

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

L'Eglise Locale

J-M. R. Tillard, Editions du Cerf, Paris 1996

A review by David Carter, June 1996

This is the finest piece of ecclesiological writing it has ever been my privilege to read. Despite the limitations of my French, I found myself being swept along by the magnificent vision of the author and the vigour with which he presents it.

Connoisseurs of Tillard's writings will recognise the further development of themes already familiar from his previous works. One feels that in this work he has, as it were, integrated on a higher plane the insights of the 'Faith and Order' and 'Life and Work' emphases within ecumenism. He is emphatic that the catholicity of the local church is due to the conjunction of two 'plenitudes' that meet in its life, that of the fulness of the Gospel, proclaimed, celebrated and lived in a particular time and place, and that of the culture of that time and place, taken up into and redeemed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit in the life of that particular local church.

This book is particularly significant for England in view of the 'Called To be One' process and its challenge to all churches to reconsider how they understand the relationship of the local and universal churches. Tillard's starting point is the *ephapax* of Pentecost, the once for all descent of the Spirit, creating the first Church of Jerusalem, which is the 'mother Church' of all later churches. Each succeeding local church is not an addition to or extension of that church, but a fresh manifestation of it, caught up in the same gifts and graces of the Spirit. It is interesting to compare Tillard's teaching with that of P.T. Forsyth in his *The Church and the Sacraments* of 1917, and to integrate Tillard's more Pentecostal emphasis with the more eschatological one of Forsyth. It would also be interesting to see dialogue between the Tillardian emphasis on the 'insertion' of the local church into the total continuity of the Church and the emphasis in the 'independent' tradition, from Owen to such modern scholars as Sell or Gunton, on the voluntary nature of the Covenant

community, and its free response as mirroring the freedom of the Trinity. Important questions in the understanding of apostolicity are at stake, and the extent to which it may be possible to recognise real remanifestation of apostolic communities despite ruptures in continuity of ministry, or the existence of alternative patterns of ministry.

A short section, highly significant for ecumenical dialogue, suggests that within the Church of Rome, Peter 'attests' the continuity of the Tradition, while Paul 'attests' the unforeseeable action of God'. Tillard talks of Paul's liberty as being his contribution to the Primacy and cites Galatians 2.9. It will be interesting to see how far this can be developed and received as we seek agreement on the nature and exercise of primacy.

My only regret about this book is that Fr. Tillard does not engage a little more with Reformation ecclesiologies, but it may be that that would have created an impossibly long book. This review has only scratched a tiny bit of the surface of this magnificent book. Let us hope an English translation will appear soon. It is a book for every serious ecumenist and ecclesialogist.