

Book Review

M. E. Brinkman, *A Reformed Voice in the Ecumenical Discussion*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016, 292 pp.

What are the most important ecumenical developments of the last three decades? What was the specific Reformed contribution to these ecumenical dialogues? What exactly is the meaning of unity and contextuality? What about the relationship between truth and diversity and between state and church? What are the ethical implications of baptism? How do we see the church as communion and what about episcopal structures? What are the differences in ecclesiology? Could we – from a Protestant point of view – see the church as a sacrament of the kingdom? What do we see as important for the Apostolic Tradition, if we cannot live with the idea of an Apostolic Succession? What about the *Apostolic Faith Study*? Is it possible for Protestants to accept a collegial or synodal kind of papacy? In this volume, Brinkman shows clearly what a lot of work has been done by so many ecumenists of all kinds. The content of the volume consists of several articles and contributions published earlier by the author (1995–2010). He arranged this content not according to the time of publishing, but in four chapters: “Unity of the Church”; “Sacraments of the Church”; “Ministry”; and “Tradition and Hermeneutics.” An update of these articles has not been made.

Referring to the big ecumenical agreements, such as the *Leuenberg Agreement* (1973), the Anglican–Lutheran Agreement *Called to Common Mission* (1999), the *Porvoo Common Statement* and the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), Brinkman asks himself: Was it all fruitful? Although he is well aware of the ecumenical harvest, he concludes that after many decades of creative dialogues, there has not been much progress in unity. There is surely a hint of disappointment in this volume. Maybe the most important

reason is that – in spite of all the efforts – historical and theological research alone can never solve ecumenical disagreements. We must not underestimate the sociological, psychological, historical, and geographical factors, he warns. He observes that much of the rich ecumenical harvest has been “put into the fridge,” because it did not extend further than the desk drawers of the church officers in ecumenical affairs. At the same time, he observes how ecumenical achievements sometimes have not even reached academic theology. The document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013) is offering nothing new, in his view. Furthermore, the ecumenical strategy of finding agreement on the sacraments as the first step to a common ecclesiology has apparently failed. The idea that convergence on the main sacraments would lead automatically to convergence on ministry was too optimistic. His view on the church as a sacrament of Christ is very interesting. To overcome its lack of a strong sense of unity, Calvinism appears to stress clearly the sacramental character of the church. And in his analysis of the *Apostolic Faith Study*, Brinkman shows the shortcomings of a too-Western approach.

His “reformed voice” is clearly Reformed and typically Dutch when he is quoting H. Bavinck and the Kuyper-Bensdorp disputation on truth and diversity. I think he is correct in most of his ecumenical observations, but he could have learned a bit from the consistently optimistic attitude of his former colleague Anton Houtepen. However, it is true that many ecumenists speak of an “ecumenical winter.” I myself am also wondering whether our church leadership achieved what it really was supposed to do.

I also share his conclusion that Vatican II has made the relation between sacrament and ministry the greatest ecumenical obstacle between Protestants and Roman Catholics by saying that the fullness of unity between these churches is

still not possible by the lack of ordination (*defectus ordinis*), and especially because of the inevitable Apostolic Succession. These points are still regarded as the main stumbling blocks for mutual recognition of both the Lord's Supper and the ministries. I fully agree with that. Why should a common theology of baptism have no consequences for a common theology of both the eucharist and the ministry? Why is it still impossible to celebrate the eucharist together as Christians when all churches accept the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who invites us all?

Another issue is the question of whether the ordained ministry in the Reformed view belongs to the being or to the wellbeing of the church. Is the ordained ministry *iure divino* or *iure humano*? The *Tampere Theses* (1986) stress that ministry belongs to the being of the church (pp. 112 and 206). If Brinkman says (p. 192) that Protestants always stress the *iure humano* character of ministry but never say that the ministry is *iure divino*, I must disagree. It is true that Vatican II states that the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* is "*divinitus institutum*" (*Lumen Gentium* 28), but not all Protestants reject the idea totally. Both Lutherans and Calvinists may have different opinions here. For example, *Confessio Augustana* V has been explained as supporting the divine institution of the ministry. According to Calvin, the ministries are "*secundum Christi institutionem*" (*Institutio* IV, 3, 4): therefore, some Calvinists dare to speak of the ministry *iure divino* and others deny it. I agree with Brinkman that the emphasis on the *iure humano* or *iure divino* could be elaborated with the common reference to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This brings me to another interesting point: Brinkman makes a plea for the emerging consensus on papal primacy and for a more collegial and synodal form of papacy. His main point is that increasing numbers of Protestants are convinced of the importance and necessity of universal structures of church unity, and they do not

automatically deny that the primacy of the bishop of Rome could possibly contribute to that aim. However, I think this is only true for ecumenically involved Protestants, not for all of them. The question of papal infallibility, however, is not mentioned, although this is also an important ecumenical stumbling block, as Karel Blei shows in his work on the infallibility of the church (*Simul infallibilis et fallibilis*, 1972).

Brinkman's reflections are interesting, and they give a fine overview of what has already been achieved ecumenically since the 1990s. He shows how many ecumenical dialogues are potentially fruitful for the churches and for the ecumenical movement itself. He expected that especially the ecumenical efforts for a theology of baptism would have consequences also for the theology of the eucharist and the mutual recognition of ministries. He writes several times that the question of the ecclesiological consequences of mutual recognition of baptism has not been taken seriously enough, and he is asking why.

He also pleads for stronger non-Western input in the present ecumenical discussions, since in many contexts, such as India, China, and Indonesia, interreligious dialogue has become part of their inner Christian dialogue. In his analysis of the *Apostolic Faith Study* he shows the shortcomings of a too-Western approach. He also offers, in the final section of his book, a constructive contribution to the development of a hermeneutics of tradition and asks this critical question: What is lost and found in translation? I hope his Reformed voice in the ecumenical discussion will find its way to both church leaders and academic theologians alike.

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