

BOOK REVIEWS

Mark D. Chapman (ed.), *Hope in the Ecumenical Future*, Palgrave Macmillan, Oxford, 2017, 226 p.

The unexpected withdrawal of Pope Benedict XVI (28th of February 2013) and the election of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio (12th of March 2013) created very quickly a new era for ecumenism and provided a greatly different backdrop from the gloom of the past. Although nobody could have predicted these events, it offered an opportunity for the gathered ecclesiologists and ecumenists to reflect on the first year or so Francis' time as Pope.

In this context, an important conference is held at Oxford between 9- 11 April 2014 with the theme "Hope in the Ecumenical Future", and in many ways, it was intended to provide a shot in the arm for many disillusioned ecumenists and ecclesiologists who hoped for a better future.

The chapters collected in this volume, were at first papers presented at that Conference. The editor, Mark D. Chapman (born 1960), is an Anglican priest, Vice – Principal of Ripon College, Cuddesdon, and Professor of the History and Modern Theology at the University of Oxford. His field of study is in ecumenism and misiology. Among his works, the most recent ones are: *The Fantasy of Reunion: Anglicans, Catholics and Ecumenism, 1833 – 1882* (Oxford University Press, 2014) and *Theology at War and Peace: English Theology and Germany in the First World War* (Routledge, London, 2017).

The *first part* of this book addresses methodological issues, especially the relationships between hope and ecumenism. In a comprehensive essay (p. 13 – 27), Mary Doak of the University of San Diego locates the discussion in the broader history of theologies of hope and eschatology exemplified, among others, by Jürgen Moltmann. She raises significant questions about the appropriateness of the model of the Trinity as a pattern of perfect harmony in pure communion. This offers a poor analogy for ecumenical consensus which, she suggests, has to face the realities of ecclesial conflict, disunity and exclusion.

In the second chapter (p. 27 – 45), Thomas Hughson SJ similarly raises questions about the relationship between hope and charity, without which the ecumenical movement will simply become 'a repeated cycle of hope and disappointment'. From a different perspective and background, the leading Italian missiologist Sandra Mazzolini (p. 45 – 63) discusses the relationships between mission and hope, showing how Christian hope entails responsible witnessing to God. The leads on to a firm commitment to solidarity that calls for a dynamic reconfiguring of a radically inclusive vision that implies solidarity with everyone, as well as care for the world: all Churches should engage in this process in a joint synergy that is respectful of difference and diversity.¹

From a more philosophical perspective, and with a very close reading of texts, many of which are not available in English, Craig Phillips discusses the work of the radical Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (p. 63 – 85), who has devoted a great deal of attention to the analysis of the impact of resignation of Pope Benedict and the possibilities it offers to the Church.

The *second part* of the book moves on from the explorations of method into a discussion of hope in ecumenism. The authors have been able to explore the impact of the first years of Pope Francis' pontificate.

In his chapter (p. 85 – 103), Jakob Egeris Thorsen investigates the ecumenical impulses of the document produced by the Latin American bishops meeting at their Vth General Conference in Aparecida, Brazil, from 13 to 31 May 2007.² In this, Thorsen discerned an important number of areas in which the document held out significant ecumenical hope, even the changed circumstances of Latin America which has seen the rise of secularism and pluralism.

Similarly, Gerard Mannion offers a detailed account of Pope Francis' many ecumenical and inter – religious encounters, which offer a quite style and set a different tone from that of his predecessor (p. 103 – 133). According to Mannion, Francis continues to be resolutely serious about grasping

1 The historical and social implications of Christian hope are discussed in the recent WCC document *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, presented at the Tenth Assembly at Busan, South Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, but also in Pope Francis' Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* of 24 November 2013.

2 In this conference, a major role had the future pope Jorge Mario Bergoglio, back then Archbishop of Buenos Aires.

Mark D. Chapman (ed.), *Hope in the Ecumenical Future*

the challenge of the “hard questions” that remain divisive both inside and outside the Church: there is every cause, he suggests, for a great deal of hope in the ecumenical future.

Bishop Christopher Hill, formerly Bishop of Guildford in the Church of England and currently (from 2013) President of the Conference of European Churches, offers a reflective chapter (p. 133 – 149) which draws on his long experience of ecumenism at the official level. In this, he offers a candid assessment of the history of the relation between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. He concludes that hope is something very different from facile optimism, and it takes real work and genuine risk in order to succeed.

In their different ways, Thorsen, Mannion and Hill each show that the style, manner and substance of Pope Francis’ ministry of unity to date have brought renewed energy and vitality to intra – church, inter – church, inter – faith and faith – world dialogue alike.

The final part of the book moves into some outworkings of ecumenism in different settings, both practical and historical. From an Australian context, Maggie Kappelhof, using a “gift – task” method, reassesses the creedal marks of the Church (unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity), as a “communicative, analytical and theological” paradigm for the Church in the twenty – first century (p. 149 – 167). Also from Australia, Patricia Madigan OP traces the history of the Australian Churches Covenanting Together process from 1994 to 2014 (p. 167 – 183). From first – hand experience and through detailed case studies, she analyses the challenges that this Australian experiment in multilateral ecumenism has faced and continues to face: she not only concludes with a sense of realism – pointing to a number of hurdles that were put in the way of ecumenical progress – but she also offers a note of optimism as new bilateral and multilateral agreements continue to be made.

The two final chapters engage more broadly with the pluralist context of the modern world. The systematic theologian Chukwumamkpan Vincent Ifeme offers a far – reaching analysis of the commonalities and differences between the religions, including the African indigenous (p. 183 – 203). Finally, the American theologian Richard Penaskovic offers a thorough investigation of the French theologian Simone Weil, who is considered to be something of a pluralist before her time, and who is shown to display many similarities to comparative theology which seeks to learn

Mark D. Chapman (ed.), *Hope in the Ecumenical Future*

through engagement and dialogue with the theological systems of other world views and religions (p. 203 – 223).

All in all, this collection offers a series of reflections on this exciting ecumenical moment and suggests ways forward for the Churches. Things have changed, and there is reason to hope that the thaw will continue, and one might even hope that increased dialogue between the Churches might be the first stage towards a broader reconciliation.

Rev. Phd. Stud. Traian Nojea