

THE CHURCH  
AND THE CHURCHES

*Toward an ecumenical ecclesiology*

G. R. EVANS

*Lecturer in History  
University of Cambridge*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
**UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1994

First published 1994

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Evans, G. R. (Gillian Rosemary)  
The Church and the churches: toward an ecumenical ecclesiology / G. R. Evans.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 46286 X (hardback)

1. Church. I. Title.

BV600.2.E94 1994

262'.001'1-dc20 93-42441 CIP

ISBN 0 521 46286 X hardback

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction	i
1 Local and universal	18
2 Ecclesial identity	121
3 Diversity	174
4 Restoring to order	212
5 Decision-making	251
6 Communion	291
Conclusion	315
<i>Select bibliography</i>	319
<i>Index</i>	326

## *Introduction*

### THE SAME AND THE DIFFERENT

There is a sense in many quarters that the ecumenical movement has become becalmed. A number of promising bilateral rapprochements has not yet resulted in the hoped-for unions. Enthusiasm can flag when great and honest effort is not visibly rewarded. But there must be two lessons in the failures, both of which are important for keeping up the spirits. The first is that mending the divisions of hundreds of years will take a great deal more time than anyone expected, though no one should really have expected anything else. The second is that these delays and setbacks are helping us to see what the problems really are.

The reformers of the sixteenth century believed that the removal of accretions which they saw as corruptions could restore primitive and therefore (they assumed) pure Christianity. But at the same time they themselves brought about a shift of emphasis in theological preoccupations towards a concern with sacramental and anthropological questions of grace and sin which had different emphases from those of the first centuries.<sup>1</sup> A systematic reading-through of the contents of ecumenical journals during the last twenty-five or thirty years shows them reflecting the pervasive shifting of both attitudes and expectations which has taken place in almost all churches since the Second Vatican Council, and the ways in which these expectations may be at variance with the stated agenda.<sup>2</sup> So conscious purpose and partly unconscious assumption can often diverge. The task now is patiently to seek to gain access to what is happening in this undergrowth of ideas so

<sup>1</sup> A. Houssiau, 'Réception et rejet d'un consensus conciliaire', *Christian Unity*, p. 518.

<sup>2</sup> For earlier manifestations of similar patterns in ecumenism, see O. Rousseau, 'Le Sens oecuménique des conversations de Malines', *Irénikon*, 44 (1971), 331-48.

that the end towards which we are working can be seen more clearly.

At the Council of Florence (1438–45) a party if not the majority of the Greeks hoped to recover the primitive unity of Christians, so that the Church might be one as it had been in the first age.<sup>3</sup> We have said that the reformers of the sixteenth century believed that if innovations (which they were sure were corruptions) were removed, primitive Christianity could be restored. In the seventeenth century many were confident that Christians could come to agree on ‘fundamentals’ which could safely be taken to have been the basics of the beginning of the Church too. In the nineteenth century Tractarians still held that unity could be restored on the basis of the faith and order of the undivided Church. At the Faith and Order Conference held at Lausanne in 1927, Orthodox Christians continued to call for a return to a unity ‘based on the common faith and doctrine of the ancient, undivided Church of the seven Oecumenical Councils and the first eight centuries’.<sup>4</sup> The same ideal was held up by the Orthodox at successive Faith and Order Conferences in the following decades.

The heart of the Orthodox ideal is surely right. If we cannot be sure that a future united Church will be the same Church as that of the Apostles, body of the same Christ, then ecumenical labour must be in vain. Yet in a practical sense it would certainly be impossible to go back. Language and categories of thought have changed, and no one can now enter completely into the mind of the early Church and live there. Bad memory may perhaps be purged, but it cannot be as though separation had never been.<sup>5</sup> It is argued by other Christians that there not only cannot but should not be a going back, that the goal of Christian unity should be a Church which encapsulates and expresses the enlargement of understanding which has come with the intervening centuries of division; and that the providential purpose of the Church’s mixed history has been to make that possible. This is to accept that the divided centuries have had their effect, and that a future united Church cannot be what the

<sup>3</sup> J.-P. Arrignon, ‘Les Russes au Concile de Ferrara–Florence’, *Irenikon*, 47 (1974), 188–208, giving the account of Simeon de Suzdal.

<sup>4</sup> V.T. Istavridis, *Orthodoxy and Anglicanism*, tr. C. Davey (London, 1966), pp. 96–7.

<sup>5</sup> These are the sentiments of the hymn, ‘Sinners whose love can ne’er forget / The wormwood and the gall.’ See, too, A. Bea and W.A. Visser’t Hooft, *Peace among Christians*, tr. J. Moses (New York, 1967), p. 213.

undivided Church once was.<sup>6</sup> But it is also to hold that God can bring out of the division something better than that which was lost. Division becomes a *felix culpa*.

The third possibility is that the right way forward is to seek to bring these ideals together in a future united Church which is both demonstrably still the Church of the first centuries and manifestly the living Church of today's world. That is to see the Church as 'a living being . . . developing as every living thing develops, changing itself . . . and yet in essence always the same, and its core is Christ'.<sup>7</sup> This book is written on the assumption that this attempt to hold both together in seeking the goal of unity is the right – indeed the only – way.

#### THE PROBLEM OF ECCLESIOLOGY

Ecumenism cannot proceed without an ecclesiology. But it is not easy to settle on ecclesiological principles which will be acceptable to everyone and acceptability to the whole community is ecumenically essential. We might choose to keep to the great Biblical themes and images: sheepfold, flock, field, vine, God's building, holy temple, holy city, betrothed, body of Christ.<sup>8</sup> But the Bible's pictures have not kept the Church visibly together. We might work with the rules of order which developed during the first millennium and a half. We might try to strike a balance between the emphases generated within that order and those of the dissident and reforming communities of the sixteenth-century West which challenged some elements of that ecclesiology in the name of getting back to scriptural basics. We might concentrate on recent theory, some of which has been radical, much of it a restatement of earlier notions in modern frames of reference. All these will have their advocates and detractors, and none except the scriptural models will speak to all Christians' thinking.

None of these can be quite satisfactory if it is exclusive of others. If

<sup>6</sup> See J.M.R. Tillard, 'Eglise catholique et dialogues bilatéraux', *Irénikon*, 56 (1983), 5–19, pp. 9–10.

<sup>7</sup> Ratzinger, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> These 'all have God, Christ or the Spirit as active subjects', points out Duquoc. He suggests that in a hierarchically constituted Church, the bishops with the assistance of priests, become the active subjects. C. Duquoc, *Provisional Churches: An Essay in Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, tr. J. Bawden (London, 1986) (*Des Eglises provisoires; Essai d'ecclésiologie oecuménique*, Paris, 1985), p. 47.

we believe it is the same Church which has survived in the world since Christ founded it, then all the accounts which have been given of it, all its pictures of itself, have a place. That is an ecclesiological position in itself, and it is the one adopted here.

If the ecclesiologies of history have all contained truths, if they describe the same Church, they must cohere. The ecumenical task is to discover their coherence. That is not so difficult before we get to relatively modern times. There was organic growth of models and structures to meet pastoral and practical – and sometimes political – need in the centuries up to the Reformation in the West. Reformers' challenges were shaped by what they saw to have happened to the Church, and their thought-forms and assumptions persisted in succeeding centuries. Modern challenge has been of a different order. It has been made out of a sense that we understand things better now; that we see more clearly; that man advances. I think that can be disputed. But the premiss of the intellectual superiority of modern ecclesiology has to be allowed for in the discussion.

What we are to see as the task and role of the Church will depend on the context we envisage for its operation. The loss of general Christian contact with the cultural milieu in which early Christianity developed, especially in the Third World churches whose heritage is different and which now want to assert the value of that heritage in its own right, creates a strong sense that the Christian foundations have to be restated in terms of new and varied cultures. Yet the old ways of thinking have to be synthesised with the new. Members of the Church through the ages will have to be able to communicate in heaven. They have to recognise one another's faith in their own from age to age.

There has recently been a sense in many quarters that conventional ecclesiology has become diverted into a preoccupation with secondary issues. By this are meant the domestic and internal problems of the Church. Thus, it is suggested, ecclesiology has lost sight of 'the heart of the Gospel' and what is 'distinctive and unique' in the Christian religion.<sup>9</sup> So the thrust of the new ecclesiology is to get back to what really matters, and what really matters is saving the world.

Present types of solution to the problem of finding an ecclesiology

<sup>9</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (London, 1989), p. xiii. (*Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn, 1989).)

for the modern world fall broadly into perhaps four groups of further ideas.

*The otherness of God and the question of transcendence*

One school of thought argues that the key question is whether God is somehow with us, or so absolutely 'other than us' that we can never really know him. (Christians have been here before, notably in the struggle of the first centuries to 'place' Christianity in relation to Platonism.)

This axis of modern ecclesiological concern, running from an extreme doctrine of God-with-us to an extreme doctrine of divine 'otherness' from us, is not in itself highly sensitive ecumenically. But it shares with others a tendency to make ecumenical concerns seem less urgent and less central, because it does not itself put unity at the heart of the Church's welfare.

*Eschatological accounts of the Church*

The 'eschatological' axis of modern ecclesiology forces us to think big ('your God is too small').<sup>10</sup> The key theme here is the all-embracing character of the Church, its relation to creation in space and time and eternity. Eschatology has always been central to Orthodox ecclesiology. Until the nineteenth century in the West it had been entirely respectable intellectually and academically to set historical events in a framework extending before history to creation and after present events to eternity, and to assess their operation and the lessons to be drawn from them accordingly. Augustine's two cities work in that way.<sup>11</sup> The Church in history was on this view ultimately inseparable from the Church as heavenly community. So in a sense the modern revival of concern for the eschatological dimension of the Church's life has been a return to an old sense of this necessary complementarity.<sup>12</sup>

Yet there seems to be an inherent danger of losing this balance. It turns out not to be easy to hold the *eschaton* in view. Schillebeeckx

<sup>10</sup> John Young, *Our God is Still Too Small* (London, 1988), contributes to this debate.

<sup>11</sup> In *De Civitate Dei*.

<sup>12</sup> *Basic Questions in Theology*, ed. W. Pannenberg, tr. G.H. Kehm (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 15–80. C. Morse, *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 3. Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1987), covers this transition.

speaks of 'The eschatological fullness and freedom of men and women, which is sought and constantly found in a fragmentary way, only to be constantly threatened again.'<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Moltmann took this further, and offered a secure life-line, by placing an emphasis on the concept of promise. If the life of the Church in history points forward it must do so by fulfilling God's promise.<sup>14</sup> This can be seen not only as reinstating in its proper place the Biblical notion of covenant but also as providing a modern substitute for the notion of providence which Christian philosophy took over from the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition.<sup>15</sup> In both cases it is understood that the divine plan overarches history and acts within it to bring about God's intended outcome. This is a comforting doctrine and at the same time one which enlarges the scale of operations. In recent decades a further strand of the historiographical development has been spun. Karl Rahner has tried to effect a reintegration, by denying the possibility of separation between intellectual or speculative theology and the practical theology which derives from events and applies itself to needs.<sup>16</sup>

Schillebeeckx points to four aspects of the eschatological vision which have become particularly appealing in the current sociological climate. The first is the promise that God will be all in all, so that there will be no more pain or tears, no more master-servant relationships, but equality in brotherly and sisterly love. The second is an interpretation of the resurrection of the body in terms of perfect fulfilment for the individual. The third is the ecologists' paradise of the new heaven and the new earth. The last places the emphasis upon the parousia of Jesus Christ, when the whole world will understand the significance of Jesus and the kingdom of God will be consummated.<sup>17</sup>

But such thinking also has an impact, beyond the broad shape of things, on the detailed texture of the Church's being. The recognition that the Church lives its life beyond time as well as in time has implications for the concept of continuity in the Church's life. On

<sup>13</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> J. Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (Munich, 1964), *Theology of Hope*, tr. J.W. Leitch (New York, 1967). Newer eschatologies agree that 'the anthropological solution to the eschatological problem' is not adequate. Morse, *The Logic of Promise*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> H. Chadwick, 'Providence and the problem of evil in Augustine', *Augustinianum* (Rome, 1987), 153-62.

<sup>16</sup> On this, see conveniently A. Carr, *The Theological Method of Karl Rahner* (Missoula, Montana, 1977), p. 154.

<sup>17</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 133.

this view, interruptions in sequence and apparent historical breaks stand embedded in the timelessness of eternity. Breaks are thus not necessarily ends; and under providence and with the assurance of promise they need not be ultimately destructive of the ecclesiality of the communities in which they occur. Ecumenically as well as ecclesiologically this is reassuring thinking, especially in connection with some of the problems we shall be meeting in the pages which follow.

### *Engagement with the world*

A further group of explanations pressed by recent theological exploration presents an ecclesiology of responsibility. Here the key theme is that love imposes an obligation to strive energetically to achieve fairness and fulfilment for oneself and one's neighbour. The Church is seen as having a primary duty to make that happen. This, too, comes in several forms. Like the ecclesiology of promise-providence it has both ancient and modern features, and can be seen as partly a translation of classic positions into terms with which modern concerns can engage. The precedent in this case is the anti-clerical and anti-hierarchical dissidence which marked the revolts, well documented from the twelfth century, which eventually led to the divisions of the Reformation period in the West. These had a good deal to do with resentment about the abuse of power claimed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy over the ordinary lay believer.

A post-Vatican-II dichotomy is now with us, especially in the last decade, between those who now see the Church primarily as the whole 'people of God', and those who are still inclined to 'identify the Church with their own hierarchical offices',<sup>18</sup> that is, to consider the Church to be a structure in which the people occupy a necessarily subordinate position, and have somehow a lesser membership. Within the Church itself, this has recently seemed to Schillebeeckx to carry with it the additional danger of encouraging inward-looking disputes, from which it becomes hard resolutely to turn our eyes away to the greater issues; for the infighting becomes engrossing.<sup>19</sup> The potential for the distortion of a proper sense of responsibility here is thus twofold. The people of God within the Church fail

<sup>18</sup> R. Modras, *Paul Tillich's Theology of the Church* (Detroit, 1976), pp. 15-16.

<sup>19</sup> He argues that 'in a period of Church polarization' it is a mistake 'to be directly concerned with what are really secondary, domestic church problems', *Church* p. xiii.

to experience the duties as well as the liberties of their union in Christ. And they cannot carry out freely and fully their responsibilities to the world as a whole.

Moltmann comments that there is an opposition between the acceptance of authority in the Church and the individual's duty to take responsibility on his own account. 'The more they make our decisions for us, the more they cheat us of the happiness of our full, independent responsibility.'<sup>20</sup> The 'they' is telling here. Again the Church is being implicitly identified with the hierarchy, over against the people. In his view this means that the 'Church will be superfluous . . . once it has achieved its purpose . . . when "the days come" [Jer. 31: 31-4] in which God will make the new, final, indestructible covenant with men and women'.<sup>21</sup>

Although he would also answer the query what is 'the world' in question by saying 'my main concern is with the *ecumene* of suffering humankind',<sup>22</sup> Schillebeeckx would consider the battle for a balance of responsibilities within the Church as important, alongside the battle to get the balance right outside it. He sees the need for internal reforms in the Church as designed to protect the 'freedom and values' of the Gospel. 'Sociologically speaking . . . in a world church, from the moment when the freedom and values of the gospel are no longer protected and supported by institutional structures, above all the so-called ordinary believers' lose their voice 'and with them a great many pastors and theologians'.<sup>23</sup> He sees a continuing tension between the grassroots growth which has sprung up in the Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council and which is an 'authentic flourishing of the gospel' he believes, and the attempts of the hierarchy to contain or even suppress popular initiative.<sup>24</sup> Schillebeeckx would argue here that there must be 'institutional safeguards' for equality if it is to be realised and maintained.<sup>25</sup>

This strong identification with those under authority as having to learn to take responsibility for themselves, is of a piece with a generalised contemporary preoccupation with the problem of oppression, and the correlative demand for justice which extends far beyond the Christian churches but which they feel touches them most intimately because the Church ought to be a community of

<sup>20</sup> J. Moltmann, *Ohne Macht mächtig* (Munich, 1981), *The Power of the Powerless*, tr. M. Khol (London, 1983), p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 189.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

salvation.<sup>26</sup> This generates a powerful ecclesiology of encounter and struggle.

Schillebeeckx has challenged the principle that order is a good thing. He dislikes the notion, which would have seemed self-evidently sound in earlier ages, that 'the only meaningful transformation of the world and society is in a restoration of things to their ideal order. Whether one puts this ideal order at the beginning of time, the earthly paradise, or in a distant future at the end of times, a coming golden age, makes little structural difference', he suggests.<sup>27</sup>

The objection is to a search for tidiness which can limit freedom (again an ancient issue), an objection especially to allowing that there can be any constraint on God's actions. The implications of this line of thinking have been seen by other theologians as imposing a requirement of involvement upon the Church. Its responsibility is to the needs of the world. 'There is no department of the world's life into which [Christians] are not commissioned to go', argues John Robinson. 'They find themselves concerned with evangelization and with civilization, because . . . the two are the same – the bringing to men and society of the *civitas dei*, that divine commonwealth which must ultimately transform the kingdoms of this world till they become the kingdom of God and of his Christ.'<sup>28</sup> An acceptance of the duty of Christian involvement in and Christian responsibility to and for the world seems to be inseparable from an ecclesiology of the responsible Church (envisaged as a Church of the people), and from the thrust towards the development of an anti-hierarchical structure.

Within the last decade 'the world' has come to be identified more broadly as including not only the human community and society, but the natural world. An ecological ecclesiology has developed as an extension and correlative of the social gospel and the gospel of peace and justice and the removal of oppression; and again with a high theme of responsibility. 'To hurt and damage this world is, from a theological perspective, a sin against the Creator of heaven and earth', comments Schillebeeckx.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 'Many believers, above all women, have the impression that they are being asked to believe in a God who injures and belittles people, above all women, through religion.' 'I have to discover how I can live with any decency at all as a member of "the First World" in the face of the Third', comments Moltmann. 'Only a history which brings about human liberation can be experienced as salvation history', says Schillebeeckx. As he sees it, the imperative to get this right means that 'the Church exists in the conflict between the lordship of Christ and the powers and forces of society', *Church*, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230      <sup>28</sup> J.T. Robinson, *On Being the Church in the World* (London, 1960), p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. xix.

'Many people already have a spontaneous experience of communities in general.'<sup>30</sup> They bring this to their understanding of 'Church' as community. Ecclesiology must therefore take account of this sort of experience in framing an account of the Church which will make sense both to the Church's members and to those outside it.

If we want to say something like that, we should perhaps take account of the findings of sociology. It is of its nature the study of mass movement and mass mind. It has always seemed to me that the thought of individuals who have expressed it in writing furnishes a more finely tuned (historical and modern) index of positions. To take an example, Schillebeeckx portrays modern sociology as polarising the inward 'I' against the outward 'Society' as though the two were independent entities. 'All emphasis is placed either on personal human inwardness or on society. In both cases one of the two poles is secondary . . . on the one hand the enclosed personality and on the other society without a subject, still dominate many forms of both liberal and Marxist sociology of religion.'<sup>31</sup>

Now this is far from being a new tension, or one newly recognised. The 'inward' and 'outward' theme is of course of some antiquity; it is a staple of the thought of Gregory the Great.<sup>32</sup> It recurs from age to age. Kant has a strong idea of the enclosed individual, autonomous and being his or her own person. It cannot therefore be argued that we have a uniquely or distinctively modern problem to deal with. The most that can be claimed is a new angle of view.

So I would suggest that partial illuminations are to be had in this way, but not necessarily an account of things which will stand up to the criticism that it does not recognise the classic and perennial features of modern phenomena. In ecclesiology these are crucial. The 'oneness' of the Church through time is as important as its unity in the present. We need to be able to say very precisely not only what is a new sociological phenomenon, but what is a continuing social feature.

Theologies and ecclesiologies in which 'engagement with the world' and social concerns are dominant have tended to have the effect of distracting concern from ecumenical objectives. This is noticeable in recent meetings of the World Council of Churches. Yet it ought not to be an inevitable consequence. It seems to arise out of

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 46-7

<sup>32</sup> Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great* (Berkeley, 1988).

a sense of the need to husband limited energies and resources, rather than from any inherent conflict of interest.

What are the implications of these radical diggings in the search for one Church? They all tend to assume the Church to be one, or to need to be one, in order to do its great work in the world. They all find divisive differences an irrelevance to that work, or an impediment to it. So they ought to be ecumenically useful. But by the same token, what is not thought to be important will not be given the time and energy necessary to resolving it.

Which of these emphases should ecumenism find helpful? They are not of course mutually exclusive, nor should they be. The Church can work hard for the world and trust God to get things right; it can believe that here and now matters and look to eternity. Much has to do with balance. Ecumenism is about even-handedness, an eirenic respect for the other's difference, so that it ceases to be divisive. That applies equally to the grand schemes of ecclesiology. The revolutionary is not likely to be helpful if its purpose is to dispose of rivals. But it may be invaluable as a corrective.

### *Provisionality*

One ecclesiological axis emerging from recent work is undoubtedly helpful ecumenically. In a pioneering study of the mid-1980s, C. Duquoc argues a case for the provisionality of the individual churches which exist and have existed in the world. There are two prongs to his argument. The first is the principle that the contingency and particularity of circumstances will always make for provisionality. That is roughly to equate 'historical' with 'provisional'.<sup>33</sup> He takes not only this unavoidably non-fixed character but also the concreteness and empirical character of the churches to be a positive value.<sup>34</sup> Over against it he sets, with a pejorative sense, the 'ideal'. 'It is not far from thinking in ideal terms to imposing norms on concrete reality and from the imposition of norms to repressive measures.'<sup>35</sup> 'To begin from the ideal is to condemn or to absolutize one's church or to judge all churches sinful.'<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> He speaks of 'The historical character of churches and consequently their provisional form', Duquoc, *Provisional Churches*, p. viii.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii and p. 91, 'Provisional denotes the fact that the churches are historical and therefore mortal; it is not a pejorative judgement, suggesting a lack of value.'

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii. <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

Here I think we need to be careful. There are at least two partly submerged agendas. The first is the setting in opposition two directions of inference in ecclesiology, moving on the one hand from the ideal to the empirical; and on the other from the empirical to the ideal.<sup>37</sup> Duquoc argues that if we postulate that the Church begins from the ideal, history can only damage it. 'If the Church is originally pure and transparent in essence, time is pernicious for it.'<sup>38</sup> But I should think it unnecessary to suggest that these lines of derivation are opposed rather than complementary, pulling against one another rather than reciprocal.

The second agenda is political rather than philosophical. Duquoc writes as a French Roman Catholic, for whom it has seemed a fact of life 'for about twenty years, particularly in France . . . that "institution" is synonymous with "repression"'.<sup>39</sup> He therefore finds it necessary to defend the individuality of the 'specific churches' against their threatened effacement by institutional universalism. It has not been so always and everywhere, and I shall argue in a later chapter that it need not be so if we think in terms of 'order' rather than 'institution'. It can be unhelpful to fall into what is sometimes called the 'victim' mentality, if that breeds the habit of seeing indications of oppression everywhere.

The case I myself would want to argue here is that we may postulate a Church which is an ideal without believing that there must be decay over time, that historical provisionality is somehow destructive of the ideal.<sup>40</sup> The 'ideal' elements, the theoretical constructs and ecclesiological models on which the 'flesh' of the divided churches hangs, can themselves be provisional. Provisionality is embodied in the historical and contingent. But it is also a function of doing theology, and especially ecclesiology, in a divided Church, that no account of the ecclesiology can be complete if it is framed in separation.

<sup>37</sup> 'The elaboration of ecclesiology does not consist in deducing a doctrine from the relevant parts of Scripture, but in giving reflective expression to the practices of believers.' *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.      <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> And productive of 'particular groups engendering exclusion'. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4. Karl Rahner refers to the various realisations of Church as 'event'. 'Event may be a continuum allowing for a plurality of realisations.' K. Rahner and J. Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy* (New York, 1962), p. 27.

## THE ECUMENICAL AIM

This brings us to the question of the aim of the ecumenical enterprise. It is fundamental to Orthodox thinking that union with God supposes union among God's people. That is seen in Orthodox canon law as not only a spiritual mystery, but a necessarily visible reality.<sup>41</sup> At the centre of things lies the question whether and in what way a visible unity may unite not only all individual Christians into one communion, but also all churches and ecclesial bodies which are at present separated.<sup>42</sup> That is a much tougher brief, as we shall see.

Although there has always been a strong body of Christian opinion that the Church cannot be fully itself unless it is united, it is not uncontroversial that we ought to be seeking a visible unity. In the sixteenth century faithfulness to the Gospel seemed to the reformers ultimately more important than unity; many of them were prepared to say that visible unity cannot be achieved in this world, that the division of the Church is God's punishment for our infidelity and that fidelity not unity is the necessary goal.<sup>43</sup> Many Christians (of various traditions) would argue that unity in Christ and in the Spirit need not involve visible structures of unity, and perhaps should not do so. Some would go further, and say that there must be a tension, if not a conflict, between keeping the peace and maintaining purity in a fallen world. That is to say, it is suspected that unity involves in practice some compromising with the truth. 'Is it the will of God that some apartness be maintained in order for the divine economy to function, or is it his will that togetherness be pursued even when it means sacrificing commitments to biblical truth not universally affirmed?' asks one doubter, in language of transparent partiality.<sup>44</sup> So, although the will for unity, the *votum unitatis*,<sup>45</sup> is itself perhaps the decisive factor not only in bringing about unity in communion, but even in the very theology of communion,<sup>46</sup> it is not

<sup>41</sup> See J. Meyendorff, *Orthodoxie et catholicité* (Paris, 1965), p. 104.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. E. Yarnold, *In Search of Unity* (Slough, 1989), p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> D. Fischer, 'Ministères et instruments d'unité de l'Eglise dans la pensée de Luther et de Calvin', *Istina*, 30 (1985), 8-46.

<sup>44</sup> *A Contemporary Western Theology*, ed. C.W. Carter (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983), vol. I, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. J.M.R. Tillard, *L'Evêque de Rome* (Paris, 1982), tr. J. de Satgé (1983), p. 4 and J.M.R. Tillard, 'Le Votum Eucharistiae, L'Eucharistie dans le rencontre des chrétiens', *Miscellanea Liturgica in onore di Sua Eminenza il Cardinale G. Lercaro*, 2 (Paris, 1967), 143-94.

<sup>46</sup> See chapter 6.

everywhere present, or held everywhere to be central. Or it is held to in a general way, but sometimes without a serious commitment to finding a means of achieving it.<sup>47</sup>

The *votum unitatis* might in principle still be strong on many different understandings of what is meant by unity. It has been suggested, for example, that the ecumenical task is not to create unity but to manifest a unity which already exists in the one body of Christ.<sup>48</sup> Some would think in terms of the presence of elements or vestiges (*vestigia ecclesiae*) in the existing separated Churches, elements of the one true Church which, in the mystical sense, they already comprise. Some would press for a 'dualist' view, that there should be invisible unity alongside an institutional diversity in which separation persists. Some would simply say that only God can know his Church, and that we must think in terms of the Church as a multiplicity of churches in the form of congregations of believers, where the pure Gospel is preached, and trust him to know his own. Some would argue that the one Church exists as a promise for eternity, that it is eschatological, and not to be looked for now. Others would take a pragmatic view, that we should concentrate on practical Christianity, mission and service, on the grounds that talk of doctrine always divides, but common service can unify.<sup>49</sup>

Over against these theoretical constructs lie the experiences of recent decades. Once mutual suspicion grows less at a local level, Christians from different traditions begin to work together readily in common practical projects.<sup>50</sup> They may hold joint services from time to time, but these must, in most cases, fall short of the single, shared celebration of the Lord's Supper which would be the sure mark of their having become one Church.<sup>51</sup> All this is possible partly because the pleasures of discovering new friends create a honeymoon period; and that may last for some time, until conflicts of attitude and expectation begin to emerge. There is the danger to the

<sup>47</sup> 'A sincere intention to seek unity is incompatible with an intention to remain permanently uncommitted to any particular form of unity', comments Lesslie Newbigin, *All in Each Place*, ed. J.I. Packer (Abingdon, 1981).

<sup>48</sup> N. Ehrenstrom and W.G. Muelder, *Institutionalism and Church Unity* (London, 1963), p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> Some of these are listed in one form or other in G. Wainwright, 'La Confession et les confessions: vers l'unité confessionnelle et confessante des chrétiens', *Irenikon*, 57 (1984), 5-25.

<sup>50</sup> England's present system under the title of 'Churches together in Unity' is an encouraging case in point.

<sup>51</sup> The rules about eucharistic sharing are complex and vary from case to case among the churches.