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978-0-521-09053-7 - Ecumenism, Christian Origins and the Practice of Communion

Nicholas Sagovsky

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The theology of communion, or *koinonia*, has been at the centre of the ecumenical movement for more than thirty years. It is central to the self-understanding of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Churches, and has been prominent in the work of the World Council of Churches. This book, based on the 1996 Hulsean Lectures, examines the significance of *koinonia* for contemporary ecumenical theology, tracing the development of contemporary understanding in critical engagement with the thought of Plato, Aristotle, the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Augustine. In each case, reflection on community life is related to actual communities in which texts were produced. The importance of conflict and the place of politics for the *koinonia* that constitutes the Christian churches is a major theme throughout. Communion is seen as a gift to be received and a discipline to be cultivated in the continuing practice of ecumenism.

Nicholas Sagovsky is the William Leech Professorial Research Fellow in Applied Christian Theology at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. He is a member of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission and delivered the Hulsean Lectures at Cambridge University in 1996.

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NICHOLAS SAGOVSKY

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Acknowledgements

The first full draft of this book was the text of the Hulsean Lectures, given in Cambridge in the Michaelmas Term 1996. I must therefore thank the electors for the honour they did me when they gave me the opportunity to develop my thinking in such a context. I hope that John Hulse, who endowed the post of ‘Christian Advocate’ in 1790 that there might be someone to ‘compose some proper and judicious Answer or Answers every year, to all such new and popular or other Cavils and Objections against the Christian or Revealed Religion, or against the Religion of Nature, as may . . . seem . . . most . . . to deserve or require an Answer’ and who required ‘such his written answer to be in English, and only against notorious Infidels, whether Atheists or Deists, not descending to any particular Controversies or Sects among Christians themselves’, would not have found the concern in these lectures with the *reconciliation* of Christians to be misplaced.

Two of the Hulsean electors in particular I must thank for their encouragement with this project and friendship over many years: Nicholas Lash, who, as Norris-Hulse Professor in the University of Cambridge for nearly twenty years resisted all manner of Cavils and Objections to the Christian Religion with the seriousness (or otherwise) they deserved, and David Ford, who, as Regius Professor, makes it his business to see that the Faculty of Divinity may properly be called a community, making its contribution fully within the scholastic community of the University.

Sections of the text were also read at a conference of the Council for Christians and Jews, two meetings of the London

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seminar of the Society for Ecumenical Studies, a ‘Bishop’s Study Day’ in Birmingham, as a College Lecture at Cranmer Hall, Durham, and as a Lecture in the Department of Theology at Durham University.

It is no coincidence that my theme should have matured amongst the friendships of Clare College, Cambridge. In this book there are echoes of conversations with Valentin Dedji, the late Roger Hooker, Jonathan Lear, C. F. D. (Charlie) Moule, Stephen Plant, Malcolm Ruel, Mark Santer, Dominic Scott, Robin Steinke, Stephen Sykes, Douglas Templeton, Nicholas Tustin, and John Zizioulas, conversations I remember with delight. The Master and Fellows of Clare gave me sabbatical leave for two terms in 1993 and one in 1997, for which I am profoundly grateful. The support of Tim Brown and the generosity of Jane Charman and Jo Bailey Wells, covering for me in my absence, made those times possible, as did the tolerance of my family, my closest and most beloved *koinonoi*.

In October 1997, I became William Leech Research Fellow in Applied Christian Theology at the University of Newcastle. When interviewed, I blithely assured the Trustees that the redrafting of this book would be finished before I took up the appointment. My timetable proved hopelessly optimistic. The task occupied much of my research time through my first year in the new post. The indulgence and support of the Trustees has enabled me at last to finish the work and to look with confidence towards a second volume on ‘Justice and The Common Good’.

John Orme Mills OP, Ben Quash, Rowan Williams, Alex Wright, and three anonymous readers appointed by the Cambridge University Press read the typescript in full, offering searching and perceptive criticisms which I tried to bear in mind as I revised the text. Others who read or heard part of the text and helped me with their comments were Stephen Barton, David Carter, David Chapman, James Dunn, Paul McPartlan, and William Telford. Michael Root helped me by procuring material from the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasburg. Mistakes that remain after so much help are, of course, ‘mine own’.

Two very different groups can have little idea how much I

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Acknowledgements

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I hope my sisters and brothers in ARCIC will accept my dedication of this book to them, in gratitude for the communion that we share and in longing that the Lord's petition may be fulfilled, '*ut simus consummati in unum*'.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Throughout this book I have used and quoted a variety of translations of key texts, indicating in the notes which translation is being used, or adapted, for a particular quotation. Unless otherwise indicated, the translation of the Bible quoted, including for Apocryphal texts, is the Revised Standard Version or New Revised Standard Version.

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ANCF	Ante-Nicene Christian Fathers Series (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)
CD	<i>De Civitate Dei</i> (Augustine)
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality Series (London: SPCK; New York: Paulist Press)
FC	The Fathers of the Church Series (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press)
GS	<i>Gaudium et spes</i> (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, from The Documents of the Second Vatican Council)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, from The Documents of the Second Vatican Council)
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version (of the Bible)
PCPCU	Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
PNCF	Post-Nicene Christian Fathers Series (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)
PG	Migne, J. P. (ed.), <i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version (of the Bible)
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> (Paris: Cerf)
TDNT	Kittel, G. (ed.) <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), translation of Kittel, G. (ed.) <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neues Testament</i> , 10 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933–79)
TWOT	Botterweck, G. J. and Ringgren, H. (eds.) <i>Theo-</i>

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List of abbreviations

logical Dictionary of the Old Testament, unfinished, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–), translation of *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973–5)

UR

Unitatis Redintegratio (The Decree on Ecumenism, from The Documents of the Second Vatican Council)

WM

Gadamer, H.-G. *Wahrheit und Methode*, revised edition (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986)