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Review: 'Small Christian Communities: Imagining Future Church'

Dennis M. (Dennis Michael) Doyle
University of Dayton, ddoyle1@udayton.edu

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that understand "the seeing, hearing, and touching of Jesus' risen body to be secondary issues" (105). His own theology focuses on the interaction of "the grace-filled and free action of God" (which has primacy) and "religious experience" of the resurrection. The final chapter suggests that the resurrection can only be interpreted not in isolation but in the context of "unified christology," including a theology of grace. But by the last chapter we have lost the connection to literal-minded believers in the resurrection. There is a muted criticism of biblical scholars here for masterfully handling text and context while not addressing various philosophical issues of embodiment and death. I wish these conflicts among "scholars" had been made more explicit, so that even ordinary Christians could understand why biblical scholars and systematic or philosophical theologians are often as distant from each other as either is to faith's first *naïveté*.

Loyola College in Maryland

JAMES J. BUCKLEY

Small Christian Communities: Imagining Future Church. Edited by Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997. xi + 132 pages. \$14.00 (paper).

This well-integrated collection of papers and responses represents the outcome of a four-day theological consultation on small Christian communities held at the University of Notre Dame in 1996. The voices present at the consultation stemmed from such culturally diverse places as Latin America, North America, India, Asia, Australia, and East Africa. Christologies and ecclesiologies emerging within local communities provided the theological focus. Careful attention to group dynamics in various types of forums provided the method. The quest for inculturated, grass-roots expressions of Christianity provided the goal.

The resulting volume is informative, imaginative, and lively. Many of the discussion-framing themes represent the type of "bottom up" approach associated with liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and with contextual theologian Robert Schreiter. These themes include an option for: the poor vis-à-vis the privileged; popular religiosity vis-à-vis more formal varieties; orthopraxy vis-à-vis orthodoxy; the revolutionary Jesus vis-à-vis the comforting Jesus; and community vis-à-vis institution. Other recurring themes include an emphasis on the cross as a sign of contradiction, on the "people of God" as a key theme of Vatican II, and on the need to leave behind ecclesial structures that are no longer needed.

There are moments when the suspicious reader may wonder to what extent these themes truly represent the experience of people in small Christian communities and to what extent they represent the biases associated with a particular academic school of thought. Fortunately, the responses and interchanges manage with some regularity to go deeper than any preconceived ideologies to explore genuinely the faith experience of various peoples.

Of particular interest are reports from East Africa expressing inculturated ecclesiologies that focus on the Church as the family of God and on Jesus as

ancestor and as elder brother. Also of special interest is the response paper of Catherine Nerney, who is able to reiterate and affirm the insights of local theologies while relating them positively to the communion of the Church universal. A useful sociological study of small Christian communities in the United States adds to the worth of this valuable little book.

This work belongs in the library of every college that offers courses in theology. It could be used as one text among others in a course on church, and also as a reading for introductory courses, parish groups, or for any type of small Christian community.

University of Dayton

DENNIS M. DOYLE

The Papacy and the People of God. Edited by Gary MacEoin. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998. xii + 160 pages. \$15.00 (paper).

In 1995, Pope John Paul II penned *Ut Unum Sint*. This encyclical sketches the pontiff's perspective on the ecumenical movement. Therein he confesses that the papacy is often perceived as a stumbling block in this process and he calls for a universal dialogue on the nature of papal primacy. It is his fervent hope that all Christians will eventually recognize a universally accepted Petrine ministry within the church.

Much attention has been given to this letter. Gary MacEoin, a frequent contributor to the *National Catholic Reporter*, has invited ten theologians and journalists from around the world to envision the papacy of the next century. This volume contains their reflections. Ten are Roman Catholics; one is a Protestant: Joan Chittister, Paul Collins, Harvey Cox, Ana Mariá Ezcurra, Bernard Häring, Francis X. Murphy, Pablo Richard, John Wilkins, Alain Woodrow, and Giancarlo Zizola.

In their accumulated wisdom, these authors assert that Vatican II sparked a reform movement which now demands the reformation of the papacy itself. They envision the Church as a communion of churches and call for the demise of Vatican centralism. The future pontiff will be elected by a broader spectrum of God's people and will initiate the following reforms: optional celibacy, limited terms for all office holders, bishops elected by the local churches, the suppression of patriarchy, the ordination of women, and the collapse of all artificial boundaries between clerics and laity. Furthermore, the pope of the next century is challenged to exercise a ministry of service on behalf of the world's marginalized and oppressed peoples, especially in the third world. The option for the poor must be given the highest priority in the papal quest for social and international justice.

This reviewer particularly enjoyed the brief historical overviews of the papacy and the developments of Vatican I which culminated in the doctrines of papal primacy and infallibility (17-20; 22-35; 63-69; and 74-82). It is always good to be reminded that a distinction must be made between the substance of a dogma and the historically conditioned forms in which it has been enfolded. Some current practices come not from the mandate of Christ but from an emulation of European monarchs.