

## Preface

THIS BOOK IS A result of many years of work in the field of ecclesiological studies. I started my career as a rather traditional systematic theologian who was mainly concerned with analyzing the works of other theologians about the church and other matters. It was while being employed at the Center for Church Research (KIFO) in Oslo that I was introduced to empirical methodology and social scientific perspectives as a way to investigate the church. This experience gave me a desire to incorporate my original training as a systematic theologian with this methodological approach. I was left with a nagging question: what is the relationship between doctrinal and theological statements about the church and the empirical reality of the church? Often when the issue of the empirical church was discussed in certain circles among theologians and church officials, I experienced a resistance and even an immunization strategy. Whatever data researchers would provide regarding the situation of the church, this did not seem really to affect the theological appraisal. This sort of response was clearly rooted in the traditional division between the visible and the invisible church. The visible church was left to empiricists and the practitioners, while the invisible was the domain of theologians. On reflection, I found this way of thinking increasingly unsatisfactory. This book is an attempt to resolve this issue at the heart of where the idea of the invisible church arose, namely in the area of systematic theology. As I will show throughout this book, a sound theological interpretation of the church does not necessitate this division. In fact, there is a better alternative: It is the concrete, visible church that is the only real church. Ecclesiology should therefore be an ecclesiology of the visible church.

This book was first published in Norwegian by Tapir Academic Press (*Den virkelige kirke*, 2009). After its publication it received a lot of attention. The arguments raised in this book were not I realized, just limited to a Norwegian context, but were relevant to the ongoing international debate in ecclesiology. I therefore decided to make this book more avail-

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able to a wider audience. I would like to thank the Research Council of Norway who made the translation of this book possible by a generous grant. I would also like to thank the Church of Sweden Research Unit for including this book as volume seven in *Church of Sweden Research Series*.

In an early stage of the process, John W. Kaufman, PhD, translated an excerpt of the two first chapters. The main body of translation work has been completed by Bradley Long, MPhil, who also revised John's first text in order to bring it in line with the style of the rest of the translation. The translation process has been a joint collaboration between the author and translator, with drafts and comments going back and forth. While I was understandably keen to see my views expressed as accurately as possible, Bradley accepted no compromise in making the text readable in English. I am thankful for this working relationship which has proved to be a rich experience. During this process we both learnt a lot about issues like, the interplay between translation and interpretation, and how different cultural and theological contextualizations (he an Englishman and an Anglican, I a Norwegian and a Lutheran) influences how things are written, as well as how they are read. For example, our discussions about capitalization would be worth a separate report!

During the translation process minor alterations, omissions and additions were made, which makes the present work an *English edition* of the work, rather than just simply a translation.

The writing of this book was for the most, a solitary enterprise. At the same time, I recognize that such a work is dependent upon, and is part of a wider scholarly community. I am therefore immensely indebted to the teachers, colleagues and students, both nationally and internationally, to whom I have had the privilege to be taught by, had fruitful discussions with, given critique, have worked with, and have become friends with. The names are clearly too many to be mentioned. I am also thankful to be part of the vibrant ecclesial community of the Church of Norway, both at a local and diocesan and national level. This has contributed in a special way to my interest and reason for writing this book.

I am especially thankful to the MF Norwegian School of Theology, which is a wonderful place to learn and to teach. What I particularly like about this institution is its uncompromising commitment both to serving the academy and the church. This dual commitment is one to which I adhere and continues to shape me as a theologian.

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