

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

The Church as Communion Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology

Heinrich Holze, editor, Lutheran World Federation 1997

A review by David Carter, September 1997

On a visit to Strasbourg in May, I was asked to publicise this book in England. As the title implies, it represents Lutheran wrestling with the ecclesiology of *koinonia*. It includes the statement of a theological working group appointed by the Lutheran World Federation, 'Towards a Lutheran Understanding of Communion', and seventeen supporting papers. Many of the essays throw light on the moves within world Lutheranism from loose association of churches towards a more closely related communion. Some of the essays come from American, Asian and African Lutherans, reminding us that Lutheranism is now very much a global church.

A particularly masterly essay by Christoph Schwobel relates ecumenical emphases in trinitarian theology to rediscovered Lutheran emphases on the Trinity, integrating both into a vision of *koinonia* that takes account of the traditional Lutheran formulae. Several essays emphasise the ethical and missiological aspects of *koinonia*. Thus the call of Manas Buthelezi for Lutherans to establish a genuine communion is cited:

Communion is a biblical and theological concept that points to close and organic relationships, mutual participation and impartation of life benefits such as exists among members of a body'...(whereas) 'federation' is a legal, constitutional concept that points to a loose level of association and retained power and autonomy of the ecclesiastical constituents.

Relatively little is said about bonds of communion. However, Michael Root throws out an interesting challenge. He argues that the fact that particular structures may not be absolutely necessary to the existence of a church does not mean that they are necessarily purely adiaphoral. He argues that certain structures may be 'normally normative', i.e. not to be given up unless circumstances force it. Here one can see the influence of Anglican-Lutheran discussions both in Europe and in the USA.

This book is an important contribution to ecumenical ecclesiology and a vital resource for those working in that field.