Foreword

The Point of Ecclesiology

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What is ecclesiology, who does ecclesiology, and why do they do it? These are the challenging questions that contributors to this collection have set themselves to tackle. In order to do so, the editors have brought together a range of perspectives from scholars of differing background—ecclesial and global location. These scholars explore approaches to the study of the church from differing ecclesial and methodological starting points; they uncover ecclesiological work going on in surprising places; and they engage practical, moral, and organizational issues where ecclesiology can offer genuinely transformative resources. The essays look at foundational and methodological question; historically, contextually, and denominationally divergent approaches; and they explore the realities of "embedded ecclesiology" in terms of the practical and ethical challenges in areas such as church ordering, liturgy, gender and worship. They seek to demonstrate the encompassing and integrative nature of what is called ecclesiology as well as to offer significant food for thought toward the future of the discipline.

One only has to look at the interest in the global media generated by recent developments in not only in so many churches—from the evangelical movement's growth across multiple continents, the rapidly changing face of official Roman Catholicism under Pope Francis or the Anglican Communion's internal divisions, to the forthcoming pan-orthodox synod—but also in global Christianity in general to see that ecclesiological questions are of great interest to the wide human family. So a collection that seeks to explore the wider parameters of this theological "science" in an interdisciplinary fashion is both timely and most welcome.

ECCLESIOLOGY IN FASHION

In recent years, ecclesiology has become one of the fastest growing areas of enquiry in theological and religious studies. Simply witness the rapid growth in the number of monographs, articles, collections, journals, networks, conferences, and symposia that take ecclesiology in one or more of its many forms as their focus. Or again look at how many courses and classes in universities and church-related institutions of training and education have come to the fore in these times. Often studies will say that ecclesiology as a discipline in its own right really only emerged in a distinctive fashion in the twentieth century, with important nineteenth century developments foreshadowing this. But, while the term "ecclesiology" itself emerges in use only in the nineteenth century (and in English primarily to describe the study of church architecture and interior design), with more frequent use of the term in its present-day usage only developing throughout the following century, in fact there have been many different ways of exploring the church and its story, its aspirations, its trials and tribulations, its failings and achievements, as well as differing interpretations of key teachings about the church and its life, organization, structures, ministries, offices, and so on throughout the history of the church. What is true is that the twentieth century gave more structure and methodological order and organization to the differing ways of studying and exploring the church and its life. This served to accentuate the rich diversity of ways and means of carrying out what we today call ecclesiology and, therefore, of actually being church, itself.

Stretching back to the New Testament itself, there have obviously been reasoned-informed enquiries exploring the church from theological, historical, and philosophical standpoints, as well as from other, often more context-informed and practical-focused standpoints. Biblical scholars have long charted the ecclesiological themes and priorities, for example, of the epistles of Paul, and we can say that so much of what Paul wrote to the young churches of the day was driven by practical, social, and ethical concerns (as well as political issues having an impact in some instances). The increasing influence of the church in the Empire and the multiple contributions from the early church fathers and, indeed, mothers, would often be concerned with ecclesiological issues and priorities as well. The growth of monasticism and eventual rules of community, and the emergence of important new styles of communities and schools in places such as ancient Ireland fostered much further reflections that today we must clearly deem ecclesiological in orientation. Again, much of this would often be driven by issues pertaining to the lives of actual communities, everyday issues, and

social concerns, as much as by historical reflections and theological and philosophical approaches.

In the second millennium, with the advent of what came to be the new-style schools that were the European universities, the scholastic era also gave birth eventually to weighty treatises on the church, not least of all in response to the challenges coming forth "from below," from movements for reform of varying kinds. The emergence of canon law as a discipline and fluctuating models and priorities of and for papal authority led to further reflections, historical, theological, philosophical and practical on and for the church. The emergent renaissance and humanist scholarship took such reflections into new methodological waters altogether as did the era of European reformations, itself permeated by ecclesiological reflections focused upon the "macro-" and more local levels of ecclesial existence alike as so many existing church communities found themselves facing new ways of organizing and living out their faith, just as multiple new churches were also being born. From the post-reformation period to the growth of modern missionary ventures and on to the Enlightenment, ways of exploring, charting, and indeed shaping the church and its story have increased in their diversity.

So, yes, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in particular did witness the emergence of solid foundations for approaches to ecclesiology from the standpoint of systematic theology, and that remains the branch of theology today under which ecclesiology is most commonly bracketed (others might say "dogmatic," "fundamental," or "foundational" theology). But the last century also saw theology interact with other disciplines, some of these new disciplines, others disciplines developing in new and innovative ways—so history and historical consciousness; new schools of philosophy such as existentialism; and the various social sciences and hybrid methodological approaches such as hermeneutics, critical theory, and organizational studies also left their mark upon theology. So, too, did they upon ecclesiology. Newly emergent ways of doing theology such as political theology; the theology of hope; liberation theology and its multiple forms in differing contexts and for differing communities including black theology, feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theology; as well as further interdisciplinary approaches such as ecotheology and animal theology—each of these also left their mark upon ecclesiology. Indeed, for example, contributions appeared that self-termed their approach as "political ecclesiology," "liberation ecclesiology," "feminist ecclesiology," "black ecclesiology," "ecclesiological cybernetics," as well as a host of other innovative and fruitful ways and means of doing ecclesiology.

In the light of such developments, by the time we reach our own twenty-first century there emerge ecclesiological methods and sub-disciplines

which take into consideration so many of those other schools, methods, and pathways for understanding the church better and helping the church and churches to live out their lives better too. In particular, what has been termed historical ecclesiology and then the umbrella approach that is called comparative ecclesiology (which compares one or more distinctive ways of understanding the church) have been developed in multiple ways in recent years. Here, in the work of Roger Haight, for example, distinctions have been made between more doctrinal approaches toward doing ecclesiology "from above" and more historically, socially and contextually attentive approaches to doing ecclesiology "from below."

During this same period there emerged—in many ways as a result of several of the developments noted above, and on occasion in parallel with them—ways of doing ecclesiology shaped and motivated by the core methods, areas of focus, and concern for practical and pastoral approaches to theology. Likewise the emergence of missiology. Many of the people working at the ecclesial "coalface," so to speak, saw to apply the fruits of many of the above developments in ecclesiology and so to offer further methodological tools still for speaking to the real-life communities that call themselves church in today's richly diverse world (who face real-life issues and challenges on a daily basis). So congregational studies, to take but one example, has also contributed much. Liturgical studies has seen considerable overlap with ecclesiology in this period too, alongside aspects of sacramental theology.

There have also been distinctive approaches to ecclesiology within and across particular denominations which have also led to multiple studies in recent times. Then there is the fact that global, multi-lateral, and bi-lateral representative bodies across and within differing Christian traditions have increasingly turned their attentions toward ecclesiological themes and foci in recent decades, for example the several ecclesiological commissions and reports that have emanated from the World Council of Churches. So "ecumenical ecclesiology" has emerged as a sub-discipline in its own right, the challenges of which should be of the utmost importance for any and every ecclesiology.

Further developments of relevance here have included the approach to the history, story, and challenges for and aspirations of the church from the standpoint of particular global regions and different ethnic and national communities. The method of "world christianities," therefore, has also brought so much to the ecclesiological table and tool-box for us and our successors. There have also been some innovative approaches to applying aspects of ecclesiology to a comparative theological study of religion and community in differing faiths.

I would say that so many of these ways of doing ecclesiology, especially in recent times, and throughout much of the twentieth century but also at so many other points of church history, are shaped and motivated by a further underlying concern—the ethical. Moral theology, Christian Ethics, and approaches to ethics and socio-political challenges in general have also left their deep mark upon eccesiology throughout the story of the church and especially since the later decades of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. In fact, I would suggest that ecclesiology can never be separated from moral concerns because the church itself is a moral community, and the shaping and story of any community *per se* will have multiple moral dimensions. Perhaps this moral timbre to the science of ecclesiology is what so many of the most innovative and promising approaches to the study of the church share in common. It is certainly something that many of the essays in this collection you hold in your hands have in common. Bridging ecclesiology and ethics in a consistent fashion is *the* challenge for the church in our times. Even ecumenism is, ultimately, as much a moral challenge (and thus an obligation) as it is a theological and sacramental calling. Perhaps this is what some of the contributors have in mind in seeking to portray ecclesiology as a practical discipline first and foremost.

A CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH

This collection seeks to cross the disciplinary boundaries of approaches to ecclesiology in a constructive and especially innovative fashion. They demonstrate how so much of the work of ecclesiology must by necessity be a continuous undertaking, carried out as though on a construction site or, as they term it, "in the trenches." Of course the latter phrase can also have darker connotations—reminiscent of the so destructively futile tactic of warfare that encapsulates for many the First World War, that terrible blight upon collective humanity's history, the centenary of which was observed. It was a time when Christians were sadly and especially divided and the wounds that war left among the Christian family took very long to heal, with a number still lingering. So ecclesiology also needs to be especially mindful never to forget the divisions that exist among the church of churches nor to "paper over the cracks" (to continue the construction site metaphor) by ignoring their reality. The rich ecumenical range of authors who have contributed to this volume will help ensure this collection might serve the cause of ecumenical ecumenism well, with its very starting point of ecclesiology as being "an ecumenical endeavor."

These essays also help to bridge disciplinary divides and ecclesiological "preferences," such as the doctrinal or systematic approach with the

empirical or practical approach, and to encourage readers to see the differing approaches to ecclesiology from a complementary and thus (again) "constructive" standpoint. They see ecclesiology, in the word of Sven-Erik Brodd, as "an integrative force."

The title of this collection evokes many personal memories for me in a number of ways. Both before and during my university education, I spent a great deal of time down in trenches of various form on actual construction sites. Being from an Irish family in the UK, my Father and so many of my relatives worked in the many different areas of construction. There was great camaraderie and humor on those sites and many great characters were encountered and friends made, as well as many valuable lessons and skills learned. But being down a trench for much of the day can be messy, tough, unpleasant, and laborious work. Often the hard work goes unnoticed, not least of all by those who long into the future will benefit from the laying of, say, the pipes that carry their water to their home, their waste away, or prevent the storm waters from flooding their streets. But the work that goes on in trenches is *vital*. Long after the trench is closed the benefits of such work will go on, sometimes for centuries as we know from historical and archaeological studies into the feats of groundworkers from long ago. This collection helps demonstrate that those who toil in the ecclesiological trenches do not do so in vain.

Above all else, the collection will help readers to explore further and find some answers to the question that the contributors set out with—why do ecclesiology and why do *we* do ecclesiology in the ways in which we do so? Ecclesiology has a bright and prosperous future. This collection of essays embodies so much of the creativity and promise alike that have helped make this branch of the theological sciences the vibrant and exciting field in which many of us are privileged to work.