

CREATING COMMUNION: THE THEOLOGY OF THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE CHURCH

by John J. Markey, OP

(Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003. Paper, 192 pages)

In the Introduction John Markey says that this book on ecclesiology is an attempt to look back and forward. In a glance back, he reviews the theological origins of Vatican II. In looking forward he anticipates the next stage in the Church's life. While he feels we may have entered the "winter season in the life of the Church," due to growing polarization and increased antagonism between theological camps, he has hope that the work of the Council will serve as a living flame to guide the Church in the new era it has entered.

Vatican II came at the end of one long period of development and at the beginning of another. So, the book begins with an overview of past ecclesiology. The Church's merger with the Roman empire and Augustine's dualistic notions of the "City of God" and the "City of Cain" dominated church thinking for 1,500 years. From this perspective, in matters visible and invisible, the church was separate from the rest of the world. Such a dualistic view placed it in conflict with the secular and political realms since the church fostered a perception of itself as "over against" the world. Change happened in the twentieth century. The notion of the church as a living, growing and changing organism emerged under Pius XII's metaphor of the "Mystical Body." The advantage to this notion was to expand ecclesiology to include the laity and see the Church as a community of the faithful united by love and made visible in concrete acts guided by the Holy Spirit. But Pius XII identified the Mystical Body of Christ as only Roman Catholics. Yves Congar, OP saw the need for an ecclesiology to address, not only other Christian denominations, but also the reality of grace in all cultures and peoples. He used the term "communion" to describe the unique community animated by the Spirit that acted as the sacrament of Christ in the world. Markey sees this notion of a "communion ecclesiology" as the unifying theme in the documents that subsequently came from the Council. He says that communion ecclesiology has been a "Copernican revolution" in ecclesiology and that it "reinterprets almost every dimension of the Church's self-understanding" (p. 23). Thus, Markey intends his book to develop a deeper understanding of the idea of communion to aid in interpreting the Council's documents to meet the challenges of internal and ecumenical ecclesial discussions.

Markey analyzes the principle Vatican documents that deal with the Church; most

especially "Lumen Gentium" and "Gaudium et Spes." Using the rich metaphor "the People of God," the Council acknowledged the diverse and universal scope of the spiritual community gathered in God's universal saving will. The metaphor "People of God" allowed the Church to be defined beyond any narrow or particular structure. The Council addressed the wider and invisible community of Christ that is enlivened by his Spirit into a spiritual community. Thus, "Lumen Gentium" included in its notion of the Church all those who "seek God with a sincere heart." Christ's Church extends, through the actions of the Spirit, beyond the boundaries of the visible and hierarchical institution of any one particular church.

Since the goal of the Spirit's activity is community for all God's creation—Markey calls the principle of communion that was the Council's organizing influence, the "pneumatological principle." He does an excellent job tracing the work of the Spirit through Hebrew and Christian scriptures, showing how the Spirit creates community; reveals the risen Christ in history and enables personal and social transformation. This analysis of pneumatology is one of the strongest points of the book, as the author discusses how the Council "rediscovered" and based its documents on the work of the Spirit. In discussing the work of the Spirit in the human community, Markey points to the active and guiding presence of God's Spirit both within the church and the rest of humanity--- particularly in human pain.

Preachers need to stay attuned to current theological thinking. I think we can get in the habit of just reading what pertains directly to the current preaching we are preparing. We need to maintain a "background" of study and reading in diverse theological matters. We are, by the nature of our reflecting on life and God's Word, doing theology in our preaching. But the question is: what kind of theology are we doing? Is it reasoned and supported by thoughtful theologians? John Markey's book will offer solid support to the preacher-theologian. The preacher will have in this one volume a systematic review of Catholic ecclesiology as well as a thorough discussion of the work of the Spirit in communities of those who, while not officially affiliated with any ecclesial body, nevertheless, reveal the life of the Spirit in ever widening circles of genuine communities throughout time and history.

----Jude Siciliano, OP

QUOTE:

The Church as a communion answers the "cry of the heart" of hyper-modernity. American culture in particular is in desperate need of genuine authentic models of community that can answer the American desire for full individuality and autonomy while at the same time uniting the individual in a full sharing of life with other people.... The Church itself exists as a community of communities and draws the individuals who belong to her into this rich, complex and ultimately universal community of relationships.

-----Markey, page 1.