Zizioulas attributes to the term – but rather upon the *particularity* of each person at worship, according to him or her the *other*ness that does not exist apart from the community's *together*ness. Thus does God in the eucharist emerge in and as the interpersonal ontology that he is in himself and that he wills for his people: he presents himself among them and in them as the culmination of each person's vocation to *be*.

Moreover and more generally, the Spirit's presentation of Christ in the eucharist forms the Church in its levitical function – as the People called out from within the larger society to offer up creation to God in holiness, to receive God's blessings (indeed God himself) on behalf of the world and to prepare the way of the Lord amongst the peoples of the earth.[75] The Lord's Supper is a public proclamation – a re-presentation – of Christ's unique and continually-effective sacrificial act upon the cross and a sign to the world through the perfect communion enabled therein that on the Last Day all things will be made new.[76] In this context we see again an internalizing movement of God—not only towards the persons communicant in the Church itself, but towards all that he has made: a sign of God's ongoing solidarity with creation and the firstfruits of creation itself *becoming* in God. In this sense the eucharist is iconic; the celebration presents through the means of the creation – through the means of history – the things of God: the transcendent Kingdom and the creative/salvific economy. Yet this living icon is not such that it directs humanity away from the created world, but rather confirms that God in fact has made a creation that in all of its bearings and by the means of the existence with which he has endowed it may join with him in the fullness of time. Zizioulas therefore argues, entirely in keeping with our arguments concerning the ontologically constructive character of this-worldly existence, that 'in the liturgy matter is not a window to higher things. It is the very substance of a transformed cosmos; it is an end in itself'.[77]

And yet although as holy mystery the worshipping, eucharistic Church comes to exist here and now as the real and whole presentation of the eschatological Kingdom—the communion of all things in God on the Last Day – in which all

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74 Zizioulas, *BC*, p. 115, emphasis mine.

75 Cf. Isa. 40:3.

76 Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17 (AV), 1 Cor. 15:22–4.

77 John D. Zizioulas, *The Church as the 'Mystical' Body of Christ*, paper presented at the meeting of the Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses, Crete, 1985, quoted in McPartlan, p. 137.

interpersonal *being* is in its own way already made complete, nonetheless the eucharist does not embody the final state of creation *solely*, for, as we have previously argued, neither the meaning of the Christ-event nor of the Church itself as the sign of the world coming-into-*being* may be seen in abstraction from the spatio-temporal processes by which the Kingdom finally arrives and from which its meaning as creation *ex nihilo* derives. If, as Torrance claims, the eucharistic celebration, rooted as it is in the symbolism of the cross, presents the entirety of the Christ-event (past, present, future and eternal) – the reality to which the believer is united in baptism – and if even eternal *being* itself, as we have repeatedly argued, is Event, then to conceive of the eucharist in iconic terms is not to claim a static character for the sign of grace that the Church in worship becomes, but is, rather, inherently to speak of dynamic activity: the entire *theosis*-process made plain as the new covenant into which the faithful were baptized. Through an efficacious commemoration and anticipation of the Son of God's reign the entire history of the universal Church 'in all times and in all places' becomes substantially present to the believer and to the world itself as evangelistic sign, yet without removing them from their own place within this history.

Thus, to return to the language of Church as *event-in-process* we may describe the eucharistic feast as the *sacrament of past and future* – the story of creation and salvation in its entirety, not abstracted from its nature as *meta*-event nor removing the local celebrants from their spatio-temporal context within the event-network, but known precisely as event fully laid out before and within the locality of those who worship God and for that very reason realizing for them the existential truth of the Nicene faith: that their *being* is meaningful in the will of their creator; that their present place in the *becoming*-time, the 'room' made for them in baptism, is resolved from a definite past moving towards a definite future; that they exist here and now in radical continuity with the true, perichoretic *being* of the creation-event that was and is being generated *ex nihilo* according to Word-made-flesh and promised to him as his Kingdom at the Father's right hand.

Truth and sacrament as triad

This chapter began with a problem: the contradictory views of Torrance and Zizioulas concerning the character of the Spirit's involvement with space-time, specifically in the Church as the focus of pneumatic action upon history; the nature and purpose of the Spirit's presence in the sacraments; and the role of Church and sacrament within the economy of salvation. Although both theologians recognize that the Spirit acts towards the created realm to engender redemption from *within* its own *being*, Torrance approaches this as action that mediates the salvific communion of God and humanity from within the spatio-temporal network of events, whereas Zizioulas understands the Spirit to be the liberator of both the incarnate Christ and humanity from historical causality who frees the worshipping community to partake fully in divine communion in a foretaste of its own true life and thereby to be an earthly icon of the eschatological Kingdom. It follows, then, that Torrance identifies the Church's *being* empirically in the baptismal incorporation of human persons into the experiential truth of Christ's communion in the Spirit with the Father, whereas

Zizioulas identifies it in the sharing of the eucharistic meal as the material expression of humanity's participation in the absolute freedom of the triune God's three persons to live in perfect love. Whilst in both treatments the epistemological ground, God's own *Other/togetherness* extended to humanity in creation and *theosis*, remains the same, nonetheless the authors, building upon these concepts to work out the means and manner in which *theosis* comes to pass, finally locate the core ontology of the Church in different phenomena.

The difficulty for our study is that, as we concluded in the second chapter, a viable ecclesial ontology is essential, first, for assessing the status of the multiple Christian Churches extant in human history – the extent to which any or all of them embody God's redemptive work upon earth and the manner in which they may be related – and, second, for determining the adequacy of the prevailing 'provisionalist' ecclesiologies now emerging from ecumenical circles, especially the epistemological presuppositions they demand *de facto*, for describing the plural communities we find before us in daily life and prescribing the means and goals of ecumenical union.[78] Although grounding ecclesial ontology in the concept of God's tri-unity as the final source of all *being* seemed at the outset a promising route, the discrepancies between Torrance's and Zizioulas's characterizations of the material expression of ecclesiality left us at a potential impasse, despite the larger systematic framework that they, with Gunton, hold largely in common. If these epistemological differences could not be resolved, then our ability to assess the modern ecumenical movement's ecclesiological standards would be blocked and a fresh approach would be needed.

Consequently in the fourth chapter we employed Küng's 'presentist-futurist' concept of eschatology to develop a train of thought whereby in principle the mediatory and iconic views of the Spirit in his presence towards history may both claim a legitimate role in conceptualizing the economy of salvation and the Spirit's Church-forming activity. Building upon that work in this chapter, we have examined the reverse side of the issue: namely, *history* as it *becomes* under the influence of the Spirit's this-worldly action – that is, the way in which the Church as *locus* of redeemed creation in the Spirit's presence is formed, its relationship with created history in general on the one hand and with the eternal God on the other, and the path it takes as it embodies communion – as through the Spirit it expresses in its own *being* that which *is* and *is becoming* in the unity of the triune creator. We came to the following conclusions:

(1) The Church, constituted as *meta*-event of persons coming into the communion of Godhead, stands out in history as the unique phenomenon in which, to employ Barth's phrase one further time, the 'real situation' of the world is known, realized and proclaimed: the world's real situation as creature of God, dependent upon God for its *being*; the real situation of its *being* as *other*ness to be realized in communion with God in the out-working of its own history (that is, as spatio-temporal *meta*-event); and the real situation of sin in the world as that which signals the ontological negation to which humanity tends when human *hypostases* resist the centrality of God's *being* for their own life.

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78 See pp. 50ff., above.

(2) The Church therefore stands both in and towards the world in a levitical function: at one and the same time a People distinguished from the world by the Spirit's sanctifying presence, yet living in Christ's own name in solidarity with all that is – a People who recognize sin in the world and in themselves, but who proclaim to the world through their own union with God that the ontologically negative sinful *other*ness (*other*ness in isolation) is being transformed and transfigured irrevocably into the *other/together*ness of true *being* – a People who proclaim that they and the world with them are *truly becoming*, because the final state of the world, according to God's creative will, is decided and established once-for-all in Christ's death and resurrection – a People who offer their public worship to God on the world's behalf, so that all creation may one day be drawn with them into glory in the eschatological Kingdom.

(3) The core ontology of the Church therefore consists of its actualization of the existential truth of *being*-in-love – a movement that occurs *in* history *as* history through the Spirit's binding of human *hypostases* into a communitarian network of *being* with God himself, one another and the world around – making 'room' for them within the dynamic Event-structure of all true *being* – by extending to them and evoking in them and on their behalf Christ's faithful response to the Father and embodying this response materially in the world's own spatio-temporal context through the sacraments of reconciliation (baptism) and remembrance and hope (the eucharist). The Church, as a network of persons publicly *becoming* in Christ and drawing creation into itself through the Spirit, is at once that which by grace mediates the Word of God in the world; radiates redeemed life throughout God's creation, God's elect; and serves as the already-effective icon of heaven: the firstfruits and promise of the Kingdom that *is* and *is yet to be*.

These conclusions, building upon the thought of all three of our primary authors, bring the mediatory and iconic streams of trinitarian soteriology, as expressed in baptismal and eucharistic ontologies of the Church, into a more unified systematic approach. Specifically the view of the Church as *event-in-process*, a phenomenon characterized by the interplay of humanity's vocation to *be-in-communion* (a reality already complete in a sense in Christ's work and the Spirit's eschatological presence) and its movement of *becoming-into-communion* (through Christ's ordering and the Spirit's animation of this-worldly events) means that only when the two dominical sacraments are taken *together in interrelation*, imagined as engaging one another in a kind of sacramental *perichoresis*, does our understanding of them provide a viable framework for conceptualizing the material presence of truth in history – the Spirit's action embodied in and as the Church community which stands before the world as a living proclamation of God's decision to *be* in union with the world he creates.

In this respect both Torrance and Zizioulas are entirely correct to recognize and emphasize the sacraments' conditioning properties, the one upon the other. The problem is that in both cases the conditioning operates almost entirely unidirectionally: that is to say, from one sacrament to the other, but not back. In Torrance's thought the experiential truth of baptism not only forms the Church into the kind of community

that it is, but also delineates the purpose of the eucharist, whereas for Zizioulas the reverse obtains: the existential truth made concrete in the eucharist defines the Church and imputes meaning to baptism. The hypothesis raised earlier in this chapter holds true: the problem is one of simple balance. If, as we concluded in the fourth chapter, the mediating and iconic facets of the Spirit's ecclesial action each perform a vital function within the economy of salvation, then baptism and eucharist must be conceived as *mutually conditioning* realities. If we do not see *both* at work in and as humanity's existential experience of truth in the Spirit's formation of Church, then we cannot see the Church sufficiently, for we cannot *fully* grasp redemption – *theosis* – lived out progressively amidst an eschatological community of God and humanity.

The authentic existence of the Church as communion and its authority as proclaimer of the world's 'real situation' in relation to God simply cannot be identified in the context of a lone sacrament, either baptism or eucharist: the two need each other and indeed cannot be what they are without one another. The Church's faith in the triune God, embodied as an event of creation's coming-into-communion with divinity, is linked inextricably to *both* the hypostatic incorporation of the faithful into Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection *signified in the mediating waters of baptism* and the coming glory that Christ's ascension reveals as God's eternal promise *signified in the iconography of the eucharistic feast*. Equal, balanced emphasis is required if we are adequately to express the character of the Church as event-in-process, for without the eucharistic *anamnesis* of Christ's life, death and resurrection and its existentially-immanent foreshadow of humanity's future as an assurance of eternal life, baptism could only be initiation into an aimless non-event, unstuck from history, involved in a process heading nowhere from no particular beginning and with no guaranteed end. Similarly without the dynamic character of the baptismal regeneration that forms 'room' for each person in and as the progressive sanctification of history – the network of events *becoming* – the eucharist could be only a static icon of saving mysteries: the creation-salvation history, of which the eucharist is the summation or collect, would disappear alongside the existentially shared stories of unique human *hypostases*, each *becoming* towards the Father, in communion with one another, what Christ eternally *is* towards the Father. Thus, to repeat and emphasize: the one sacrament without the *significant* presence of the other, as opposed to a derivative presence, can only lead to a corruption of our ecclesiological understanding. In the final analysis either one is rendered meaningless without the presence of the other. Indeed the dominical sacraments are not merely mutually conditioning; they are *mutually constitutive* and *mutually completing*.

How, then, shall we describe the Spirit's historical constitution of the Church as Christ's Body? If the present conclusions are valid, the out-working of the concept of the Church as *event-in-process* suggests that we make a sacramental paradigm-shift away from a strictly baptismally- or eucharistically-conditioned ecclesiology and instead come to view baptism and the eucharist together with the existential truth they embody in a *joint, triadic signification* of Spirit's dynamic animation of the world around the *Logos* in bringing creation's *theosis*-vocation to final fruition.[79]

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79 *Please note:* the term *triadic*, as opposed to *triune* or similar, is deliberate. Whereas in the present argument existential truth and the dominical sacraments are inseparable, this is

Baptism, then, is in a sense to be seen as a eucharistic phenomenon in that the initiation of the believer into the communion of God cannot truly end with his or her rising from the waters: the wider context of baptism (as the Quakers rightly claim) is indeed an ongoing and constantly-renewed process of repentance, turning from sin and becoming-in-God: directed sanctification established conclusively in Christ that manifests itself in the eucharistic celebration. Yet the eucharist is equally a baptismal phenomenon both constituting and constituted by the *baptismal* community of God's gathered People: the summation and celebration of the *meta*-event in which each baptized communicant has uniquely found 'room' as a particular hypostatic event and the confirmation that the 'room' found in baptism exists within the life-giving fellowship of the Trinity. In other words, baptism and eucharist, each performing its own particular function in the embodiment of created communitarian ontology, open out to one another to dictate the context of the whole Church-event acting in the world in the name of Christ. Simultaneously the experience of truth too is an ongoing facet of this sacramental interplay, for without truth grounded in the life of God and expressed in the faith of the community there can be no meaningful baptism or eucharist, nor can matter become truth without baptism and eucharist to make it so. Moreover, faith itself is continually amplified as a result of the baptismal and eucharistic experience, in that worship not only articulates but indeed helps effect the ongoing development of sanctifying faith within the *hypostases*-in-communion and simultaneously enables the Church to reach outside itself evangelistically into creation at large, proclaiming the Gospel and perpetuating the cycle of truth made manifest by the ever-widening catholic incorporation of creation into God's life. The claim, then, is that *all three elements exist dialogically*. The Spirit 'incarnate', acting to form humanity into the community-in-*other/together*ness that God wills, is not located specifically in any one of these phenomena in isolation, yet constitutes as Church the historical *meta*-event that inheres in them all. Where we see these factors extant and interacting in our spatio-historical realm, there we see history become the Church of Christ in its fullness: persons-in-communion responding to God the Father in the power of the Spirit.

The study's conclusion is coming into sight: *we have before us now the tools required to evaluate in light of trinitarian ontology both the status of the separated Churches and the viability of the ecclesiological thought developing out of modern ecumenism*. The final tasks will involve drawing out the implications of the systematic ontology here expounded for our concrete experience of the Churches as plural communities. How are we to apply these concepts in the context of excommunicant or semi-communicant Churches, and what will they mean for the Churches themselves? We shall need, first, a clearer vision of the *locus* or *loci* of ecclesial authenticity amongst the separated believers; second, a basic understanding of whether and how these separated communities are related to one another *as* Church (or Churches); and third, an approach to the operation of ecclesial authority in and amongst separated believers – that is to say, the way in which we understand

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no way directly analogous to God's own hypostatic tri-unity. That the Church's constitutive elements are three and not two or four is incidental – although not, strictly speaking, coincidental!

the Church(es) to be invested with authority to proclaim in word and worship both the Gospel itself and its implications for understanding the creation surrounding us and, moreover, how we understand this authority to be properly and effectively exercised among the plural Churches. We shall then be in a position to determine the extent to which ecumenical ecclesiology and especially the concept of ecumenical provisionalism addresses and answers the real situation of the historical Church and humanity's need for unity with God in Christ.

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Event-ecclesiology: a response to provisionalism

Review of the ecumenical problem

This study began with a question: has modern ecumenism developed in such a way as to create the reasonable expectation of sustainable convergence amongst the separated denominations on the doctrine of the Church – the essential requirement of the movement's ultimate goal of Christian reconciliation and benchmark of its success or failure? Such convergence, we argued, would require a credible account of the empirical phenomenon of multiple Churches in relation to one another, given that all mainstream Churches now have come more explicitly than ever before to acknowledge the genuinely ecclesial character of Christian worshipping communities beyond their own immediate jurisdiction or communion: given, that is, the recognition that each separated denomination has at least some legitimate claim to authentic ecclesial status. The kind of thought required would also need to explain credibly the multiplicity of Churches in light of the unity of God's people in Christ – their common life in the *una sancta* as proclaimed in scripture, tradition, creed and worship. How successfully, in other words, has modern ecumenism handled the problem of identifying the authentic People of God, the true Church of Christ, in and amongst these multiple worshipping communities and how successfully has it characterized the means through which the authority to proclaim the Gospel is realized and exercised within this context?

We argued that, although three major models for approaching ecumenical ecclesiology have emerged – liberal, Catholic/Orthodox and conservative – none of which is easily reconciled to the others, all operate according to an ideology which we called *provisionalism*: the concept that in the absence of reconciliation amongst separated believers some or all of the diverse Christian communities, although bearing authentic ecclesial life, nonetheless exist in visible manifestation as something less than the Church in fullness. This provisionalist principle entails two further presuppositions about the Church's nature and the requirements of ecumenism: first, that ecumenism must be worked out within the epistemological framework of a Church in some sense presently united and definitive of authentic ecclesial *being* in a way that the denominations' empirical history of division is not, and, second, a corollary, that ecclesial multiplicity cannot embody any distinctive theological content other than in the negative sense that division is *de facto* an aberration from the ecclesiological norm which detracts from the authentic revelation of life and *being* in God's Church. Simply put: the provisionalist concept suggests that the unity of *una sancta*, although an ecclesial essence extant and belonging properly to all of

God's people, is in visible expression attenuated by human sin and, as a result, that some or all Churches fail to attain the plenitude of ecclesial life and to proclaim the Gospel's fullness.

Beyond this public face of provisionalism, however, equally important to our understandings are the more subtle, correlated epistemological implications and ontological concepts that the position, drawn out to its logical conclusion, requires its adherents to espouse, whether wittingly or otherwise. Most important amongst these is the conceptual divorce of ideal and historical *being* that provisionalism ultimately necessitates in order for its adherents to make the logical distinction between the assertion of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church that exists 'in God's eyes' and the collection of non- and semi-communicant Churches that exist in observable history as something far different and purportedly far less than the former.[1] The very idea of an invisible or mystical unity, perfect in itself, in which the Church partakes obliquely, but which has no direct, concrete, empirical correlate suggests a striation of *being* into qualitative levels – a difficult proposition, in that it sets the reality of authentic Church life at an ontological remove from human experience, perhaps across an unbridgeable gulf. At the very least, the location of Church unity in something so nebulously defined, but distinctly *other* than the historical bodies, means that in effect provisionalism considers the idealized Church more real than the communities in which Christians actually worship and proclaim the Gospel message. The true Church becomes not what the Churches are, but rather what they reflect; the extent to which the Churches' claims of ecclesiality gain ontological substance depends entirely on the degree of reflection. Anchoring the efficacious proclamation of the Gospel in a hypothetical and possibly unattainable set of worldly conditions (the universal reunion of all Christian communities) rather than the promise of perfect communion in God's Kingdom on the Last Day suggests a misdirected interpretation of God's redemptive act towards his People. Provisionalist language may well indicate confusion between the *modern concept of provisionality* – contingent upon reunion – which ecumenical writers ascribe to the separated Churches as a denial of their full ecclesiality and the *eschatological provisionality* – contingent upon the Heavenly Banquet – which has lain at the heart of Christian tradition from the time of Jesus's ministry as an explicit affirmation of the Church's participation in and revelation of saving grace. Each provisionalist subtext has far-reaching and problematic implications and none of them, we concluded, should be taken for granted without significant critical examination. The degree of unproven supposition is just too great.

From examples of the three major ecumenical models in practice we found that provisionalism applied gives rise to various descriptions of ecclesiality that deeply challenge certain traditional understandings of the Church's *being* in order to uphold others. In the effort to assign the fullness of visible ecclesiality to their own eucharistic communities the Catholic and Orthodox Churches apply the provisionalist principle to other Christian groups in such a way that it results in second-tier ecclesiality for all communities separated from the teaching and sacramental fellowship of the mother Church. The liberal model, concerned with affirming the equal standing of

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1   See p. 49, above; Hanson and Hanson, pp. 29–30; ch. 6, n. 21, below.

all Churches under God through 'one baptism', implements provisionalism in such a way as to reduce the normative content of Christian faith to whatever doctrine the denominations may agree upon at any given point and the eucharistic celebration – now arguably stripped of much theological richness – to a tool through which the Churches call themselves to replicate their invisible unity visibly.[2] The full reality of ecclesial life, therefore, comes to be identified less directly with the actual Gospel proclamation by either word or sacrament in the visible Christian communities and more upon extrapolation from the present to the hypothetical future when a reunited Church may one day more closely reflect the ideal. Meanwhile the ecumenically conservative Churches affirm in principle the equal standing of all Churches in a common ecclesial life, yet set out their own distinctive ecclesiological norms as definitive of Church life in its *plene esse*. Thus do these Churches contradict their own claim to liberal-style egalitarianism by asserting distinctive characteristics not common to all Churches as necessary for visible Church life in fullness whilst simultaneously undermining their own authority to make such assertions.

From this perspective provisionalism signals the practical outworking of the Churches' common desire not only to preserve the fundamental conceptual unity of the *una sancta*, but also the traditional means whereby once they identified their own communities exclusively as Church, even when faced with Christians beyond their communities who may also be identified legitimately as belonging to God's People. In other words, the extent to which the modern ecumenical movement has in fact brought forth a greater degree of communion amongst Christians – ministries imperfectly shared, but shared nonetheless – has been created as much by the Churches' looking inward to expand their self-definitions in the presence of the *other* as by their looking outward to identify with the self-perception of the *other*. Undoubtedly such introspection has played a crucial role in reducing the Churches' self-identification as isolated, sole inheritors and guardians of Christ's true Gospel; introspection in the light of the *other* has enabled a broadening of ecclesiological categories. Yet the actual form of inclusivity growing up amongst the Churches as ecumenical dialogue matures has meant that in some important respects the differences remaining between them have hardened. Thus has provisionalism in some ways provided the Churches with a means not so much of informing their understandings of ecclesial operation in light of their ecumenical partners' presence but of explaining away the observable fact of plurality in a manner that minimizes its epistemological impact upon – and its implicit challenges to – their own self-identity.

Yet our very ability to categorize the vast majority of denominational positions on Church identity into the three major models suggests that ecumenical dialogues conducted with these assumptions have not been without some success, particularly

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2   See p. 16, above. The liberal model suggests a eucharistic vocation to unity distinct from the eschatologically-directed calling described in the fifth chapter. In that the Churches' ability to articulate the Gospel is impaired whilst they exist in separation, the eucharistic vocation the liberal model describes is at least one step removed from the general eschatological vocation proper to the Church and its eucharistic celebration. It is effectively a vocation to vocation.

amongst Churches with a notable degree of shared tradition. This point is underscored by the amalgamation of many intra-denominational splinter groups in the course of the last century, the creation of a handful of United and Uniting Churches and the hammering out of numerous intercommunion agreements through which Churches have come to share each other's ministries.[3]

Ultimately, however, we concluded that to speak of a definitive ecumenical ecclesiology in any developed sense would be premature: the ecumenical movement's social trends and the theological work of the World Council of Churches suggest that the member bodies' collective efforts to engage broadly with one another on ecclesiological doctrine have been timid. Because only now, some hundred years after the earliest modern ecumenical efforts, is the WCC beginning to take even tentative steps towards formulating the kind of preliminary ecclesiological statement that would clarify both the beliefs its members hold in common and the remaining points of contention, real actionable convergence on the identity and constitution of the Church and its authority remains a distant goal. Moreover, concerning the provisionalist concept specifically, little explicit examination is to be found in ecumenical dialogue: the phrase *provisional* itself appears infrequently and the concept arises in both WCC texts and bilateral statements far more often through allusion and implication than direct statement. For example, references to the unity of God's People in baptism and their mandate to repair their separation in order for that unity actually to be revealed certainly suggest that the Churches as they presently exist are embodied in a state that could only be described as provisional: that is, they are not the *una sancta* in its fullness, yet bear some relation to it through their vocation to become that Church. Yet with only a few notable exceptions the description *provisional* itself is rarely made outright. This lack of directness leaves the reader to wonder whether the concept, although by circumstantial evidence a firm fixture within modern ecumenical thought, has been considered consciously by those who draft such statements; we may easily question the extent to which advocates of provisionalist thought are actually aware of the positions they appear to hold or more importantly the extended implications.[4]

Nonetheless, that a certain consensus on methodology does exist in rudimentary form amongst the differing perspectives within the modern dialogue indicates that if we are to evaluate the direction of modern ecumenical Church-thought – its ability to describe adequately and effectively the expression of authentic ecclesiality within the historical denominational Churches, to foster ecclesiological convergence amongst these Churches and from this convergence to further the actual reconciliation of Christians in their worshipping communities – the viability of provisionalist

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3   Into the first category fall, for example, the United Methodists and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (both in America); into the second the United Reformed Church in England and Wales and the Churches of North and South India; into the third the *Porvoo Agreement* Churches (Anglican and episcopal Lutheran) and the *Bonn Agreement* Churches (Anglican and Old Catholic). An interesting anomaly, of course, is that the Lutherans and Old Catholics are not in full communion.

4   Cf. Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?*, trans. Tony Coates (Geneva, 1991), p. 4.

theory as a foundational premise will be critical to judge. Does this concept of one Church, the visible expression of which is contingent upon reunion, provide an adequate means of characterizing the multiple, pluriform Nicene Churches? Will we, moreover, find in ecumenical provisionalism a suitable premise for facilitating further interdenominational convergence on the doctrine of the Church and through this convergence the reconciliation of the Christian faithful one to another? And most importantly do the epistemological and ontological ramifications surrounding this concept form a viable system whereby we may give voice to an adequate conception both of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and of the plural and pluriform Churches in history that bear its name?

With all these matters in mind we concluded that in order to make an informed judgement about whether ecumenical ecclesiology, to the extent that it presently exists, is developing in a way that can, in the first instance, adequately describe the conditions of denominational Churches and, in the second, begin to provide an intellectual framework within which more extensive ecclesiological convergence amongst the various traditions may occur, we cannot finally avoid the matter of *ecclesial ontology*, particularly in light of the wider ramifications of provisionalist 'doctrine'. How, we asked, are we to understand the creative and salvific operation of the eternal God in the finite realm of creation? What actual function do we understand the Church to serve in this *schema*? How is that function accomplished, and what does ecclesial life mean in respect of humanity's relationship to history and eternity? What, in a word, do we *mean* when we say the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church *is*? And more specifically, after answering these questions, *can we legitimately approach the empirical plurality of Christian Churches as something distinct from its true life* – and consequently approach the tangible plurality of Christian Churches as if it afforded us no distinctive revelation about what it means to be God's People on earth?

In response, therefore, we have aimed to grapple with these broader issues: specifically, to develop through our understanding of God's triune *being*, communitarian life and creative will a clearer view of what it means to proclaim and embody on earth God's saving grace as his holy People. Although the route may have seemed circuitous, one goal has been borne in mind throughout: to provide – through an examination of God's *being* and action towards humanity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – a clear, systematic doctrine of ecclesial life and *being* from which to approach the problem of Church identity and Gospel proclamation in an ecumenical context and ultimately to evaluate the direction of modern ecumenical thought on ecclesiological doctrine. What remains is to bring the insights of that examination to bear specifically upon the interrelation of the plural Churches with one another and with God in the creative/salvific economy and from the understanding so developed to judge the strengths and weaknesses of the provisionalist methodology and offer suggestions as to the future direction of ecclesiological thought in modern ecumenism.

Ecumenical principles in trinitarian ecclesiology

Four major principles derived from this study's outworking of ecclesial ontology impinge directly upon what we must say about the constitution of the plural Churches in history and the extent to which they can be seen as provisional.

The first is that *the Church's life as the locus of God's salvific action and the meaningful qualities inherent in it take shape in the actual history of creation – specifically in the concrete communities of Christian believers.* The qualities of ecclesial *being*, in other words, cannot be rooted in anything other than the historical communities that collectively we identify as Church. This principle derives, in the first instance, from our discussion of creation *ex nihilo* and Christ the *Logos* as the dual axis of the creative/salvific economy and, in the second, from our development of the Spirit's role as the historically 'incarnate' facilitator of both Christ's and through Christ the Church's faithful response to the Father's perfect love spoken in the act of creation.

Common to the thought of T.F. Torrance, Colin Gunton and John Zizioulas is the explicit rejection of hellenistic cosmologies, which identify material history and dynamism with an inevitable corruption or negation of meaningful (timelessly eternal) *being*, in favour of the Hebrew idea of *ex nihilo* creation whereby history, positively, ascends into *being* through the absolute freedom of the dynamically eternal divine will. Following their arguments we have contended that the latter doctrine affords the created realm in general a distinct reality in its own right rooted in the deliberate choice of a creative God who himself is ontologically anterior to all else. St Basil explores this concept in the first of his *Homilies on Creation*:

> 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth'. If we were to wish to discover the essence of each of the beings which are offered for our contemplation, or come under our senses, we should be drawn away into long digressions, and the solution of the problem would require more words than I possess, to examine fully the matter. To spend time on such points would not prove to be to the edification of the Church. Upon the essence of the heavens we are contented with what Isaiah says, for, in simple language, he gives us sufficient idea of their nature, 'The heaven was made like smoke', that is to say, He created a subtle substance, without solidity or density, from which to form the heavens. As to the form of them we also content ourselves with the language of the same prophet, when praising God 'that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in'. In the same way, as concerns the earth, let us resolve not to torment ourselves by trying to find out its essence, not to tire our reason by seeking for the substance which it conceals. Do not let us seek for any nature devoid of qualities by the conditions of its existence, but let us know that all the phenomena with which we see it clothed regard the conditions of its existence and complete its essence. Try to take away by reason each of the qualities it possesses, and you will arrive at nothing. Take away black, cold, weight, density, the qualities which concern taste, in one word all these which we see in it, and the substance vanishes.[5]

To be sure, Basil's discourse – undoubtedly a product of the contemporary intellectual environment – in no sense transcends concepts essential to hellenistic

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5　Basil, *Hexaemeron*, §I.8.

thought such as substance, essence and form. Nonetheless, far more decisive for his cosmology is his insistence that the reality of created things can be seen neither apart from the historical contingencies surrounding them nor more importantly from the will of the Almighty God of the Hebrew prophets whose prerogative it is to fashion exactly the world he wills. This basic insight, shared by both Basil and our three main authors, describes not only a God who exists in a fundamentally constructive relationship with history but, moreover, a world that, whilst looking first and foremost to God's Mighty Act of creation as the source of its *being*, yet through that very same Act actually has existence and meaning by virtue of what it *is* – what God creates it to *be* – not by virtue of reflecting imperfectly a more substantial *being* beyond itself.

Building upon this concept we then argued that Christianity's identification of the *Logos* (the cosmic ordering principle) with Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Christ, not only confirms and amplifies creation as a place in which *being* and meaning inheres authentically, but indeed identifies God's creative purpose with salvation and salvation with the very dynamism of space-time. As incarnate Word, *homoousios* with both God and humanity, Christ comes to *be* in creation as both the revelation of his eternal life – Father and Son living dynamically in the Spirit's love – and the revelation of history itself, ordering humanity towards an eschatological destiny in *theosis* and affirming that by the very terms of its own existence history is the place in which and through which eternal communion in God is known. Crucially the divinity we see in the incarnate Christ we see not because God imposes out of place some vague divine 'essence' onto the flesh-and-blood of Jesus nor because Jesus as human being transcends the circumstances of history. Quite the opposite: the divinity we see in Christ, we see because it is *there to be seen*, *given* to the world, *as* the flesh-and-blood of Jesus. Through Christ God's implication of his divinity into the created realm does not mean that the mundane realities of creation now serve, in gnostic style, as a metaphor of divine truth; rather, it affirms God's appropriation and incorporation of the mundane into himself and himself into the mundane. To paraphrase Basil: take away the flesh and the blood of the Nazarene, and the divine presence vanishes.

Precisely the same principle, we concluded, must inform our approach to the Church as the historical *locus* of the Spirit's action: the place in which God realizes for humanity the vocation to partake, as Christ, in his own eternal life and evokes in creation the Spirit's response to the Father's 'speech' in his Word. Although we found that Torrance, Gunton and Zizioulas disagreed significantly concerning the manner in which the pneumatic presence engages created *being* with the eternal, nonetheless all were entirely agreed that the Spirit's action is fundamentally an act by which creation becomes fulfilled, not transcended. If, therefore, from this perspective the Church is seen to serve a role as the 'empirical correlate', to use Torrance's phrase, of the Spirit's 'incarnation'—the intersection of divine and worldly realities in the Spirit's perfecting movement – we must of necessity identify these 'pneumo-ecclesial' realities with particular, substantive, visible phenomena. The precise identification of these phenomena is, of course, more complex than the identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnate Word – all the more so because of

the fractured, sometimes fractious, state in which the Churches find themselves. Yet the implications are unavoidable: 'The Church', as Lukas Vischer claims,

> is always a *concrete fellowship*. It exists wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and men have felt themselves called, wherever they celebrate the Eucharist, and are sanctified as a fellowship and as individuals. *It always exists in particular places and cannot even be imagined separated from the concrete fellowship created by the Word* [through the Spirit] *in particular places*.[6]

Whatever else it may be, the Church *must* be concrete – as must the qualities with which we identify it: no ecclesiastical 'substance' exists apart from the tangible, historical faith-community which comes into *being* when actual human persons in their own condition are brought by the Spirit into the response of the *Logos* to the Father in heaven. The economy of salvation does not consist of history discarding itself in favour of the eternal: rather, salvation is history discovering in the Spirit's power that by the very gracious terms of its *being*-in-Christ and the directedness of its own processes toward the Father through the Word it has something to do with the eternal.

Torrance therefore argues that in speaking of the Church's oneness the Nicene Creed speaks of an *actual* Church – a tangible Church, moving and interacting with history, moving and interacting *as* history – a Church with a history of its own, passed down as it was from the Apostles themselves. This is a Church set, both linguistically and theologically in the Creed, within the context of faith in

> 'the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets'. … The *actual Church to which we belong* has not been made by human hands but derives from God himself, for it is the work of the Holy Spirit … .

> It follows from this that the Church throughout all its manifestations in space and time is intrinsically and essentially one, for it is constituted as Church through the presence of the one Lord and his one Spirit – that was the point of the insistence by Ignatius and Irenaeus that wherever the Christ is, and wherever his Spirit is, there only is the Church.[7]

In respect of the ecumenical problem the implications should be clear: *what we say about the Church's unity must not be said with a mystical body in mind*, at least not a mystical body existentially separate and distinct from the flesh-and-blood communities that come together for worship. This point, of course, constitutes in no way a denial of the distinctly mystical facets of Church life – for surely that would be a denial of the very intersection of time and eternity at the heart of Church's self-identity in its eschatological worship. Nonetheless, in that Christian belief acknowledges in one breath the creation of things both 'seen and unseen', all that is not-God, be it invisible or visible, is created by the same Word spoken and therefore bears the significance of *being* proper to it as creature of the Word. Thus, the plurality of Churches is to be taken very seriously indeed as the actual condition of ecclesial

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6   Vischer, p. 68.
7   Torrance, *TrinF*, p. 279, emphasis mine.

life, relevant both to the identity of God's People and their action in the Spirit's perfecting causality. The fact that God works out salvation in the context of multiple communities is not irrelevant to his revelation. We may – indeed must – speak of unity amongst the People of God, just as we speak of holiness, catholicity and apostolicity; but *we cannot set this unity over against the plurality of the empirical communities* as if the historical conditions of Church life were ontologically insubstantial, nor can we envision legitimately a unity that exists apart from Christian worship as it actually transpires in history. The unity that we find, we must find not as an intangible ideal against which we set the multiple Churches of history, but rather as a dimension of life in the worshipping communities in which and as which Christians actually dwell.[8] The genuinely historical character of revelation affirmed by our doctrines of *Logos* and Spirit suggests that in order to speak adequately of the true Church we must articulate an understanding of unity and plurality in relation to one another.

Following from this argument, our second ecclesiological principle is that *the designation of creation and salvation as* event *(more precisely, a network of events) suggests that viewing the plural condition of Churches solely from the perspective of an isolated moment in time obscures its significance for our understanding of the Church.*

An analogy, drawn from an infamous episode in the annals of American journalism, may be useful in this context. The centrepiece of this illustration is a photograph that appeared most famously on the front page of the *Chicago Sun-Times* on 5 November 1948. The photo depicts a grinning American President Harry S Truman at Union Station in Saint Louis, Missouri, on 3 November, the day following the 1948 general election, holding aloft a copy of the rival *Chicago Tribune*'s early edition for that same day, the front page of which bore the bold, black headline: 'Dewey Defeats Truman'.[9] By itself – viewed apart from its larger context of dynamic, constructive historical *being* – the one still moment captured on paper as an isolated present not only reveals to the viewer absolutely no substantial meaning, but in fact might even lead the observer to conclude that Thomas E. Dewey, the incumbent president's main challenger, had indeed unseated Truman. For that matter, without any positive identification, the unknowing reader might assume that the man in the photo was Dewey himself. From the photographic evidence alone, the only clue that might undermine the conclusion of Dewey's victory is Truman's triumphant grin. Yet even this in the absence of context offers only a hint at best: a phenomenon that *in itself* provides no obvious explanation for the president's apparent glee. In the end that moment in space-time viewed as a contextless present can be only mysterious at best, misleading and inaccurate at worst. No direct evidence arises from the photo itself to suggest the truth lived out as history: the truth that Truman had in fact won the hotly-contested election of 1948 and that Dewey's candidacy was quickly relegated, because of the *Tribune*'s premature headline, to an amusing anecdote in the footnotes of American history books.

In other words, to understand the meaning that inheres this particular present we cannot treat the story (the *event*) of Truman's life and *being* as a continuous succession

8   See p. 49, above.
9   *Chicago Sun-Times*, 5 Nov. 1948.

of present moments, isolated snap-shots of temporality, in each of which truth inheres anew. Only when we approach the present captured in that famous photograph as a place in which past resolves dynamically into future can we find substantial meaning. We must first comprehend a past resolving *into* that moment – the larger context of Truman's whole (four-dimensional) *being* in his specific interrelation with the world around as a leader who inherited the presidency upon Franklin Delano Roosevelt's death in 1945; whose leadership ability was subsequently questioned by press and public; who, standing for election in 1948, faced stiff competition from Dewey, further complicated by Strom Thurmond's rogue third-party bid; and whose victory came as a shock to all but perhaps Truman himself. We must, moreover, comprehend the past resolving *through* that moment into Truman's future as the man who subsequently was sworn into office for a second term on 20 January 1949 and whose executive policies heralded the beginning of the Cold War that defined world history for the next four decades and more immediately led to the first of many localized military conflicts for the ideological soul of the developing world. Only then can we see in the context of the entire 'Truman-event', so to speak, the meaning of that photograph: either the immediate meaning of the moment as a delicious irony for the embattled man soon to be inaugurated a second time or the broader meaning as a watershed instant in US and world history, when the aftermath of the last great European war began to resolve into a battle of an entirely new and different kind. Meaning, on the one hand, is not imposed upon the present by the past or future; yet it emerges from the present by the movement of past into future. In this respect the key ontological and cosmological insight of the Truman photograph is that a narrative concept of truth emerging from the dynamic conditions of event itself provides a far more accurate description of cosmic operations than a concept of truth as static idea or principle imposed upon one piece of history and isolated from interaction with a broader environment.

In the third chapter we argued with musical illustrations that this dynamic principle of truth and *being* holds true not only for the Christ-event, but indeed inheres in the life of creation generally because Christ the *Logos* comes to humanity as event. Neither his presence at the world's beginning, his incarnation, death, resurrection, or ascension can be understood in isolation. In itself Christ's death is not truth: the crucifixes adorning Churches the world over are no different from the photographic suggestion of Dewey's victory: meaningless at best and deceptive at worst, if not approached as a moment when past was resolving into future. Without the story of creation, resurrection and Kingdom, the moment of Christ's execution signals nothing more important than the pathetic end to a failed political criminal. Yet Christ's death viewed *in the context of story* affords us not only a glimpse of its meaning, but of all the truth of the universe: the ultimate sacrifice of the great I AM, the eternal *ex nihilo* creator who *was* at the beginning, who became in himself the oblivion of non-*being* that he inherently is not so that by his resurrection from the grave and return to glory creation might finally become the communion that it (*ex nihilo* creature that it is) inherently is not.

In precisely the same way must we approach the empirical reality of the Christian Churches today, not only because by God's creative will history in general unfolds in such a manner, but because the Church itself exists in the Spirit's power, first, as

a network of persons coming directly into God's own life by its interrelation with Christ the *Logos* and, ultimately, as in some sense an actual dimension of Christ's earthly-historical presence. A snapshot of the Churches' plural state, the mere fact that multiple Churches exist here and now, will not by itself impart any reliable means of determining what that plurality might mean in respect of their whole *being* in the Church-event. In the end we are not in a position to ascribe meaning to the situation of *present* ecclesial pluriformity *alone* because, *abstracted from the larger event-context, the present situation will have no meaning*. Just as, for example, the meaning of the Lord's resurrection can be discovered *only* by examining its significance for the Christ-event as a temporally directed but ontologically unified process – an event in which past, present and future inhere in one another holistically – so too the meaning of ecclesial pluriformity will be found only by recognizing that, to repeat Gunton's words, the present is 'the place where the past is directed to the future' and then addressing the problem from that perspective – seeking, in other words, to find the order inherent in the larger four-dimensional *theosis*-process in the middle of which the fissiparous denominational Churches find themselves.[10] The significance of ecclesial plurality must be derived from a larger view of God's action as he works out creation's destiny from its beginning moment through to the *parousia*.

The third principle concerns precisely that movement of history as the basis of ecclesial life: *the Church is the historical revelation of the Spirit's* dynamic *implication of creation, as Christ, into the perichoretic* other/togeth*erness of God's own life; consequently talk of the Church is synonymous entirely and without remainder with talk of personhood-in-communion – or, more precisely, personhood*-coming-into-*communion*. Within this statement lie this study's two most critical insights for the ecumenical task:

(1) At the outset we asked whether the plural state of Christian Churches does in fact bear witness to any distinctive theological insight or whether instead it merely serves to obscure the unity proper to the Church. We have now concluded, first, that by reason of history's status as an absolutely free God's chosen revelatory medium and the Spirit's 'incarnate' presence in and as the communities we see before us, plurality must be approached as an ontologically significant fact of Church life and, second, that the multiple Churches must be seen in the context of the larger event of salvation. Now the task will be to grapple with the actual content of revelation: the significance of ecclesial multiplicity as a sign of God's revealed presence. To this end we look back to the previous chapter's comments concerning the Church's actual history as the summation of creation's history in general: that which in itself proclaims the world's 'real situation' in sin and its eschatological destiny in redemption without abstracting either the world or itself from historical context.

This point is absolutely pivotal: that which is made known in the pneumatic 'incarnation' – that movement of God towards humanity which in empirical expression constitutes the Church as Church – is not *solely* the communion of humanity in God's own life. Rather, that which is made known, that which indeed is actualized in the Church in history by the very terms of history's own *being*, is the

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10 Gunton, *Y&T*, p. 122. See also Zuckerkandl, pp. 223ff.

Spirit's *dynamic transfiguration* of unique human persons as both the fulfilment and proclamation of his perfect, creative will to *make room for them in the world* and to *make room for the world in himself*: the pneumatic transformation of the *ex nihilo* creation's tragic tendency towards the division and isolation from whence it came – its tendency towards sin – into perichoretic personhood, personal particularity affirmed and shared with one another in God as the very same love shared by Christ himself with the Father. Redemption in the Church means precisely this, no more nor less.

Crucially this dynamic character inherent in the Church means that ecclesial assurance of eschatological glory removes neither the present day communities nor indeed the *parousia* itself from their specific context in the spatio-temporal interrelation of worldly things. Quite the opposite: the Church is formed explicitly as the *tangible outworking* of a pneumatic *event*, the story of salvation in which is seen the Spirit's implication of human persons into the Christ-event and through that network so established the ordering of worldly events perichoretically towards the eternal Kingdom. When we speak of the Church as the sign and instrument of *theosis*, then, we do not and *cannot* present the experience of ecclesial life any more than Christ's own *being*-towards-us as a frozen, timeless salvation motif imposed upon historical *being*. For the Church's essential function is to reveal in itself the true character of created personhood in its pneumatic interrelation with the Father through the Son – and this by definition means that it reveals the creative will of a God, who himself exists as an Event of communion, to *make room* for his creatures. The Creatures, to be sure, encounter substantially the eschatological promise in their ecclesial life: as Zizioulas argues, they exist in worship as what they *will* be. Yet they are not for that reason removed from the *event* of growth into ever-fuller communion with God and one another. Indeed by their actualization of the future in the context of their present and knowledge of their past *the conspicuous, public character of their movement towards unity serves as the visible sign of Spirit's activity in the world generally*; their own *theosis*-process is the tangible sign of God's actions in the entire creative process generally and, moreover, an active vocation to the rest of creation to own its place in the redemption dynamic.

Seeing the Church(es) as an *event-in-process* – that event being the progressive involvement of human persons in all their personal particularity in the life of God – means that, rather than identify ecclesial authenticity with *absolute* human community here and now (that is, a state of community that belongs properly to the eschatological promise revealed in the Gospel proclamation of Christ's once-for-all death and resurrection) we must instead identify the true Church with humanity's *coming into* community. Indeed we may identify the Church's tangible proclamation with God's *will* for creation in its substantial anticipation of parousiac unity; but we identify the Church's tangible revelation of God's *active, perfecting presence* in creation not so much with its being-unity, but with its becoming-unity. Epistemologically and ontologically a faith-community's being *as Church* is defined as much by its facilitation both internally and in evangelistic mission of the tangible processes of creaturely reconciliation in Christ to God as by its anticipatory experience of the coming Kingdom.

Concerning the ecumenical task specifically, this insight has important ramifications, for it will mean that *the multiple, non- and semi-communicant Churches are doing on earth exactly what the Church is meant to do* by the very fact that in them human persons are by the Spirit's creative power coming *dynamically and historically* out of the isolated oblivion of non-*being* – naming and repenting of sin – and moving through his perfecting will into the fullness of *being* synonymous with personhood-in-communion. The Churches in the fullness of the self-same space-time in which God gives them *room* are *becoming* dynamically towards God what Christ *is* dynamically towards God. In so doing – not as plural Churches *per se*, but as *plural Churches in the act of reconciliation* – they do no more nor less than what the *una sancta* is called to do in its embodiment of the world's 'real situation'.

(2) The affirmation of Church as personhood-coming-into-communion means that in respect of either the *una sancta* or its multiple iterations we cannot speak primarily in terms of monolithic institutional structures – an existential hive into which humanity (like the drones of the modern-mythical Borg) is subsumed.[11] To the contrary: as we have previously suggested, the Spirit's function both in the triune dynamic itself and in the Church as event-in-process, is to *particularize* personhood: to establish its unique life in the context of its perichoretic indwelling of *other particular persons*: a network of personhood-in-communion.[12] Consequently, whether we refer to persons in the communion of one particular denomination or to persons in separated worshipping communities, we speak fundamentally of the same phenomenon: human personhood – *particular*, historical human persons – *coming* (not *having come*), through the processes of space-time, into the wider network of interrelated creation that the Spirit is ordering dynamically around the Christ-event.

Ecumenically this affirmation will mean that sharp distinctions between denominational communities and their membership must give way to a more holistic

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11 See ch. 3, n. 62, above, for an explanation of the Borg. Cf. Schwöbel, *Quest*, p. 15: 'For some the unity of the church absorbs the personal particularity of its members. Religious individualism is a protest against this kind of monolithic unity. The Trinitarian approach suggests a possibility of going beyond monism or pluralism, collectivism or individualism. Since the personal particularity of the Trinitarian persons and their communion-of-*being* are both equally constitutive for the *being* of God, the one and the many can exist simultaneously without contradiction in the Trinity. The key term is communion: communion does not abolish the personal particularity of the Trinitarian persons, but is constituted by their relations to one another. If the church is constituted by the Trinitarian God, the church can exemplify a similar relationship of the one and the many in the communion of persons in relation'.

12 One appropriate analogy might be the decentralized peer-to-peer file-sharing networks of the modern Internet, such as Gnutella or Bittorrent, in which each computer, upon logging onto the network, becomes established within the universal framework as a unique and particular 'node' – an entity in its own right serving and receiving files (not unlike *charismata*) in the 'room' that simultaneously it has made for itself and the *others* have made for it. Network identities – indeed the network itself – are established because of the particular interrelation of the particular nodes: in the perichoretic presence of the *others* each *one* becomes unique and particular, whilst affirming the uniqueness and particularity of the *others*; in that uniqueness-in-togetherness the *one* bears meaning for itself and for the *others*, as they too do for it; apart from the *others* the *one* by definition sinks into incommunicable isolation.

– but, to repeat, not monolithic – view of the *una sancta*: insofar as communion as a historical phenomenon remains generally in process, *both unity and disunity characterize the ecclesial interrelation of persons in all its expressions; the real separation of particular believers either within one denomination or amongst multiple communities is a matter of degree, not of kind*. Within this dynamic view of redemption, division and isolation remain entirely relevant even within a single community 'in full communion'; the concept of Church as a dynamic event of persons uniquely *coming into* relation, rather than existing in perfect communion, gives us pause to re-think not only our involvement with ecumenical partners, but also our involvement with those who share our worship more fully. (Paul's admonitions to the Corinthians, for example, illustrate pointedly that Christian separation has never been the exclusive domain of feuding denominations.) Insofar as denominational separation is a fact of the Church's *actual history*, the degree of separation between particular groups of particular persons is a real and potent sign of the sin for which they must yet repent. It is not, however, the only such sign; unity and disunity amongst Christian persons must be conceived in far more nuanced terms.[13]

The fourth and final principle is that *the Christian Church, as the empirical locus of the one 'incarnate' Spirit's presence, finds its being in the actual structures of the triadic, mutually-completing signification of baptism, eucharist and the 'rule of truth'; where one element exists, so too must the others; therefore where a community is recognized as Church, each element necessarily and fully inheres*.

Hans Küng reminds us that the worship of the Christian Church, an essentially local phenomenon in which the fullness of historical ecclesiality is realized, must for that reason be seen only as a microcosmic iteration of the 'whole Church', never merely a fragment:

> Each individual ekklesia (each individual congregation, community or Church) is not *the* ekklesia (the whole Church, community or congregation); but none the less fully represents it: this means two things. First: the local ekklesia is not a 'section' or a 'province' of the whole ekklesia. It is in no way to be seen as a sub-division of the real 'Church,' … as though the Church were not *wholly* present in every place, endowed with the *entire* promise of the gospel and an *entire* faith, recipient of the *undivided* grace of the Father, having present in it an *undivided* Christ and enriched by the *undivided* Spirit. No, the local Church does not merely *belong* to the Church, the local Church *is* the Church. It is the real Church, to which in its own local situation everything is given and promised which it needs for the salvation of man in its own situation: the preaching of the Gospel, baptism, the Lord's Supper, different charisms and ministries. Second: The 'whole ekklesia' is not a 'collection' or 'association' of local Churches … . The Church is not a limited company or organization of individual communities; the ekklesia is not made by adding together the local Churches nor can it be broken down into them. Rather *the* ekklesia of God exists in each place.[14]

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13 Cf. J. Robert Nelson, 'The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Mankind', in Groscurth, p. 112: 'Church unity requires the personal relation-in-love of individual members. This must be reiterated because of the common disposition of ecumenists to think of unity almost wholly in terms of the organizational union of denominations'.

14 Küng, pp. 121–2. See Zizioulas, *BC*, pp. 23–5, 247–60, and Schwöbel, *Quest*, pp. 7–8, on the microcosmic character of the local Church. Contrast Runcie, p. 18, on 'the fragmented

Although not strictly a reiteration, Küng's words nonetheless echo the fifth chapter's concluding argument that the Church's life takes shape in the worshipping community's *experience* of God, given historically to humanity as the full dynamic of truth, baptism and eucharist in triadic interrelation, mutually completing – and mutually necessary, in that the Spirit's 'incarnation' does not exist in any one element specifically, but in all of them *dialogically*; to remove one from the equation is effectively to remove them all.

As to this fourth principle's ecumenical application, of critical importance is that to describe the local community as the universal-Church-microcosm, arguing also that denominational separation is fundamentally an interpersonal rather than an institutional phenomenon – to repeat, a matter of degree, not of kind – enables us to say that despite the substantive character of ecclesial division, so long as the Churches do actually recognize in one another's experiences of God a genuine (and therefore at some level common) experience of the *una sancta*, no single denomination will be in a position to arrogate to itself any single one of the triadic elements of pneumatic 'incarnation' that in the final analysis belong necessarily to and define dynamically the whole network of persons-coming-into-communion *and* each particular community in worship. Equally important, no Church may minimize the significance of any one element for actualizing the network without doing violence to the entire economy; the Church's *being* as pneumatic creature, realized over and again in each locality, must in some real sense be whole, or else it cannot *be*. *Thus, whatever the denomination, every local Church at worship, because of its place within and microcosmic iteration of the Church-event, will – indeed must – be said to embody without impairment all three elements of the pneumatic 'incarnation'.*

A caveat applies, however: these statements are not offered with the intention of prescribing ecumenical behaviour. Affirming through the triad's dialogical wholeness the Church-event's microcosmic *being* in all Nicene worship does not, for example, invite the immediate conclusion that the eucharist, as a 'shared commodity' amongst all baptized believers, demands of every denominational Church an open table. As welcome as intercommunion may be and as indicative as the act may be as a sacramental sign of genuine growth in communion amongst the persons involved, the outright demand for intercommunion – as opposed to its welcome reception as a free expression of love – signals a failure to appreciate the reality of division and sin that yet remains within the Church as a distinctive aspect of its historical outworking from its origins in oblivion into the life of God. In a sense the very absence of communion between two communities, both of which may now be seen as belonging wholly to the eucharist and it to them, may well carry a sort of 'negative sacramental' connotation that their interpersonal separation is indeed more serious than between those who do share the table. Likewise, affirming the communities' whole and common heritage in the triadic expression of the Church-event undermines any suggestion that agreement in all *minutiae* of faith – all the jots and tittles of any one group's canons and traditions – is exclusively the requisite condition for ecclesial recognition and communion; for this position, too, constitutes in no small way the denial of a signal reality of Church life: that historical believers,

nature of the Christian family'.

persons-coming-into-communion, now exist in the between-time as those who do not and cannot know as fully as they are known.

Yet this same affirmation, taken not as prescriptive but simply descriptive of the conditions of the Churches that actually exist and encounter one another in history, provides a clear means of identifying authentic ecclesiality in all of these bodies through their local doxological iterations and in so doing provides also a context in which the ultimate demands of truth, baptism and communion may be worked out. If we cannot demand eucharistic hospitality from every congregation, yet we can say that even in separation denominational Churches must meet ecumenically with the assumption of one another's full integrity *as Church* – as those who by the Spirit's tangible presence dwell truly in the heritage of faith. If we cannot demand the adherence of any one given Church to any one given confessional standard, yet we can say that the rule of truth must be conceived as rich, full, thriving and indeed *particular*; that, far from a mere 'minimum standard' of what the Churches can manage to agree upon, the experience of truth grows directly out of the Churches' tangible encounter with the real person of Christ in the real person of the Spirit—not least when those Churches meet one another ecumenically to explore its myriad, nuanced dimensions in the promise and foretaste of its wholeness.

However, the key to these statements as an articulation of ecumenical principle lies once again in the specific identification of this 'whole Church' that, as Küng says, is laid out before each locality: the vital point is that it comes to the faithful not simply as 'Church' in general, a mere intellectual abstraction, but as *Church-event*: the existential implication of believers into the *story* of creation and salvation: an *experiential* and *processional* confluence of eternal and historical dynamism, of which all three elements of the triad are expressions. That is to say, truth, baptism and eucharist embody not only the proclamation of God's sovereignty in the Last Day but also his sovereignty in the *directedness* of creation *from* oblivion (sin) *to* Paradise. This way of conceiving the triadic elements implies for the believers – simultaneously separated and coming together, both inter- and intra-denominationally – a certain continuity of experience, both as those who really taste the *Eschaton* in their encounter with the Spirit *and* as sinners in whom the perfecting Spirit is at work. Truth, baptism and eucharist, individually and dialogically, embody in the tangible life of the communities *both* aspects of God's revelation of forgiveness in Christ: hence the denominational Churches must relate to one another both as *communities in which the Gospel's fullness is revealed once-for-all* as the perfect Sonship of Christ still present and as *persons in whom that same Sonship is being fulfilled* by the work of the Spirit.

To give these points more specificity: we have before us the view of a Church that exists as persons-coming-into-communion and we have a view of its sacramental self-expression as a mutually conditioning and mutually necessary interrelation of baptism and eucharist in the experiential truth of God's presence as Event. Therefore, baptism, as that which establishes human persons, makes room for them within the confluence of persons whom in space-time the Spirit is bringing into God's own life, becomes that which places human persons in a fundamental, experiential continuity with the story of salvation history: it affirms their unique and particular places in the story and in so doing makes them *essentially* a eucharistic People. Through baptism

they belong – *must* belong – to the eucharist, even in the separation remaining between them, whether in one Church or many Churches, because through baptism they are united to Christ – creator incarnate, slain, resurrected and ascended; the eucharist, being his story, is also their story. Conversely, the eucharist, as the story of salvation history unfolded in its entirety in and as the local community in worship brings to bear upon that community not only the room that in baptism is made for it and for the persons therein, but also evokes tangibly in the very lives of those same persons the room that in baptism is made for *others* – other persons, other communities – *all*, that is, who in baptism also belong to the eucharist. In this respect every eucharistic celebration in one locality is an engagement with – indeed an experience of – every other eucharistic celebration in all places and all generations, *including those with whom the table is not yet shared.* For this reason the eucharist is a communion not only of each community's and all communities' life in the Kingdom, but also a communion in the pain of separation, a sharing in the feast's very brokenness from Church to Church – a confluence of persons around the Christ-event, revealed as what they will be, what they have been and *what they are*.[15] The eucharist, as the story of the Word with the world actualized in the worship of believers – all of whom through baptism belong to Christ, but not yet perfectly to one another – tells the Churches that they yet move in the resolution of past into future whilst evoking in them the promise of the Kingdom in which they have their home.

The 'rule of truth' in this *schema* is the actual faith both proclaimed by and revealed to the Church in the enactment of Christ's story – and in Christ its own story – in the baptismal and eucharistic worship of the believing communities. This truth is existential in nature, in that its appropriation by humanity grows out of the personal experience of perichoretic community in God and with humanity.[16] Moreover, by its rootedness in the once-for-all *Logos*-revelation (the Christ-event) and in sacramental signs as the entirety of salvation history made present in the Spirit, the faith of the Church is essentially *one*: insofar as the communities' life is rooted in their common baptismal and eucharistic experience of the triune God (including the common experience of continuing to emerge, in pneumatic dynamism, from sin and division), the faith they proclaim, despite some real ambiguity amongst their various proclamations, is nonetheless *fundamentally coherent*.[17] Yet, like the sacramental

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15 Not insignificant in this respect is imagery of baptism and eucharist as a sharing in the death of Christ in order to share also in his eternal life.

16 Cf. Christoph Schwöbel, 'Human Being as Relational Being', in Schwöbel and Gunton, p. 147: 'Faith is *ontologically* the mode of being in which human beings actualize their relational being in accordance with God's relationship to humanity.'

17 Cf. Gunton, *BTR*, pp. 15–16: 'There are, to be sure, variations within the credal confessions of the Christian church, some of them of major import, like the difference over the *filioque* … . But, despite all the blurred boundaries there is something recognisably the Christian faith, and it is transmitted in a range of credal forms which for all their variations, for all their requirement of the exercise of theological judgement and discussion, are fundamentally *stable*. Another way of putting the matter would be to say that there is a continuity of content and dynamic between the creed of Nicaea, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Barmen Declaration … . It can be argued that there is an overall gain in richness from the formulating of confessions to meet particular historical circumstances and demands.

expression in which and as which faith takes shape, faith is characterized in its essence by the dynamism of persons-coming-into-communion. It is the proclamation and enactment of Yahweh's Mightiest Act, the creation of a world – a People – to dwell in his Word: living and vibrant, it comes to meet the needs of every new place and generation so that all may become his People. And its essential oneness is the oneness of *event*, perichoretic and processional: in the context of the whole, proclaimed in every congregation, the ambiguities remaining now amongst them become not merely a sign of disagreement, but the sign of resolution into one perfect, eschatological truth: a People *becoming*. The baptismal and eucharistic faith therefore lives in persons who, in coming to appropriate their own particularity in God's will, come in the same movement to take into themselves the particularity of the *other* so that joining in God's story together in their celebration of the holy mysteries they may come to know and proclaim ever more fully their place in that story – their place together and in God – and thus to 'grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour' (2 Pet. 3:18) until one day in the final fullness of his communion with the Father 'all will be made alive' in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22, NIV).

Provisionalism re-visited

A bellwether question was posed at the conclusion of this study's first part with a view to gauging whether the provisionalist concept of Church emerging from modern ecumenical dialogue is capable of providing as a basis for broad ecclesiological convergence a meaningful account both of the credal *una sancta* and the multiple Christian Churches in history: *would the organic reunion of denominational Churches truly re-constitute the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in a form less damaged and provisional?* Or put conversely: *is it true to say that in the absence of organic union, separated believers participate in something less than the fullness of Christ's true Church?* A problem of deep ontological significance, it required for its answer a close investigation of the Church's very *being* as the earthly community in which the presence of an eternal God touches the world uniquely to proclaim its redemption. The resulting insights into the nature of unity and division in the Church's constitution *demand a negative respons*e.

The notion of the Church as *event*, the outworking of God's reign in space-time as the historical confluence of human persons, suggests a way of thinking about the nature of ecclesiality which renders unnecessary the merging of denominational Churches in order for them here and now to proclaim the Gospel efficaciously as Christ's own People.[18] Standing in the realm of space-time as, in Jürgen Moltmann's words, 'a way and a transition to the kingdom of God', the Church declares to the world by its very fleetingness – a constructive fleetingness emerging from the past

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But the impact of the Barmen Declaration came from its sharing of the beliefs of Nicaea, not from denying them; from its continuity with the historical parameters of the faith once for all delivered to the saints'.

18 The implication is *not* that the reunion of Churches would serve no meaningful function in the creative/salvific economy, but merely that it is not necessary in order for the Churches simply to *be* Church; further discussion on p. 185, below.

and 'determined by a divine future' – that the Word remains present and operative by his Spirit, sanctifying that which he has made and drawing all unto himself (John 12:32) according to the Father's will.[19] In this view the dynamic of interpersonal convergence itself takes on the pivotal role in the revelation of God's People as the living sign of the world's own history and vocation in the presence of its creator, confirming that by the very terms of its creaturely *being* the world – in the Word – lives in the hope of the Kingdom. Provisionality, to be sure, lies at the very heart of this revelation, but only in the more traditional sense that the Church lives in the world, directing itself and through it all things towards the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2).

Indeed the very fact that the Church is at its core *in the world* – a material phenomenon of space-time – is the crux of the matter, for in this respect the *utterly decisive impact of the incarnation* upon the Christian ontological and cosmological landscape means that the Churches that exist in plain sight *must count* in the proclamation of God's future reign, for, as Gunton argues, 'there is no timeless Church: only a Church then and now and to be, as the Spirit ever and again incorporates people into Christ and in the same action brings them into and maintains them in community with each other'.[20] However central the Churches' struggle to live in one Body by one Spirit (Eph. 4:3–4) may be to their vocation and indeed to their very *being*, *we cannot approach the problem of reconciliation in terms of making Christendom's multiple Churches 'more real' or even 'more Church'*, if by doing so we imagine the conceptual divorce of the visible communities from the concrete reality of God's living and uniting grace as the source that sustains their life. That is to say, we cannot root the authenticity of their *being*-as-Church in the reflection of an abstract unity – nowhere actually to be found in the world of space-time, but in which all truth nonetheless resides – nor even in an inherent but intangible unity that exists, pseudo-historically, only (as Anthony and Richard Hanson argue) 'in God's eyes', whilst in history proper yet remains hidden and obscured by ultimately illusory 'man-made' divisions.[21]

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19 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, 2d edn (London, 1992), p. 35.

20 Gunton, 'ChE', p. 79.

21 Hanson and Hanson, pp. 29–30: 'God does not recognize our divisions, even the most hallowed and ancient of them. If there is schism in the church, it is internal schism and we are all guilty of it. Despite our strenuous efforts through the centuries, we have not succeeded in dividing the church ontologically (in its being). It is still one in God's eyes'; p. 44: 'God has purchased for himself a holy church by the blood of his dear Son. That Church which exists on earth can only be one. Our divisions therefore have not succeeded in producing two churches or a hundred churches. They have only succeeded in obscuring the unity of the church to the outside world, in the same way that the sin of the individual Christian obscures to the outside world the fact of his redemption in Christ'. See also Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (London, 1953), p. 116. This study's present concern is not to argue that no real unity exists amongst the Church(es), but that, because ecclesiality is fundamentally historical, such unity must be seen publicly through the real conditions of God's People – not hidden away in the intangible. The concept of communitarian personhood-in-process means that just as God declares the Church holy, not through its members' moral suitability, but by setting aside *in*

In this light the incarnation yields two critical insights, both involving the integral rootedness of material *being* in the active, salvific presence of its eternal creator – fully human, fully material, fully present as God in the world, yet without attenuation of his perfect divinity – which, as we have argued previously, bespeaks necessarily a positive engagement between history and eternity, in direct contradistinction to the hellenistic denigration of the material that characterized the prevailing intellectual environment in which the doctrine arose. St John of Damascus encapsulates both insights in his eighth-century defence of Christian iconophiles against charges of idolatry:

> Of old, God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was never depicted. Now, however, when God is seen clothed in flesh, and conversing with men, (Bar. 3.38) I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honouring that matter which works my salvation. I venerate it, though not as God. How could God be born out of lifeless things? And if God's body is God by union (καθ υποστασιν), it is immutable. The nature of God remains the same as before, the flesh created in time is quickened by a logical and reasoning soul. I honour all matter besides, and venerate it. Through it, filled, as it were, with a divine power and grace, my salvation has come to me. Was not the thrice happy and thrice blessed wood of the Cross matter? Was not the sacred and holy mountain of Calvary matter? What of the life-giving rock, the Holy Sepulchre, the source of our resurrection: was it not matter? Is not the most holy book of the Gospels matter? Is not the blessed table matter which gives us the Bread of Life? Are not the gold and silver matter, out of which crosses and altar-plate and chalices are made? And before all these things, is not the body and blood of our Lord matter?[22]

The question of iconography is only tangential to the present concern; moreover, as was true for the earlier quotation from Basil, the ontological suppositions in John's words (the relationship of 'reasoning soul' and flesh, for example) bear marks of hellenistic conceptual frameworks. Yet undergirding the whole development of thought whereby John insists upon defending the venerable character of the material is a far more fundamental concept of matter informed first and foremost by faith in the incarnate *Logos*: a concept that, in the first instance, requires the material world, far from a necessarily-pale, half-hearted reflection of God's life, to be rich and full, brimming over, abundant with the life with which God has graciously seen fit to

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history a chosen People (Barth, *FC*, p. 117, quoted on pp. 136–7, above) who are by that very declaration simultaneously exposed for the real sinners they are and freed for sanctification in the Spirit, so too does God set aside in history *one* People who through Christ's blood truly share a common life and heritage, thereby exposing their real fissures for what they are and freeing them for unification in the Spirit. Unity is not extant 'in God's eyes' despite what humans have made of the Church, but rather exists and is being worked out *by God's declaration* in the midst of what humans *are*. Both unity and division impact on the Church's ontology. Both must be historical – *real* 'in God's eyes' and ours. And both will shape our understanding of what God achieves in redemption.

22 John Damascene, *On Holy Images*, trans. Mary H. Allies (London, 1898), online edn, part 1, u.e.d.

endow it *as matter* and most importantly, in the second instance, binds that richness of life inextricably to the actual work of salvation, signalling in matter a deep existential orientation towards the eternal – an orientation that finally determines all that it is and all that it has been in terms of all that it (in itself, with God) will be.

In other words: as we have seen previously, the incarnation, by virtue of the fact that God thereby comes to the world not as eternity in worldly costume, but simply eternity *as* matter, identifies the very work of salvation with the material history of creation, thereby liberating the created realm to be *in itself* what it is created to be, to become what it is created to become, with existential reference only to its subsistence in the divine will and purpose, not to its ability or inability to serve as an analogy of something else. More pertinent to the present problem: seen, as it must be, within the broader context of Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, the incarnation grounds the same salvific history of the material world in its culmination in God's eschatological reign. It identifies the material outworking of space-time as being ordered by Christ's presence in the Spirit to the great final glory of the *parousia*.[23] The incarnation thus creates an involvement of eternity with a material order arising *ex nihilo* which constructs the meaning of that order by pointing history *through* itself to its perfect fulfilment *beyond* itself.

For the Church(es) of Christ an incarnational cosmology so conceived by rooting history in the material phenomena whereby salvation is wrought abolishes all recourse – and all need of recourse – to the abstract and intangible as the focus of its 'true' meaningful *being*. Thus, 'the era of the Paraclete', as the continuing historical presence of Christ, suggests Nikos Nissiotis, 'signifies the *concretization, realization, manifestation* in time and life [of] Christ's Lordship after his resurrection by forming his Body, and sending out the Apostles, the Church'.[24] Yet in the self-same movement, by rooting history equally and simultaneously in the assurance of the age to come, the incarnation, by the resurrection and ascension, abolishes all suggestion – and all need of suggestion – that humanity's *perfect* engagement in God's triune communion must occur at any time before the Last Day in order for the Church(es) effectively to reveal Christ's eternal lordship in both heaven and earth.[25] The real ecumenical impact of the incarnation, resurrection and ascension is to suggest that in fact we *cannot* imagine a circumstance in which prior to the End the Church might attain the perfection required, if perfection were indeed the requirement, to proclaim the Kingdom more truly than is now within its capabilities or remit. Such, as the Apostles' own story suggests, is not the Church's vocation in the between-times:

> Now having met together [the disciples] asked [Jesus], 'Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority, but you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the earth's remotest ends.' (Acts 1:6–8.)

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23 John 12:44–5, 49–50a.
24 Nissiotis, p. 18.
25 Cf. Eph. 1:18–23.

On the purely pragmatic level the question of the basic criteria by which provisionalists would judge the Churches to be sufficiently reunited raises considerable logical and theological difficulties, particularly in light of this study's identifying the Church and Churches with relational personhood through an ultimately christological insight into God's triune life:

Generally speaking, statements from 'official' ecumenical sources such as the WCC and its subordinate committees suppose that the movement's goal at a minimum is the restoration of full sacramental intercommunion and mutually recognized ministries through a certain level of agreement on underlying doctrines.[26] Perhaps more characteristic of the movement is the contention that a truly undivided Church also requires structural reunion. Thus did Robert Runcie, for example, approach the issue in his opening statements to the 1988 Lambeth Conference, wherein he spoke in effect of his own Church's vocation to disappear:

> We must never make the survival of the Anglican Communion an end in itself, the Churches of the Anglican Communion have never claimed to be more than a part of the the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Anglicanism, as a separate denomination, has a radically provisional character, which we must never allow to be obscured.[27]

Similarly, but from the more general perspective of the Churches as a whole, both Paul Avis and the Hanson brothers borrow Lesslie Newbigin's phrase 'reunion without repentance' to argue that a federated solution to the problem of reconciliation would be insufficient. In Avis's words, 'intercommunion is … no substitute for ultimate organic unity. A federation of inter-communicating Churches would not answer to the ecumenical quest for *koinonia*.'[28]

But do these particular expectations for 'recovering a united Church' actually square with a more thorough examination of the Spirit's perfecting action at work in and amongst the lives of historical Christians?[29] Granted that sacramental intercommunion, convergence on doctrine and structural reunion are entirely proper and important ends to which the ecumenical movement works in order to bring the lives of the visible Churches' persons more closely together, can the achievement of these goals guarantee a Church more *authentic*? Even a cursory glance at the actual history of the Church(es) both modern and ancient gives rise to serious doubt.

To cite an extreme example, it was not after all the Church's unity but rather a profound crisis of disunity that led to the Council of Nicaea in 325. Moreover,

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26 F&O, *BEM*, Preface, 466: 'If the divided Churches are to achieve the visible unity they seek, one of the essential prerequisites is that they should be in basic agreement on baptism, eucharist, and ministry'. WCC, *Constitution*, §III: 'The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe'.

27 Runcie, p. 7.

28 Newbigin, *Household*, p. 22; Avis, *CiC*, p. 56; Hanson and Hanson, p. 36; cf. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Pressure of our Common Calling* (London, 1959), pp. 23–4.

29 Hanson and Hanson, p. 23.

the stakes in that dispute – the raging Arian controversy that up to the time of the Council's conclusion transpired between nominally communicant members of one undivided Church – cause the disagreements of the modern era to pale in comparison. Can we reasonably claim that the Church in 324 simply by virtue of its institutional wholeness somehow embodied *truth* in a manner less provisional than do the exclusively trinitarian Churches today, when in fact the former found itself unable to describe in terms agreeable to all the identity of the very God it encountered in worship? Similarly how should we approach the 'undivided' Church at Chalcedon roughly two centuries later (451), the 'unity' of which was preserved only by anathematizing and expelling the Oriental Orthodox Churches – which in modern times have contributed prominent leaders to the ecumenical movement – over christological differences that today are often said to have been largely the result of linguistic misunderstanding?[30] At what point in history is communion amongst these groups actually more evident? Or, to invoke a modern example of no small import: given the *Porvoo* intercommunion agreement, might not a liberal Anglican and a liberal Lutheran be said to live more closely in communion than would a liberal Anglican bishop and a conservative congregation nominally within his see which demands the ministries of a Provincial Episcopal Visitor? In none of these examples does the identification of 'true' ecclesiality with organic union finally commend itself as a viable means of conceiving the purposes and results of ecumenism; to the contrary, in these particular instances such a concept may actually prove misleading.

The point, of course, is not to suggest that increasingly common expressions of faith, sacramental communion and structural reunion have nothing substantial to do with a genuine public proclamation of the Churches' unity in God, but merely to emphasize that their meaning as efficacious signs lies wholly in particular human persons' *experiential* encounter of one another precisely as they are in God's creative/salvific outworking of history and, moreover, that their significance relies as much upon the fullness of the economy's outworking as on the immediate historical environment. The ecclesiological vision developed in the course of this examination suggests that monolithic, institutional ideas about ecclesiality, particularly in respect of interdenominational relations, must give way to a more subtle yet more realistic view of both inter- and intra-denominational relations – a view that engages humanity in a delicate existential dance of unity and disunity: the living interaction of particular persons in particular communities expressing itself in deeply nuanced ways. In practical terms this existential interplay imputes a certain distinct and historically substantial unity to the denominations now extant by virtue of the patterns

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30 Regarding the Oriental Orthodox' WCC involvement, see Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, 'Oriental Orthodox Churches', in *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds Nicholas Lossky *et al*. (Geneva, 1991), online edn, u.e.d.: 'Five of the [six] Oriental churches have contributed leaders to the ecumenical movement', including two WCC presidents, a moderator, a vice-moderator, a moderator for the Church and Society sub-unit, and at least four noted ecumenical theologians; the Armenians, additionally, have often played host to ecumenical meetings. For examples of modern christological agreements between Oriental Orthodox and Chalcedonian Churches, see John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV; OORD.

of personal interrelation within them, yet for the same reason hints at division even amongst 'united' communities.[31] In the context of the immediate problem – that is, the nature of the Church's 'true' unity – the relevant implication of identifying ecclesiality with a historically dynamic, personal-relational ontology accomplished in human beings through Christ's creative, salvific and pneumatic presence towards the world, most especially in the dynamic revelations of faith and sacrament, is that such a concept *frees* the Churches this side of reunion to *live truly* in history, even given that measure of disunity that is part of the human experience, in the sure knowledge that their unity is being resolved. Moreover, the principles of dynamic event-ecclesiology free even the future reunited Church projected hypothetically by ecumenical advocates simply to be what it would be (should it ever come about) without the burden of eschatological perfection imposed upon it out of place, yet also to maintain absolutely the prophetic call for persons in the Church and in all creation to come together ever more perfectly in the presence of the Lord who wills that they should fully share his life.

Therefore, we find that Torrance's christology, for example, here expounded in his brief essay, 'Ecumenism and Science', leads him smoothly and inevitably to a view of Church that proclaims God's Kingdom, crucially, *by the very act of ecumenical effort itself, not by its expected results*:

> Not only has God created the world out of nothing, with space and time as the medium of its order and of His interaction with nature, but He has confirmed it and established its relation to Himself through the incarnation of His Son within it, at once affirming the reality of space and time for the fulfilment of His own eternal purpose and binding man to space and time as the sphere of his life and work and communion with the Father.
>
> This is the world of space and time … in which the Church in obedience to the Saviour is engaged in the mission of reunion, proclaiming the Word of reconciliation and living it out among men, through evangelism and ecumenism.[32]

Simultaneously Gunton, whilst claiming (rightly) that 'the Church remains this side of eternity a highly fallible community existing in a measure of contradiction of what it is called to be' and even 'that there is need to bear constantly in mind the temptations, by no means always resisted, to regression into a fallen past', yet in the same breath also argues that by 'that which is from time to time realised by the Spirit', the Church here and now simply 'is what it is by virtue of being called to be a temporal echo of the eternal community that God is'.[33] There is no sense in either author's discourse that through ecumenical effort the Church must somehow become more closely analogous to perfection in order to bring Christ's light to the world – only that in all its bearings it must strive to become what in the fullness of time God has promised that indeed it will be.

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31 See pp. 173–4, above.

32 Thomas F. Torrance, 'Ecumenism and Science', in *God and Rationality*, [2d edn] (Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 112–13.

33 Gunton, 'ChE', pp. 74–5.

In sum and crudely stated: when the Church is conceived according these terms, there is nothing actually to be gained from the *ontological* standpoint by rounding up all Christians into one institutional body or even one eucharistic community. For the whole-Church-truth that the Spirit evokes perfectly and completely in every doxological act is no mere abstraction either of heaven or earth, but rather is that which places historical persons in a radical continuity with the Word-made-flesh and thereby into a radically existential encounter with the entire narrative, meaningful and coherent *as* narrative, of God's presence towards creation; it is humanity becoming the *history* of Christ through their *history* in the Spirit as the path to eschatological glory. Therefore, the reunion of believers, however desirable in respect of the ultimate goal of perfect unity, would nonetheless not change the *essentially transformational, forward-looking character* of the Church as the World-becoming-Kingdom. Interpersonal convergence would remain an event *in process* – both within the Church's internal framework and in its dynamic, proclamatory and levitical infusion of a world called by the Church's very repentance and turning from sin to respond in kind to the free grace of God in the promise of all that by Christ's saving work is to come.

Conversely the Churches as they now exist – a confluence of particular persons *from* their sin and division *into* communion with one another in the presence and promise of the triune Godhead's eternal dynamic – have in their *present* experience all that they require in order to proclaim and to *be* history-in-redemption. The whole event of God's one, holy, catholic and apostolic *ekklesia* lives in and as them all, both in the immediate perichoretic nature of their local worship itself and in the existential continuity of the local worship within the network of persons worshipping in 'all times and places' and thereby resolving into the *Eschaton*: the very pneumatic act whereby human persons are *coming together*, ordered by and ordering the real conditions of space-time according to the incarnate Word spoken into creation.

Now, to be absolutely clear: *the present argument in no way aims to deny the crucial importance of ecumenical effort for the Church's life and mission, nor does it suggest that the heart-felt struggle amongst Christian communities to realize a more perfect love by their reconciliation into wider eucharistic or even wider structural fellowships is merely wasted labour, bereft of meaning.* Indeed quite the opposite: this study's pivotal identification of the Church as the coming-into-communion of human persons with one another in the triune God's own life *imposes an unequivocal obligation upon Christians to seek unity wherever possible* as a sign of God's eschatological promise.[34] The Church, as Gunton claims, 'is the body called to be the community of the last times, that is to say, to realise in its life the promised and inaugurated reconciliation of all things'.[35] Far, then, from marginalizing the work of reconciliation, event-ecclesiology places ecumenism right at the heart of what it means to *be Church* in the world. And yet to make this assertion is to say something profoundly different from the provisionalist supposition that the Churches must first be unified before they can begin to proclaim truly the love of Christ, who alone amongst humanity is perfect.

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34 Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church* (London, 1959), p. 1.
35 Gunton, 'ChE', p. 79.

Conclusion: a 'new outlook and a new measure'

At the Lambeth Conference of 1920 the bishops of the Anglican Communion declared that

> the times call us to a new outlook and a new measure. *The Faith cannot adequately be apprehended and the battle of the Kingdom cannot be worthily fought while the body is divided, and is thus unable to grow up into the fulness of the life of Christ.* The time has come, we believe, for all the separated groups of Christians to agree in forgetting the things which are behind and reaching out towards the goal of a reunited Church.[36]

At the heart of this plea for Christian unity, quoted first at the study's outset – and now again with the benefit of hindsight – lies the self-same provisionalist principle that still serves so importantly, though often implicitly, to ground the work and thought of the modern ecumenical movement. As we begin to draw this study to a conclusion by returning to the first and most general formulation of the research problem – *has the ecumenical movement succeeded in fostering growth towards a common ecclesiological vision, viable in its handling both of the unity traditionally assigned to the Church and of the pluriformity of modern ecclesiastical experience?* – the presence of the provisionalist supposition as the primary operative principle in one of the ecumenical movement's seminal calls to arms may provide pause to wonder.[37]

That in this central respect the shared thought of the ecumenical movement remains in much the same place and cast in much the same language as it was more than eight decades ago suggests that the 'new outlook' and 'new measure' to which the Anglican bishops refer may well have gone unrealized, at least in respect of ecclesiology. Provisionalism remains a sort of shadow doctrine, a motivational article of faith and a methodological assumption, the full implications of which go mostly unexamined and unchallenged.[38] Moreover, because of the ways in which Churches have employed the idea, the major ecclesiological fault lines amongst the separated denominations remain unshifted on the whole. Despite the emergence of a few united Churches and intercommunion agreements amongst like-minded groups, the three major Christian traditions – Catholic, Orthodox and Reformation – remain, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, essentially stuck at many of the same root-level ecclesiological impasses that have characterized their relationships throughout

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36 LC1920, §IV, res. 9, quoted on p. 3, above, emphasis mine.

37 Paul Schaefer, '"Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed?": Ecumenism as a Twentieth Century Church Concern', *Modern Reformation* 7 (Sept.-Oct 1998), online edn: u.e.d.; Neville R. Callam, *Faith and Order: A Perspective from the Caribbean*, paper prepared for Faith and Order Consultation with Younger Theologians, Turku, Finland, 1995, online edn, u.e.d.

38 See p. 38, above; that in a few instances, for example, the Anglican-Lutheran *Porvoo Common Statement* (ALJC, par. 21–2), provisionalist premises have been cited directly as motives for establishing formal communion – *Porvoo*'s ratification by each participant Church elevates the theory to a quasi-doctrinal status – does not necessarily imply that provisionalism has been sufficiently explored theologically – and indeed lends the task a greater sense of urgency; cf. ALC, par. 55.

their separated history.[39] The rules of engagement, the language employed and the measure of trust amongst them, to be sure, have changed dramatically in the course of the 'ecumenical century'; that in itself is no small feat. Yet at the end of the day these groups remain both excommunicate and likely to stay so for decades still to come.

In light of this study's course of development and its ultimate rejection of the central provisionalist plank that the Churches would become ontologically more truly Church merely by reuniting, the situation cries out for a radical reconsideration of the ecclesiological models upon which the modern ecumenical movement has been built. Indeed, given the profound diversity and sheer number of Nicene Christian denominations, any refusal to entertain some real doubt as to whether the structural reunion of all Christians is even possible before the Last Day seems potentially less significant as an example of faith than of unfounded, blind optimism – that is, a very unsure cornerstone upon which to build ontological suppositions about the Church. Certainly the struggle for Christian unity in measures both large and small is in no sense optional to the communities who proclaim Christ's Gospel of reconciliation. Nonetheless, that reunion on the massive scale required by the terms of provisionalism can actually happen before the End is by no means assured, nor, according to event-ecclesiology, is it fundamentally necessary. Much more importantly we *can* be assured that the promise of humanity's *perfect* communion with one another in God's own life is wholly eschatological in nature. In the meantime Christians still live with the obligation to go about Christ's work, proclaiming the world's 'real situation'.

Yet however inadequate the provisionalist concept may be for answering the challenge of credible ecclesiological convergence, the message itself, as expressed at Lambeth in 1920, does present an incisive and abiding challenge to Christians to rise above their historical resentments, isolation and exclusivism and to realize in the Spirit's guidance an ever more common life in Christ as the fruit of their salvation and as their mission to the world. If, more than eight decades on, the provisionalist call to come together, that in love Christ's People may become Christ's face to the world, still resides near the heart of ecumenism, this is surely because such words have genuine resonance with the pain felt by real, living people over their inability to articulate more fully in deed their life in the 'one Body' of Christ (Eph. 4:4). John S. Pobee, a one-time delegate to the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, provides a compelling personal illustration:

> Of the many warm friendships, I recall one with Raymond Lessard, then Roman Catholic Bishop of Savannah in the USA. We ate together; we went to the pub together to 'break liquid bread' together. We had genuine respect for each other and tried to help one another. But at the formal meetings we could not share eucharistic fellowship.

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39 The present point is emphatically *not* to claim that important areas of theological convergence have not occurred; yet, as we have seen, ch. 1, n. 83, above, on some rudimentary issues upon which compromise is exceedingly difficult for all parties, the three major traditions remain at loggerheads.

… The pain of not having eucharistic fellowship with friends who happen to be Roman Catholic only spurs me to redouble my commitment to work at the ecumenical imperative. It forces me to give cash value to the biblical exhortation to the Christians of Ephesus 'to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:1–3). Ecumenism is more than politeness; it also means facing and engaging painful issues and differences, always respecting the humanity and dignity of the other.[40]

Moreover, the provisionalist proposition, whether implied or stated outright, does constitute in its various guises and expressions a serious attempt to address a number of legitimate theological concerns that arise when Christians begin to embrace the *other*'s presence as fellow believer rather than just another heretic. Despite our rejection of provisionalism's ontological implications, many of the positions the ecumenical movement aims to safeguard are indeed sound, among them:

(1) The affirmation that a Church universal does in fact exist as and amongst the separated Nicene Churches and therefore that all are to be understood as sharing in some sense the heritage of Christ's Church and a fellowship therein: 'We gladly accept that there is already a "real but imperfect" communion between Christians and between ecclesial communities given in our common baptism. This communion lacks the full visible expression which is its essential character'.[41]

(2) The identification of Christian separation as inherently an expression of human sinfulness: 'The God whose being is holy love, uniting the Father, Son and Spirit, draws us by the work of the Spirit into participation in the Son's love and obedience to the Father. This same holy love draws us to one another … . If then we refuse to accept one another in Christ we flout the grace by which he has accepted us and by which we live'.[42]

(3) The recognition of the search for more perfect communion as a turning from sin – humanity's necessary response to the Gospel mandate: 'Jesus said: "I, when I am lifted up will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). The Church is called to be the first-fruits and sign of that promise which is for all mankind. Its disunity is a sin against that promise. Church unity would be a false unity

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40 John S. Pobee, 'Perspectives for Ecumenical Formation Tomorrow', *The Ecumenical Review* 48 (Oct. 1996): 485–6.

41 House of Bishops of the Church of England, *May They All Be One: A Response of the House of Bishops of the Church of England to* Ut unum sint, House of Bishops Occasional Paper (London, 1997), par. 55; see John Paul II, par. 96: 'Could not the real but imperfect communion persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue … keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea "that they may all be one … so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (*Jn* 17:21)?'; cf. Hanson and Hanson, pp. 43, 48.

42 Anglican-Reformed International Commission, *God's Reign & Our Unity: The Report of the Anglican-Reformed International Commission* (London, 1984), par. 25; see also ELCA, p. 11; AOJDC, *Dublin*, par. 2.

if it were not for the sake of the fulfilling of that promise in all its universal scope'.[43]

(4) The cognisance of Christian persons' communicant participation in one another in God as a witness to the world of humanity's vocation in God's will: 'We are aware that Christian disunity … has often contributed towards the divisions of the world. We know that the Church is entrusted with a message of reconciliation. This drives us to seek unity amongst ourselves, in order to contribute to the healing of the divisions of humankind, as well as to stand together as Christians who face difficulties and pressures, and who witness to Christ's truth in a hostile or indifferent world'.[44]

Each of these propositions has figured prominently in this study's development of a dynamic ecclesial ontology rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity. In this respect we see most basically in both provisionalism and event-ecclesiology the *common aim* of preserving some measure of ecclesial identity amongst the Christian faithful in the face of their tendency to isolation – that is, to find a means of identifying the separated Nicene communities with the *una sancta* despite the veil of human sinfulness in which division and separation are fundamentally rooted.

In the end, however, the provisionalist approach accomplishes the opposite effect by treating division and sin as that which obscures the theological significance of God's People as the community wherein God dwells on earth enacting forgiveness and reconciliation before the world. By denying that Churches can be fully, visibly, historically ecclesial without first bringing all Christians into an organic union provisionalism ultimately creates earthly communities that live necessarily and tragically in the shadows of history, never entirely divorced from their vocation to proclaim redemption in Christ, but neither truly capable of actualizing that vocation in the world in which they live. Simply put: ecclesial provisionality conceived according to these terms means (ironically) that, because of their sin, the Churches we see before us cannot do what the Spirit most fundamentally forms the Church to do: to exist towards the world sacramentally as the concrete sign of God's free and unconditional grace to the sinner.

In contrast we have developed in the course of this investigation four key ideas for grappling with the problem of authentic ecclesiality amidst the divided communities of Christ – ideas which, importantly, address head-on the problem of sin and separation as a matter of fundamental theological import:

(1) the material and spatio-temporal character of salvation (*theosis*), established in Christ the incarnate *Logos*, as the purposeful outworking of God's creative act within creation's own historical context;

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43 ARIC, par. 17; see also ELCA, p. 11.

44 AOJDC, *Dublin*, par. 2; cf. Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission, *Ways to Community* (Geneva, 1981), par. 8: 'Christian unity is … a blessing of the Triune God … and directed towards a unique, truly all-encompassing community'; ARIC, par. 27: 'Their corporate life is to be nothing less than a real participation in the life of the triune God – a life lived always in Christ and offered to the Father through the power of the Spirit. When it is so, there will be a credible witness to the world of God's action in Christ (John 17:21)'.

(2) humanity's ecclesial vocation to turn from the oblivion (*nihilum*) from which all creation came and to which it tends and join perichoretically in the very life of God, that is, in the divine conversation of the Father speaking his Word and responding in his Spirit;

(3) the Church as the Spirit's 'incarnation', the 'empirical counterpart' of his sustaining, healing and perfecting creativity, whereby he establishes human particularity by his indwelling of humanity's historical life, ordering those persons according to the Word and enabling them to become towards the Father as Christ is towards the Father;

(4) the Church as an event-in-process lived out and signified in the efficacious triadic dynamic of faith, baptism and eucharist: the narrative of Christ in solidarity with the world, drawing particular persons to himself and to one another – meaningful as event in its entirety, yet as event directed towards and culminating in God's eschatological reign proclaimed once for all in Christ's atoning work.

To be sure, this claim that event-ecclesiology assigns theological significance to division cannot be taken to mean that division amongst the Christian faithful is finally an acceptable option nor that sin as such has any *being* other than as the oblivion from which humanity is formed. Indeed, precisely because the concept of Church as event is founded upon the affirmation of perichoretic personhood as the elemental unit of both trinitarian ontology and the creative/salvific economy, division and isolation amongst human beings either inside or outside the Church is not nor ever can be normative in an *absolute* sense. In this respect event-ecclesiology is entirely harmonious with ecumenical provisionalism.

The seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel sets the standard of unity for the Church when it depicts Christ praying shortly before his death:

> May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognise that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you have loved me. (John 17:21–3.)

A beloved, oft-cited passage in ecumenical circles, the verse's profound significance is that it roots the *final* normative condition for Christ's followers entirely in the perfect community of human persons within the all-embracing love of the Father for the Son. In our own historical context, of course, that perfect community in God may not yet have been brought to completion, but the drive towards and assurance of existential community is paramount: in the final analysis God's love, given in the very act of creation and embodied perfectly in his Word, leaves no room for sin and division in the People formed in his Spirit.

Yet, even so, from the event-perspective human separation is no illusion: this assertion delineates a most critical distinction between ecumenical provisionalism and event-ecclesiology. Whereas the former treats division ontologically as *negatively significant* for the Church's *being*, the latter treats division as *negative ontology* impinging upon the Church's *being*: very much real, not, of course, in the sense that

it derives from anything other than oblivion, but in the sense that sin is a palpable fact of the Church's human, earthly life, indicative of each person's existential struggle between the vocation to *be*-in-God and an origin in non-*being*, and is thus to be understood as an integral factor in the economy of salvation, highly significant to our understanding of what God was actually doing 'in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:19).[45]

In simplest terms the pneumatic revelation of Christ in the Church is not merely a revelation of humanity's community in God. It is also a revelation that in a single, majestic and historical event God himself unites himself to the world he creates, thereby calling humanity – and ultimately creation itself – out of divided, separated, isolated individuality and shaping them into a holy People, communicant within his own life. Although the fundamental demand for unity amongst God's People remains therefore the normative calling for ecclesial life, it is nonetheless a calling that cannot be seen apart from the entire course of salvation history. We must view it as a movement in a larger four-dimensional process by which sanctification occurs, a process which extends from creation's beginning in nothingness to the fullness of *being* in the *Eschaton* and which can be understood coherently only when viewed in its totality.

There is not, in a word, simple unity in the economy of salvation: there is *movement towards* unity from within the species of space-time. And this process of movement, *theosis*, necessarily entails a *movement from* division. The fractured nature of the Christian communities confronts both the world and the believer alike with the real and true condition of humanity: both fallen and chosen. Whilst baptism and the eucharist stand out in the Church communities as the tangible signs of redemption being effected by the Spirit's animated, gracious presence, the context of these sacraments' appearance – the broken People of God coming together in faith to seek unity in this world and to experience God's eschatological promise for the next – indicates what in fact is being healed (hypostatic isolation and ultimately death) and declares publicly the process of reconciliation while it actually occurs. God transforms the very fact of human brokenness so that in the Church the world may see the glories and firstfruits of its own restoration going on in its midst – although only the firstfruits, not in itself the final result (Rom. 8:23, Jas. 1:18).

For this reason, therefore, a very specialized sense exists in which we legitimately may treat ecclesial separation as *economically normative* for our understanding of God's uniting, relational action towards and within humanity: normative not precisely because God wills it, but rather because in it we see the death of the world that God is willing away. Both T.F. Torrance and Karl Barth argue that the Church's designation as holy is not to be seen as a moral assessment of its members; rather, they argue, the Church is holy because God has declared it holy and from that declaration is then working out holiness within it.[46] By the same token, the Church is one, the persons within it are one, because God has declared it one and from that declaration is then working out unity within it. Although the world undoubtedly sees

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45 Cf. Torrance, *DC&O*, pp. 119–20.
46 Torrance, *TrinF*, pp. 280–1; Barth, *FC*, p. 117, quoted on pp. 136–7, above.

both holiness and unity in ecclesial life, nurtured in some real way in the Spirit's ecclesial nursery, neither has yet been brought to completion nor can it fully be until history itself is complete. From this perspective, therefore, to treat division as theologically insignificant, merely a blight that obscures the Church's 'true' nature, is finally to miss the point of what God is actually accomplishing for humanity in the economy of salvation.

Herein lies the fatal flaw of ecumenical provisionalism; and if the insights developed in this study are valid, then the provisionalist position, insofar as it represents the ecclesiological assumptions driving modern ecumenism (a point to which we shall return momentarily), cannot finally provide a viable framework for conceptualizing unity and plurality amongst the multiple Churches of Christ. By dismissing out of hand the possibility that the separation of Christians into denominational Churches may itself raise matters of genuine ecclesiological consequence, rather than serving merely to hide the Church's 'light under a bushel' (Matt. 5:15, Luke 11:33, AV), the provisionalist concept fails to allow the plural state of Churches to inform our understanding of the Holy Spirit's operation in effecting redemption. In doing so the concept not only casts aside as immaterial the real conditions in which denominational Churches find themselves, but also as a direct and simultaneous result undermines utterly, despite all explicitly contrary intentions, the vision of the one Church of Christ actually witnessed in scripture and tradition: the community wherein God begins the work of reconciliation in flesh-and-blood sinners by bringing them face to face with their sin (cf. Rom. 7:14–25), declaring them sinless purely by his free gift of grace in Christ (cf. Eph. 2:3–6), and *then* enabling them in their lives together to 'work out' their 'salvation in fear and trembling', giving them 'for his own generous purpose … the intention and the power to act' (Phil. 2:12–13), so that 'when he appears' they 'shall be like him' (1 John 3:2). If finally the Churches we see now before us are not freed through their very acts of reconciliation in God's love to actualize the Gospel in a meaningful way – to proclaim the profoundly unprovisional truth delivered once for all time at the Empty Tomb and in so doing to be *theosis* acted out corporately in the world – may we not seriously question whether they could ever become so freed simply by merging their structures?

And yet in the end the reticence of the World Council of Churches and other institutional arms of modern ecumenism up to this point to define more clearly a vision of where and how the *una sancta* exists amongst the plurality of Christian Churches or how they as plural Churches may relate back to the *una sancta* may well be a boon in disguise. In general the literature of modern ecumenical dialogue has done little, as we have said, to define any clear parameters for the provisionalist concept or explore in depth its wider ramifications.[47] Although this failure makes close examination of the concept an awkward and slippery task, it also means that important ambiguities often attend the concept's expression – which in this case leave as a still-open matter the future direction of ecumenical ecclesiology.

Indeed the casual, assumptive manner in which provisionalism most commonly is employed (as opposed to more explicit, chosen argumentation) allows ample room

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47 See pp. 35ff., above.

for engagement with different ideas about Christian unity and plurality – space to draw upon both old and new insights that may eventually prove more conducive to ecclesiological convergence. In fact only rarely does talk of ecumenical provisionality or its associated concepts (invisible or mystical unity, for example) occur as a sole premise or primary context in statements or documents – as it does, for example, in the *Porvoo* agreement and Runcie's Lambeth Conference speech. Far more common is to find hints and guesses of provisionalism juxtaposed in dialogue, tension and sometimes conflation with more traditional ideas about the Church's constitution (present and future) – as is true for the WCC's *Toronto Statement*.[48] The 1984 report of the Anglican-Reformed International Commission, for example, subsumes its main provisionalist statement, cited earlier in this study, within the larger context of a profoundly rich theological exposition of Christian life as 'nothing less than a real participation in the life of the triune God' which echoes numerous themes raised in the course of this study, not least a perichoretic life in Christ 'both deeply personal and inescapably corporate' and the Church as an eschatologically 'provisional embodiment of God's final purpose for all human beings and for all creation'.[49] Likewise, Avis, who refers to a 'tacit unity' of faith recognized more commonly by grassroots believers than by leaders haggling over doctrine, argues in common provisionalist phrases that these believers need to be 'set … free to explore in their own time and way the unity that, already in their possession, waits to be fully entered into'.[50] Yet he identifies this unity not with mystical or invisible qualities, but rather entirely with concrete phenomena: doxological experience and faith lived in the world.[51] And finally, to take an example from two who are unabashedly provisionalist in outlook, the Hanson brothers in the midst of their oft-repeated fanfare about the Church undivided 'in God's eyes', which must 'answer in existential reality to what God has given us in heavenly reality', nonetheless concede quietly elsewhere that 'the real unity of the church is not complete until the *parousia*' and even that 'were all our denominations to disappear into one organically united church there would still be plenty of scope for growth in unity'.[52]

This commingling of provisionalist language with that of other schools of thought, taken together with the same lack of provisionalist definition mentioned previously, suggests three important points:

(1) Insofar as further growth towards unity may require new ecclesiological frameworks, the ecumenical movement is not locked into those finally demanded by provisionalism. Although heretofore provisionalist methodology has provided a workable means of getting Churches into conversation and enabling a degree of mutual recognition and convergence, ecumenism as a general movement may not have become so irretrievably wedded to the

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48 WCC, *Toronto*, examined on pp. 37ff, above; see also, for example, RCLJC, *Ways*, pars. 4–8.

49 ARIC, par. 27; par. 30.

50 Paul Avis, *Ecumenical Theology and the Elusiveness of Doctrine* (London, 1986), p. 128.

51 Ibid., pp. 127–8.

52 Hanson and Hanson, pp. 44, 57.

concept as to be unable to disengage from it when and if required in future in order to take the movement further along its path.[53]

(2) The Churches and theologians who employ provisionalist language may not be prepared in all or even most cases to take on board all of the concept's epistemological and ontological consequences when it is held up to closer scrutiny. That is to say, although provisionalism has in its underlying way been broadly representative of the modern ecumenical approach to the doctrine of the Church(es), this may well be the case only because its implications have not been more rigorously thought out. The concept is in that sense representative of ecumenical ecclesiological thought only by default.

(3) The ecumenical movement has the tools at its disposal to reconsider the Church(es) in their interrelation with God and one another with a view to overcoming the problems raised by a provisionalist ecclesiological framework. Ecumenical dialogue has produced a clear view of certain important ecclesiological premises demanded by the Gospel: the recognition of Christian persons' involvement with one another as Church even in separation, the equation of separation with sin and the search for unity with repentance, and the appreciation of the Churches' vocation to seek unity as an expression of creation's vocation to live in God. Ecumenism's failure successfully to articulate these premises through provisionalist ecclesiology has not closed off access to other avenues of thought that might better accomplish that goal.

Therefore, bearing in mind the 'new outlook' and 'new measure' to which the Lambeth bishops called Christian Churches some eight decades ago, there is no reason to suppose from this study's negative response to provisionalism that the task of ecclesiological convergence is closed off, nor that the impasse between the three major Church traditions, created at least in part through provisionalist ecclesiology, represents the end of the ecumenical road. Yet the call is a reminder that, just as Christian persons and denominations individually are involved in the Spirit's perfecting action, so too are the Churches together: the need for introspection and reform remains constant.

In reality the hardest work towards ecclesiological convergence has yet to be done. Much discussion and introspection has occurred generally in recent years concerning insiders' and outsiders' perception of an ecumenical identity crisis – loss of direction in the movement, stagnation and redundancy in its discussions and confusion about the next logical steps towards reconciliation.[54] Yet with crisis comes also a window of opportunity, a chance to take stock of how far the Churches have come towards their goal, a moment to look back with hindsight upon all that has been learned from their journey together and in that light to refine the vision of the future – *to re-imagine the frameworks of shared inheritance and mutual interaction*. In respect of the ecclesiological challenge the timing is perfect, for only recently has the ecumenical movement as a whole – as Churches working all together, rather than

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53 Indeed the concept of ecclesial provisionality presented in CoE-ECG, par. 7, resonates strongly with this study's event-ecclesiology.

54 Cf. Aram I, u.e.d., quoted on p. 8, above.

in bilateral dialogue – felt sufficiently confident to turn its eyes explicitly to the task of 'saying what can be said together' about the doctrine of the Church with the aim of building the kind of broad ecclesiological consensus that must eventually coalesce before Christians will ever be able to take wide-scale denominational reunion from expectant hope into shared reality. This task inevitably will require the Churches individually and collectively to expose fearlessly not only their systematic doctrines but also their hidden assumptions about their experience of God in the Church for the sake of a deep, honest, thoughtful and perhaps even painful airing amongst their peers in the cold light of day.

The arguments presented in this study suggest that through this process, when it comes, the provisionalist concept of Church should give way to a framework that better encapsulates the Christian Peoples' common experience, both as united and separated persons, of salvation in Christ's Church. We have suggested an alternative view: a concept of the Church as an event-in-process, an event of persons-in-reconciliation, rooted in the dynamic tri-personal life and creative will of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Although this vision of ecclesial unity and multiplicity offers no guarantee that full reunion can or will be accomplished by ecumenical activity prior to the *parousia*, it underscores even more radically than the provisionalist notion itself the need for Christians to press on with ever greater thirst in their cause of reunion. For when we come to see the Church first and foremost in terms of interpersonal reconciliation in God through Christ, not only does the goal of perfect unity become paramount for the Spirit's revelation of God's People, but indeed the act of *driving towards* unity takes on equally critical significance. Therefore, regardless of whether the Churches involved in the ecumenical task actually believe that the goal can be accomplished before Day of Christ, still they *must* come to the table in the sure expectation that God in his faithfulness will draw the Christian people ever closer together in a profound experience of communion – and will do so *visibly*, as he does even now. *This is the promise given in Christ* and the witness that the Church has to bear. For in the end the eternal goal of perfect unity is – and ever has been – guaranteed; it is the *journey of love* that most clearly matters for our world of space and time.

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