ECUMENICAL ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT: TOWARDS A VIEW OF THE CHURCH AS UBUNTU

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Abstract

This purpose of this essay is to provide an overview of approaches to ecclesiology in the African context with specific reference to various institutional expressions of the ecumenical movement. While wider ecumenical ecclesiological debates have pondered on the distinctive nature of the church. African contributions have focused on the embeddedness of the church in the African context with its evolving cultures and social context. Decrying the split between what the church is (read: ecclesiology) and what it does (read: ethics) as a false dichotomy within the African context. I will argue for a critical appropriation of the sub-Saharan African non-dualistic notion of ubuntu as apposite for articulating an ecumenical ecclesiology within the African context. This is buttressed by the connotations of communality, communion and interrelatedness that ubuntu carries in addition to its resonance with other concepts in African thought, such as vital participation and vital force.

Key Words: African Theology; African Ecclesiology; Church as Family; Communion Ecclesiology; Diakonia; Ecumenical Ecclesiology; Koinonia; Trinity; Ubuntu

Introduction

African theologians operating within the paradigm of inculturation have employed a variety of metaphors to describe the church within the African context, such as clan (Waliggo, 1998). family (Oduyove, 1991; Onwubiko, 2001; Chukwu, 2011), and community (Omenyo, 2000). Within African liberation and reconstruction theologies, ecclesiology has often been framed in sociological terms. More generally, African contributions to ecclesiology have typically responded to several aspects of the African social context. This is understandable given the consideration that churches as historical communities are indeed culturally and historically grounded and conditioned. As an attempt at an African contextual ecumenical reflection on the church, this contribution will offer an appraisal of selected proposals for an African ecclesiology in African ecumenical discourse in general and in the African theologies of inculturation, liberation and reconstruction specifically. On this basis. I will argue for an approach to African ecumenical ecclesiology that does justice to the integral relationship between ecclesiology and ethics. I share the conviction that the relationship between these two crucial ecumenical concerns can hardly be overlooked in any meaningful reflection on ecumenical ecclesiology within the African context. This contribution will therefore proceed from an African ecumenical vantage point.

Antecedents of Ecumenical Ecclesiology

Dominant historical understandings of what the church is in sub-Saharan Africa reflect a heritage of missionary Christianity and its concomitant western interpretations. Most churches that were established as a result of the 19th century missionary movement were

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Provisional Churches Christian Duquoc,1986 Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology Lorelei F. Fuchs, 2008 The word koinonia has gained prominence in recent ecumenical discussions In this original and substantial work Lorelei Fuchs proposes the theological idea of koinonia commonly translated as communion or fellowship as the key to moving fractured churches toward a future unity Fuchs challenges churches to move beyond mere dialogue and to apply ecumenical insights at the local level She begins by relating the exegetical meaning of koinonia to its ecumenical meaning tracing the place of koinonia both within the churches and between the churches She then examines the concept of koinonia in the extensive and fruitful dialogues that have taken place between Lutherans Anglicans and Roman Catholics finally articulating a symbolic competence for communionality that provides a rich and workable way forward for church unity at all levels Encompassing the latest in ecumenical thought Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology provides a broad thoughtful framework for realizing Christ's prayer that all may be one so that the world may believe and Ecumenical Church Thought William C. Ingle-Gillis, 2016-12-05 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 The Church and the **Churches** G. R. Evans, 2002-04-04 Individual churches today have a lively ecumenical consciousness but they often express anxieties about what will become of them in a future united Church Questions are being asked about the goal of such unity In this book G R Evans asks what we mean by a church and how different Christian bodies have understood the way a church is related to the Church She surveys the nature of unity and what the fullness of the communion being reached for might consist of the place of diversity of faith and order in a united Church or ways in which there can go on being many churches in one Church and how they might be related to it and questions about the common structures one Church would need and the way in which it could come to think and act as a single body of Christ The book concludes with a discussion of the concept of communion which now looks very hopeful ecumenically as a guide to the way forward William Temple and Church Unity Edward Loane, 2016-09-29 This book evaluates William Temple's theology and his pursuit of church unity It exposes a number of paradoxes and conflicts that have generally gone under appreciated in assessments of Temple William Temple was one of the most outstanding leaders of the early ecumenical movement In many ways his ecumenical efforts

provided a paradigm others have looked to and followed Through detailed analysis of primary sources this study sheds light on several behind the scenes conflicts Temple experienced as he worked toward church unity Edward Loane explores the foundation of Temple's work by analyzing the philosophy and theology that underpinned and fueled it The book also exposes the tensions between Temple's denominational allegiance and his ecumenical convictions a tension that in some ways undermined his work for reunion This book reveals issues that contemporary Christians need to grapple with as they seek to Systematic Theology Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, John P. Galvin, The disciplinary barriers that have further church unity divided the confessions are broken through not only in biblical or historical studies but in dogmatics itself George A LindbeckThis is a fine introduction to the major areas in Roman Catholic systematic theology produced by a first rate team of scholars It should be widely used in colleges and theological schools Gerald O Collins S J Dean of the Theology FacultyGregorian UniversityThis fine collection brings together recent Roman Catholic and ecumenical discussion on major theological themes It is a contemporary and collaborative summa valuable for students and teacher alike Ann E Carr Professor of TheologyThe Divinity SchoolUniversity of Chicago Ecumenism, Christian Origins and the Practice of Communion Nicholas Sagovsky, 2000-05-04 The theology of communion or Koinonia has been at the centre of the ecumenical movement for more than thirty years It is central to the self understanding of the Anglican Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches and has been prominent in the work of the World Council of Churches This book based on the 1996 Hulsean Lectures examines the significance of Koinonia for contemporary ecumenical theology tracing the development of contemporary understanding in critical engagement with the thoughts of Plato Aristotle the Hebrew Scriptures the New Testament the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine In each case reflection on community life is related to actual communities in which texts were produced The importance of conflict and the place of politics for the Koinonia that constitutes the Christian churches is a major theme throughout Communion is seen as a gift to be received and a discipline to be cultivated in the continuing practice of ecumenism The Gift of the Church Peter C. Phan, 2016-03-24 As the Church enters its third millennium it must take stock of its identity and mission These essays in The Gift of the Church address the fundamental issues confronting the Church in its immediate future Their authors represent the most prominent ecclesiologists of our time Written in honor of Patrick Granfield OSB these essays form a textbook for classes in ecclesiology They also are a useful tool for those engaged in various ministries in the Church to update themselves on the theology of different aspects of the Church The first section of essays discusses ecclesiology in its historical development as well as its methodology the second examines various aspects of the Church and the third part presents the life and work of Patrick Granfield The essays are clearly written and based on solid and extensive scholarship Ecclesiology has been the central theme of theological reflections since Vatican II and may continue to be in the next millennium This textbook fulfills in part Pope John Paul II s Vision for the Jubilee Year when Christians with a profound sense of commitment will likewise express their gratitude for the gift of the Church Essays

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Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning Paul Murray, 2010-05-06 This volume proposes a fresh strategy for ecumenical engagement Receptive Ecumenism that is fitted to the challenges of the contemporary context and has already been internationally recognised as making a distinctive and important new contribution to ecumenical thought and practice Beyond this the volume tests and illustrates this proposal by examining what Roman Catholicism in particular might fruitfully learn from its ecumenical others Challenging the tendency for ecumenical studies to ask whether explicitly or implicitly What do our others need to learn from us this volume presents a radical challenge to see ecumenism move forward into action by highlighting the opposite question What can we learn with integrity from our others This approach is not simply ecumenism as shared mission or ecumenism as problem solving and incremental agreement but ecumenism as a vital long term programme of individual communal and structural conversion driven like the Gospel that inspires it by the promise of conversion into greater life and flourishing The aim is for the Christian traditions to become more not less than they currently are by learning from or receiving of each other s gifts The 32 original essays that have been written for this unique volume explore these issues from a wide variety of denominational and disciplinary perspectives drawing together ecclesiologists professional ecumenists sociologists psychologists and organizational experts Richard Lennan, 2004-10-14 As a consequence of numerous social and theological movements over the last few decades the Roman Catholic Church finds itself in a situation that some have described as a state of peril This book traces the emergence of that peril develops a systematic ecclesiology that identifies both the mission and resources of the Church in the present day and explores possible responses to some of the specific challenges facing the contemporary Church The book develops an understanding of the Catholic tradition in order to highlight its potential for development **Tilling the Church** Richard Lennan, 2022-04-15 Tilling the Church is a theology for the pilgrim church In this book Richard Lennan shows how the ecclesial community looks toward the fullness of God's reign but lives within the flux of history the site of its relationship to the trinitarian God In this way God's grace tills the church constantly refreshing the tradition of faith and prompting the discipleship that embodies the gospel Tilling the Church explores the possibilities for a more faithful just and creative church one responsive to the movement of grace Fruitful engagement with grace requires the church's conversion the ongoing formation of a community whose words and actions reflect the hope that grace engenders **Hope and Community** Veli-Matti Karkkainen, 2017-10-23 The culmination of Krkk inen s multivolume magnum opus This fifth and final volume of Veli Matti K rkk inen s ambitious five volume systematic theology develops a constructive Christian eschatology and ecclesiology in dialogue with the Christian tradition with contemporary theology in all its global and contextual diversity and with other major living faiths Judaism Islam Buddhism and Hinduism In Part One of the book K rkk inen discusses eschatology in the contexts of world faiths and natural sciences including physical cosmological and neuroscientific theories In Part Two on ecclesiology he adopts a deeply ecumenical approach His proposal for greater Christian unity includes the

various dimensions of the church's missional existence and a robust dialogical witness to other faith communities Christian Theology in the Pluralistic World Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, 2019-06-20 K rkk inen s acclaimed five volume constructive theology abridged in one accessible volume Providing a new and unique way of doing theology in our pluralistic world Veli Matti K rkk inen presents historic Christian doctrines in relation to the natural sciences and four other living faiths Judaism Islam Buddhism and Hinduism This textbook covers all systematic topics along with a host of current issues such as violence colonialism inclusivity sociopolitical liberation environmental care and more Accessible and student friendly Christian Theology in the Pluralistic World is the ideal text for exploring a theological vision at once rooted in the Christian tradition and constructive in its engagement with the complexities of our global pluralistic world After Our Likeness Miroslav Volf, 1998 In After Our Likeness Miroslav Volf explores the relationship between persons and community in Christian theology He seeks to counter the tendencies toward individualism in Protestant ecclesiology and give community its due Sustaining the Hope for Unity Erin Brigham, 2012 What is unity and how does it serve as a goal for ecumenical dialogue How can churches ecumenical organizations ministers and theologians effectively approach this goal in the twenty first century Sustaining the Hope for Unity offers a methodological reflection on these guestions using insights of contemporary critical theory With particular attention to the work of I rgen Habermas the book develops a framework for exchanging religious narratives in a postmodern context marked by pluralism and ambiguity Using this framework to address questions that have emerged out of the life of the World Council of Churches Sustaining the Hope for Unityargues that unity must be imagined eschatologically in order to achieve inclusive and non coercive dialogue between diverse Christian communities Looking ahead to ecumenism in the twenty first century it makes a case for the role of the WCC as a public space for the exchange of religious narratives **The Kingdom of God** John Fuellenbach, 2006-04-01 The fruit of many decades of study and teaching The Kingdom of God provides an impressive systematic treatment of the doctrine of the Kingdom of God It is a comprehensive review of this crucial symbol as well as a careful analysis of its meaning and a creative interpretation of the Kingdom motif for the church and Christians in our age The Kingdom of God begins by analyzing the background of this idea in Hebrew scripture and tradition and in the preaching of Jesus Fuellenbach explores how this elusive phrase presents a specific comprehensive view of reality and a goal for transforming the world In Fuellenbach s reading the Kingdom forms the core of Christian faith and the reference point of all theology spirituality and apostolic activity Fuellenbach pays special attention to the relationships among Kingdom Church and World arguing that with the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed a vision that embraces God humankind and the whole of creation in the single most comprehensive vision of reality imaginable The Kingdom of God is balanced and nuanced in its scholarship but also vigorous and courageous in taking positions sure to provoke debate For example Fuellenbach argues that the word Kingdom is to be preferred over the word Reign despite critiques that find the word problematic in its patriarchal connotations Designed for

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