

Still with salvation's walls surrounded?

Ecclesiology needs a theological basis, *Paul Avis* suggests

The House Where God Lives: Renewing the doctrine of the Church for today
Gary D. Badcock
 Eerdmans £23.99
 (978-0-8028-4582-5)
 Church Times Bookshop £21.60

The Faith We Confess: An exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles
Gerald Bray
 Latimer Trust £9.99
 (978-0-946307-84-5)

Anglicanism Reimagined: An honest Church?
Andrew Shanks
 SPCK £12.99
 (978-0-281-06085-6)
 Church Times Bookshop £11.70

Anglican Eirenicon: The concept of churchmanship in the quest for Christian unity
John Fitch
 Lutterworth £17.50
 (978-0-7188-9212-8)
 Church Times Bookshop £15.75

THE 20th century was dubbed “the century of the Church”. The Liturgical Movement renewed Christian worship on the pattern of the Early Church. The Biblical Theology movement embedded ecclesiology in the scriptures. The ecumenical movement transformed the relationships between the churches. Pentecostalism rediscovered the power of the Holy Spirit in Christian experience. All had their successes and their excesses.

In the second decade of the 21st century, the debate about the Church is intensifying. It is a mistake to think that the ecumenical movement is about to expire; rather, ecumenism is entering a new phase. While it is the problems of the institutions that make the headlines, beneath the surface there is a spiritual and theological renewal going on that the institutions — of whatever stripe — will struggle to contain.

The key to holding together treasures old and new is to fuse together unity and mission, ecclesiology and missiology. That means that we look at the Church in relation to the mission of God, and we engage in mission as the Church. So what do these four very different books have to contribute? I am going to save the best wine until last.

An eirenicon is a proposal intended to make peace. The peace that the retired Suffolk clergyman John Fitch wants to make is between warring factions in the Church of England and the Anglican Communion. The factions represent four rival churchmanship positions: high, low, broad, and traditional (though this fourfold taxonomy is questionable). It is not enough to let them co-exist and then to celebrate our “diversity” (“a word dear to some of our less thoughtful bishops”): the “positive essence” of each of these four positions is complementary. “Churchmanship” is a

“vital, unavoidable and irreplaceable, uniquely and distinctively Anglican” phenomenon.

As someone blessed or cursed, as he puts it, with “an incorrigibly cross-bench mind”, Fitch cannot come to rest on any one of the available options. He deplors the “deeply entrenched partisanship” that self-contained schools of churchmanship produce. But he wants to hold these strands together in a synthesis of truths in tension.

Here there are echoes of F. D. Maurice and Michael Ramsey, but when Fitch reveals that his ideal is “central” churchmanship, the tension is lost in a way that is not true of Maurice or Ramsey. Written at a semi-popular level, with humour and a telling turn of phrase, this book is part rather droll memoir of a long clerical life, part trawl through years of assorted reading, and part manifesto for a more generous and more empathetic approach to the rich texture of Anglican tradition.

Andrew Shanks has produced many scholarly books: they are unusual in approach, marked by wide literary and theological culture, pointed in argument, and provocative in their conclusions. *Anglicanism Reimagined* is provocative all right, but it lacks the more solid virtues of Shanks’s other work. It is a middle-brow, rather knock-about discussion of a range of issues in current Anglican church life.

It converges on a rather opaque vision of an “openness” and a “moving beyond” our current dilemmas. What I find particularly unhelpful is the short shrift that Shanks gives to the four instruments of unity of the Anglican Communion. While desperate efforts are being made to preserve the *koimonia* of worldwide Anglicanism, Shanks’s advice is that the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury should become “residual”, that the Lambeth Conference should never meet again, that the Primates’ Meeting should be “abolished forthwith” — but that Anglican Consultative Council should have its managerial role “very greatly expanded”, though preferably without bishops! I think that in this case imagination failed.

Gerald Bray’s exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles is generally a model of hefty scholarship worn lightly, balanced good sense, and a pastoral touch. Although he correctly places the Articles among the “historic formularies” of the Church of England, he also claims that they are “the Church’s confession of faith”, which is somewhat overstating the situation.

To a large extent, Bray has used the Articles as pegs on which to hang a series of edifying discourses, but his exposition contains enough historical context to give his mainly contemporary interpretation integrity. Bray consciously addresses an Evangelical audience (though, unlike some, he doesn’t play to the Evangelical gallery). But he loses an opportunity to help the wider Church to appreciate the value of the Articles.

The House Where God Lives is in a different league to the previous three. The rather twee title belies an outstanding biblical and theological account of the Church as the

dwelling place of God through the Spirit. Badcock’s starting point is the impoverishment of the Church through the ascendancy of liberal individualism, whether Catholic or Evangelical, which domesticates ecclesiology, and the consequent loss of the mystery of the Church in the eternal purposes of God.

The emphasis today is on the practical and pastoral dimension of ecclesiology, but, like it or not, this is shaped by a theory about the nature and mission of the Church: therefore, it is important to get that theory, that theology, right.

Engaging with a wide range of writers, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, Badcock argues that ecclesiology must begin with God the Holy Trinity. The real question is not whether there should be this or that type of Church, or whether one is better than another, but why there is a Church at all. The Church does not exist by its activities, but by virtue of the God who summons it into existence. Altogether, a refreshing, stimulating discussion, and thoroughly recommended to anyone who wants to do some hard thinking about the future of the Christian Church.

The Revd Dr Paul Avis is General Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity, Canon Theologian of Exeter Cathedral, an honorary professor in the University of Exeter, and editor of Ecclesiology.

Spreading

Two contrasting views of church history here, says *Cally Hammond*

When Our World Became Christian 312-394
Paul Veyne
 Polity £17.99
 (978-0-7456-4499-8)
 Church Times Bookshop £16.20

Early Christian Doctrine and the Creeds
Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski
 SCM Press £18.99
 (978-0-334-04200-6)
 Church Times Bookshop £17.10

HERE are two books written in radically different ways, on overlapping subjects. A self-professed unbeliever, Paul Veyne provides a disjointed, digressive essay on the triumph of Christianity in the first four centuries AD. In contrast, the Anglican priest Ashwin-Siejkowski has written a tightly organised Studyguide on the formation of Christian belief in roughly the same period.

Veyne’s book is stuffed with generalisations. The writing is often sententious, and the thread connecting his materials is sometimes so fine as to escape the reader’s notice altogether. He opines that religious feeling is aboriginal rather than learned (what does “religious feeling” mean?); that believers see hell as a distant rather than an immedi-