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'Communion Ecclesiology' (2000): The Author's Response to Challenging Criticism

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other feminists are precisely critiquing the church's failure to fully embody the inclusive nature of God's love and call to full communion. Is Doyle suggesting that male-female equality is not a constitutive element of the gospel, that theologians have access to some objective divine criteria that are not mediated by our human subjective interpretations of divine revelation?

In a similar vein Doyle affirms the work of U.S. Catholic Hispanic theologian Roberto Goizueta as having a strong communion foundation, and demonstrates how his work shares some of the best insights on communion with Möhler, Zizioulas, de Lubac, and Balthasar. He affirms Goizueta's passionate argument for "a preferential option for the poor, God's universal love, and concern for the poor and impoverished and justice as characteristic of liberation theology." He then underscores what distinguishes Goizueta's work from that of some major Latin American liberation theologians who remain unnamed. In this way he seems to suggest that communion ecclesiology and most Latin American liberation theology are mutually exclusive, rather than understanding liberation theology as a necessary step in the process of communion for those who find themselves excluded, marginalized, dehumanized, and devalued. These are things I suggested in my December 2000 *Theological Studies* article, "Communion Ecclesiology and Black Liberation Theology."³

I would appreciate comment on three of my ideas: 1) my suggestion that Doyle's work has a similarity in genre with the "classical works" of Dulles and Schineller; 2) my critique of his treatment of Johnson and Goizueta; and 3) my thesis developed elsewhere, "that liberation can be interpreted as a necessary step in the process of communion" for the oppressed.

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AUTHOR'S RESPONSE

Communion requires dialogue. The myriad ways in which we understand "communion" requires even more dialogue. I am grateful to the reviewers both for the kind words and for the challenging criticisms that make for a good conversation.

Susan Wood finds my use of communion ecclesiology to provide a valuable lens, but warns that I need to note that the term can only be applied anachronistically to many of the theologies I cite. I agree that I could have been clearer on that point. I do say, for example: "It would

³*Theological Studies*, 61/4 (December 2000), 672-99.

be anachronistic to suggest that [Möhlér] would have explicitly applied the term 'communion ecclesiology' to his own work, but his approach to the Church had an important formative impact upon theologians associated with the twentieth century development of communion ecclesiology, such as Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger, and Walter Kasper" (23). In another place, however, I speak more directly of Möhlér's "version" of communion ecclesiology (37). I intended the latter statement to be read in the light of the former, and so as an abbreviation for "Möhlér's contributions which had a significant impact on later developments that would come to be called communion ecclesiology." I find other shorthand statements that feed the ambiguity that Wood notes, including the use of chapter titles for material drawn from previously published articles about "the roots of communion ecclesiology" that drop "the roots" and yet leave "communion." Wood's call for further explanation on this point is helpful, for it has moved me to clarify the point that the issue lies not in theological method but rather in form of expression. I also find helpful Wood's in-depth summary and her analysis of my use of communion ecclesiology as a lens that allows one to compare the contributions of a wide variety of theologians.

Michael Baxter praises the charity in my theological approach and my ability to draw out the positive contributions of diverse positions. He questions, however, the adequacy of the "both/and" formulation for expressing Catholic inclusivity. A truly inclusive approach, he suggests, would value both the "both/and" and the "either/or," in other words, both the analogical and the dialectical. This is a paradoxical statement which itself plays lightly with Baxter's own criterion of logical consistency. To be truly inclusive, for example, would we also need to embrace positions that reject all attempts at inclusivity?

Baxter, however, did not intend his statement to function as a new formula that would replace my formula. Rather, he uses it to point to the complexities and difficulties of the contemporary use of "both/and." I strongly agree that the theological world needs more reflection on this point. In fact, the paradoxical question that Baxter posed to me is one that I have been posing to my students for some years now. Does "both/and" mean a rejection of "either/or," or does it call for an embrace of both? The first response to that question is usually laughter, because it is a real brain-twister.

David Tracy addressed this matter in *The Analogical Imagination*.¹ For Tracy, what the analogical imagination rejects is, on the one hand, the univocal, and, on the other hand, the equivocal. The analogical

¹David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 413-21

imagination does not reject the dialectical, and in fact it is complemented by it. This is why Tracy calls for a dual emphasis on manifestation and proclamation. I intended to speak of catholic inclusivity in the spirit of Tracy. When I wrote of the catholic tendency to favor the “both/and” over the “either/or,” I was again using a kind of shorthand that could be misleading without further elaboration and more precision. I appreciate Baxter’s noting that in practice I do include dialectical voices, and I welcome his call for deeper reflection on this point.

I will argue, though, that the role of the analogical in Catholic tradition is more significant than Baxter allows. I am not an expert on the early Christian centuries. When Möhler speaks of heresy, however, as egoistically maintaining a particular position in a way that rejects all other emphases and of orthodoxy as the embrace of the range of legitimate positions held in the community, he is expressing what he takes to be the general practice of the early church.² When de Lubac speaks of the *complexio oppositorum*, through which the church is described simultaneously as a spring and a fall, and as a bride and a harlot, he is expressing a vision that he finds common in the church fathers.³ The Council of Chalcedon’s focus on Jesus as fully divine and fully human can be read as an analogical “both/and” position, as can traditional Catholic positions on creation and fall, grace and freedom, faith and works, and scripture and tradition. Still other examples are speech about the ineffable God, sacraments as both causes and signs, virtue as the mean between extremes, and the incorporation of non-Christian customs and traditions into Catholic practices.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle addressed an objection that has some similarity with Baxter’s question about taking a “both/and” position on the Holocaust. Does one meet the mean between the extremes by practicing the appropriate amount of adultery, neither too little nor too much? Aristotle replies that some labels, such as adultery, apply by definition to an excess.⁴ There is no mean within an excess, and so adultery is always a vice. It is something of which even the smallest amount is too much. Aristotle’s reasoning can be applied analogously to the holocaust. I do admit, however, that Baxter’s example raises valid questions about any approach to the analogical imagination that would reject the dialectical rather than see it as

²Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church, or The Principle of Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, trans. Peter C. Erb (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996 [German original: Mainz, 1825]), 143-65.

³Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard (London: Burns and Oates, 1950 [French original: 1938]), 26; 136.

⁴Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 39.

complementary. The language of the analogical can be co-opted by those whose embrace of the world is uncritical and excessive.

Bradford Hinze approves of my project, agrees with my major points in principle, but proposes corrective amendments insofar as my principles might be applied to contemporary ecclesiology in practice. He points out that communion ecclesiology can be used for good or for ill, and that in fact it is being used for ill today in some important contexts. My conceptual schema for acknowledging the ambiguities of communion ecclesiology is a bit different from Hinze's. My working distinction is between adequate communion ecclesiology and inadequate communion ecclesiology. If communion ecclesiology is put to questionable ends, it is not a "use" but a "misuse" that relies on an inadequate version. In my book I clearly criticize imbalanced versions of communion ecclesiology, such as the one expressed by the CDF in the 1992, "Some Aspects of the Church Understood as a Communion,"⁵ that can be misused to support the problematic positions that Hinze names (132-35).

I acknowledge that there is much truth in Hinze's description of current affairs and that the most frequent misuses of the label "communion ecclesiology" are for the purposes he cites. If I were to accept his amendments, however, I would feel also obliged to accept a similar set of amendments from other theologians whose worthy concerns run in different directions. The full range of amendments would surely span several volumes. More importantly, though, it would change the genre of the text. I self-consciously set out to work as a mediator within a theological world in which there are sincere and intelligent people locked in bitter disagreements. I wanted to weigh strong points and limitations in such a way that parties at various points of the spectrum would feel heard, respected, and challenged. The complaints that Hinze is making about present ecclesial practices need to be made, as do the counter-complaints of those whom Hinze is criticizing. I think there is also, however, a need for works that are more irenic, and this is what I was trying to accomplish in this book.

Hinze also questions whether communion ecclesiology is the "one, basic ecclesiology," as Joseph Ratzinger has stated⁶ and as I seem to agree. Hinze goes on to say, "I fully affirm that the ingredients disclosed by this doctrine are necessary, not optional, ingredients in Catholic and ecumenical ecclesiology." I do accept Ratzinger's position, but only insofar as it means exactly what Hinze says in the previous sentence. And, judging from the context of Ratzinger's statement, in which he

⁵Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. "Some Aspects of the Church Understood as a Communion," *Origins* 22 (25 June 1992): 108-12.

⁶*L'Osservatore Romano* [English Edition], 17 June 1992, p. 1.

acknowledged that there can be various approaches and stresses as long as the harmony of certain essential elements is taken into account, Ratzinger himself meant no more than this. If I had interpreted Ratzinger as dictating an exclusive theological method or emphasis, I would have explicitly disagreed with him on that point. As it stands, my response is more along the lines of saying, "Well, if we are going to consider communion ecclesiology as being in some sense the 'one, basic ecclesiology,' let's explore what such a communion ecclesiology would have to look like." One of the main themes of my text is that the vision of communion ecclesiology can only be adequately expressed by inclusive versions that strive to overcome imbalance by making room for a wide variety of legitimate approaches.

Jamie Phelps underscores the genre of the text by comparing it with works by Avery Dulles and J. Peter Schineller. I agree with her that my approach reflects the former's complementarity rather than the latter's mutually exclusive categories of basic ecclesiological stances. In my introduction I acknowledge my indebtedness to Dulles and offer a brief comparison of his models with my own design (18–19). I also agree with Phelps, though, that there are some significant differences between my own work and Dulles' models. I do name six contemporary versions of communion ecclesiology that could be construed as models; what is more basic to my approach, however, are the five "dimensions" of the church that I explore. These dimensions themselves have some strong overlap with Dulles' models, but the contrast between "dimensions" and "models" is significant. Some theologians, not Phelps, have labeled my method a "models" approach, and contrast it with other valuable methods. I see my stress on "dimensions," however, to be very different from dictating a particular method, and to be compatible with a variety of methods. Models name positions which may be complementary but which are still distinct. Dimensions label elements that all models and methods should take into account.

Phelps questions my rendering of a Balthasarian-style critique of Elizabeth A. Johnson. I tried to make clear in the text that I was offering this critique "hypothetically" as what some Balthasarians might think, citing Benedict Ashley as one who puts forth a similar position as his own.⁷ I had two reasons for doing this. First, many theologians would tend to think that Balthasar and Johnson are no more miscible than oil and water, insofar as Johnson draws upon contemporary experience as a source for theology. I wanted to demonstrate that I understood these perceptions. Second, I wanted to set the stage as a backdrop for the alternative reading that I offered as closer to my own: "... [Johnson]

⁷Benedict Ashley, *Justice in the Church: Gender and Participation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 189–206.

could also be read more sympathetically and with some accuracy as using the impact on women's flourishing as a tool for freeing scripture and tradition from cultural baggage that binds them, in order to unleash their transcendent, revelatory power. Johnson uses her feminist criterion, not simply to stand over and judge the sources, but as a standpoint from which to enter into the sources and open up what they have to offer" (141). I perceive myself not as accepting Johnson's positions only when they correspond with those of Balthasar, but as arguing that it is indeed possible to draw upon human experience in a way that opens up rather than covers over God's revelation through scripture and tradition.

Phelps also questions my tendency to favor Goizueta's positions precisely at those points where he departs from other liberation theologians. She asks further if I think that liberation is essential to communion. I do, and I tried to say that in the previous chapter in which I criticize the CDF's analysis of Leonardo Boff and state that, though Boff has his own limitations, he champions elements essential to communion ecclesiology.

Allow me to try to put my treatment of Goizueta in historical context. Goizueta published *Caminemos con Jesús* in 1995.⁸ He himself stressed points that I mention in my book: his own commitment to liberation, his differences with some Latin American liberation theologians, and his awareness that many of those theologians were at that time moving in some of the same directions that he was. The differences had to do not with what was authentically emerging from the margins, but rather with tendencies to embrace Enlightenment rationality and Marxist sociology, to undervalue popular religion, and to give inadequate attention to various forms of cultural alienation. It is easier for me to recognize now than it was in 1997, when I first gave the paper that was re-worked into this chapter, that theologians throughout the world have been growing in their awareness that liberation and inculturation are better treated not as juxtaposed themes but as two sides of the same coin.⁹ This awareness works to enlarge the common ground between liberation and more traditional forms of theology. The needed synthesis is one to which all parties have essential gifts to contribute. Liberation is indeed essential to communion, as is also sustained and sensitive attention to inculturation.

I am glad that Phelps referred to the December 2000 issue of *Theo-*

⁸Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

⁹See, e.g., Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993); José Comblin, *Called for Freedom: The Changing Context of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998); and Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

logical Studies because it gives me the opportunity to get something off my chest. That issue was devoted to "The Catholic Reception of Black Theology," commemorating the 1970 publication of James H. Cone's *Black Theology of Liberation*. I read the entire issue shortly after my own book was published. Author after author spoke of a sophisticated form of racism that excludes by ignoring. They spoke of white theologians who will engage various forms of liberation theology but not black theology. Cone himself summed it up in his concluding essay: "If one read only White Catholic theologians, one would hardly know that Blacks exist in America or had the capacity for thought about God."¹⁰ I looked at my own book and saw a discussion of white European and American theologians, followed by some engagement with a feminist theologian and a U.S. Hispanic theologian. In a book that is socially located in the U.S. and that emphasizes inclusivity as one its main criteria of judgment, I had failed to discuss racism or to include the contributions of African-American theologians, even Catholic ones. I felt convicted, and I intend this public acknowledgment to be the first installment of my repentance.

I wish again to thank my reviewers for their praise and for their criticisms. They have given me much appreciated encouragement while helping me to think more deeply about important questions. What I tried to do unto the theologians I studied has been done unto me. I feel heard, respected, and challenged.

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¹⁰James H. Cone, "Black Liberation Theology and Black Catholics: A Critical Conversation," *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 741.