

Featured Review

– *Reforming the Church*

Enda McDonagh

Gabriel Daly's latest book, *The Church Always in Need of Reform*, is both timely and significant. It might be argued that a book with such a title must be always timely given that the Church is always a 'community of sinners', even if traditionally the preferable and also valid description is of it as a 'communion of saints'. It is that dialectic, if never so named, which gives Daly's book its intellectual rigour and theological power. The breadth of discussion is so broad and the detail of analysis so profound and complex, that the best this limited review can hope to achieve is to revisit and reflect on some of the major themes as suggested by the author's own overarching concern with the reforms deriving from the Second Vatican Council and given new life by the words and gestures, if not yet decisive actions, by Pope Francis.

AGGIORNAMENTO AND RESSOURCEMENT

John XXIII's summons of the Council dwelt on need for *aggiornamento* in the hope of enabling the Church to have a fresh presence in the world of mid to late twentieth century and so, as we might say now, a fresh force for evangelisation. Some theological attempts to promote this especially in France had dwelt on the need for return to sources in the early Church, Ressourcement as it was labelled. This provoked a return to the early twentieth century restrictive practices of Vatican authority in the reactions of the Holy Office as it was then called. It is some measure of the achievement of Vatican II that theologians censured at that time like Yves Congar and Dominique Chenu became such important positive influences at the Council in face of persistent resistance from the usual very conservative suspects, by now a tiny minority of the Council Fathers. It has however been their and their successors'

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continuing recovery of power after the Council closed that has, in the view of Daly, of many other theologians and of so many of the faithful, frustrated the aims of the Council and provoked Daly into this forceful response.

In this context it is well to be reminded of these two major documents of Vatican II, *De Ecclesia* (The Church) and *Gaudium et Spes* (on The Church in the Modern World). In the first of these on the Church, the chapter headings and their sequence is important to this discussion. Chapter I on the Church as Mystery is obviously not meant as referring to the puzzling nature of the Church however much it may appear like that to outsiders and some insiders. Mystery refers of course to the fact that it is beyond simple human comprehension. More significantly it communicates the reality of the Church as the contemporary presence of the God of Jesus Christ, Creator, Lover and Saviour of the universe and of humankind. In the immediately following chapter this presence is identified primarily as The People of God and only in the third chapter is the question of the structures of the Church addressed. The previous dominant tendency to think of the Church as primarily in terms of structure and hierarchy is clearly put in its subordinate third place. And within this structural discussion the aspect of collegiality is recognised as qualifying the usual emphasis on the power relations of superior and subordinate. *The Church in the Modern World* emphasises in turn the listening and learning, witnessing and evangelising role of the Church in its necessary dialogue with all of God's creation, human-personal, political and cultural, as well as natural. It is in the faith-filled interchange, explicit and implicit between these two dimensions of God's presence and work, that the Church of Jesus Christ has developed and will continue to develop. From Higgs Boson to Gravitational Waves the sweep of the physical world reveals the presence and power of its Creator for those with the (faith-filled) eyes to see. The mystery of world as well as of Church deepens as it betokens the ultimate mystery of God and of God's Word in whom we were created and by whom we are perfected or saved. This is the Faith which the Church is called to proclaim and which the theologian presumes to explore and defend. It should come as no surprise that 'Church men and theologians' prove frequently inadequate to their tasks. Jesus' promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit of Truth may not always prevail against human weakness and pride although it will not ultimately fail.

In the context of a community of the weak limiting a communion of the holy (the saints), reform, in that great biblical sense of *metanoia*, transformation of mind and heart and so of behaviour, remains a radical Christian call to the Church. Daly's chapter

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devoted entirely to this word and theme is central to his thesis of the Church's permanent need of reform. This reform is ultimately structured by the Holy Spirit in the conversation between *Ressourcement* and *Aggiornamento* as Vatican II illustrated, at least partially. And even these partial successes have been increasingly obscured in the succeeding decades. Some of these successes and their subsequent limitations, as presented by Daly, will be considered in later sections of this review.

ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXIS

John's Gospel, the most theological or more correctly the most contemplative of the Gospel accounts of Jesus, has Jesus present himself as 'the Way, the Truth and the Life', the radix and foundation of all faith, faith living and faith reflection in Orthodoxy (right opinion-faith-truth) and Orthopraxis (right way of living, faith-living). Theologians in the (rather arch) title of systematic theology (improvement on the earlier 'dogmatic theology'), including Gabriel, take as their remit the exploration of the truth(s) of Christian faith in a primarily intellectual fashion. Gabriel in common with the best of that tradition does attend to the living of faith in this work as exemplified by his discussion of Church power-groups and the role of women. (The two contemporary theologians to whom he gives most explicit attention are the one time censured and now deceased theologian, Yves Congar and the outstanding if episcopally challenged American woman theologian, Elizabeth Johnson.)

It might, however, have been worth paying more attention to the relation between truth and love, between Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis, recognising that love has its own primacy both in the search for and defence of truth. It may be one of the congenital weaknesses of the divisions and specialisations in the practice of theology that love and truth are too sharply separated.

Important illustrations of this separation occur in two notable examples treated with genuine personal sympathy as well as intellectual integrity by this author. The exclusion of women from decision-making in the Catholic Church has no effective defence within the theological tradition. This is particularly evident as one reflects on origins of Christian discipleship and ministry as they evolved in interaction with their cultural and political contexts over the centuries. That there were no women listed among the Twelve did not exclude them from close relationship with Jesus and significant roles in fulfilling his ministry from companionship unto his death and to being among the first witnesses to his resurrection. Their later roles as house hosts to the community and martyr-witnesses to the faith were wisely recognised despite

their continuing subordinate role in the culture. In developing form these Church structures were influenced by current cultural models as well as by New Testament ones. This is not to deny the validity of papal and episcopal roles but to recognise their development in interaction with cultural and political contexts. This development has not now come to an end although it must as always be interpreted in faith and love.

A parallel development may, as Daly acknowledges, be discerned in the Inter-Church and Inter-Faith/Religious movements. The progress, which these movements have made during and after Vatican II, is by human standards simply astonishing. The movements may at the official level seem to be marking time at present but the unofficial relations continue to grow as one can see in various dialogical and cooperative activities. My own experience, as Ecumenical-Catholic Canon at St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral in Dublin some few years ago, taught me many lessons about the range and depth of truly Christian relations between Churches both above and below the radar. This did not involve anything unknown or unchristian. Since I was recognised as a regular participant in community worship as part of a Canon's duties and drawn into a loving, that is, explicit Christian relationship with that community, taking communion at its Eucharistic celebrations seemed only right and true. This was a matter of both Orthopraxis and Orthodoxy with Orthopraxis perhaps the primary mover. As in so much of life recognition of what is loving and right may precede the recognition of what is true.

The most notorious if still controverted example of the conflict in the Catholic Church between Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis is that of contraception. Daly's discussion of Paul VI's Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, reflects the arguments of so many theologians and the views of so many married lay people over the decades in their refusal to accept the Encyclical's teaching on this precise issue. In all this I believe he and they are correct. Pope Francis's careful response, en route from Latin America, on women protecting themselves from pregnancy in face of infection by the Zika fly with its threat to the future baby, is another hint of how official teaching even at the highest level is not completely closed. Orthopraxis, loving practice, has prepared the way for Orthodoxy. There are of course many other issues in sexual living and loving which require fuller clarification in truth. One might mention the increasing loving acceptance of homosexuals and their loving relationships and the legal recognition of their committed and permanent relationships as marriage in Ireland. As Daly argues, this does not necessarily alter the meaning of Christian sacramental marriage as occurring between a man and a woman. The legal acceptance of divorce did

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not alter the sacramental notion of marriage as permanent bond. The interaction in a pluralist society between various religious traditions and the secular state is a matter of continuing complexity, calling for respectful and careful debate of the kind which Daly is courageously adept at offering.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

At the risk of reaching beyond the limits of a regular review (and of the Editor's renowned patience?) I must address the central issue of the Unity of the Church in its equally essential diversity. For a range of historical reasons, based on fear of division and thrust to power as well as on more proper Godly reasons, the Catholic Church has long put its primary emphasis on unity mainly through control from the centre, episcopal or more recently papal. The various major divisions from the twelfth century with the Eastern Churches (recently recalled with the first meeting of Pope Francis and the Patriarch of Moscow) and particularly in the aftermath of the Reformation divisions of the sixteenth century (also due for commemoration these years), unity with Rome and subsequent centralisation under Rome became critical signs of the 'one and true Church'. Such a form of unity became increasingly intolerant of local diversity. The reservation of the appointment of bishops to Rome, for example, and the definition of Papal Infallibility in 1870 became powerful signals of where the last word and increasingly the first word lay. The unexpected election of the ageing Pope John XXIII and his calling and initiation of the Second Vatican Council provided the first serious and surprise interruption to this tendency since Vatican I certainly.

The Church combination of Unity and Diversity is ultimately grounded in the Unity in Trinity of God in all its mystery. In history and in its human reality the Church is grounded in Jesus Christ, in his humanity and divinity, in the doctrines of Creation, Incarnation, Death/ Resurrection and Pentecost. How it is finally understood in the light of all these is beyond full human comprehension which has emphasised different features at different times. Some of these differences are inevitably related to the wider human situation in which the Church has found itself, as already indicated. The aftermath of the Reformation and of the French and other revolutions led to different emphases and practices with a growing stress on the unity not only in authority but relatedly in the wider Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis. Vatican II signalled a more relaxed attitude and an increased awareness of the diverse cultural and political contexts within which the Church lives and by which it is being enriched and could be further enriched in its diversity without undermining its unity. Although this diversity in unity has

been strongly resisted by the ‘continuity curial conservatives and their allies’ in Daly’s well argued presentation, it has not simply gone away. While Pope Francis, in the author’s view, embodies the Vatican II vision of collegiality and the attendant unity in diversity, he has yet to move decisively towards practical implementation. It may be one of the limitations of the analysis of Daly and of so many theologians and other Church reformers that so much of the necessary reform is still left to the Pope and Rome, almost in contradiction to their faith and hope in a would-be collegial and practically-loving community. It could well be responded that those who have tried like the recent Irish quartet whom Daly lists, were quickly censured with at least one removed from ministry. So how could any of us, more diplomatically behaved in our theological comfort zones, be the first to cast even a pebble at others for their inaction?

Happily Gabriel Daly has done all of us a signal service in this extended and profound analysis of *Ecclesia Nunc et Semper Reformanda* (The Church, Now and Always, in Need of Reform). *Deo Gratias*.

Disempowering a word. ‘This (Darndale halting site) is my home. This is part of my identity. Since I was a child I have had people call me ‘knacker’. It hurts and it builds and it makes me angry. But I’m not going to give that word any power any more. I am not a knacker. I am Traveller’.

- JOHN CONNORS, ‘Love/Hate’ actor, in a conversation with Kitty Holland, Social Affairs Correspondent of *The Irish Times*, 19 March 2016.