
If we look back over the four most recent pontificates, it seems that ecclesiology could hardly be a more topical focus in theology. The issues have been further sharpened by the crucial exchanges between Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (before his election as Pope Benedict XVI) and Walter Kasper, and also by some of the more difficult ecumenical exchanges of recent decades. Richard Gaillardetz’s book thus comes at a timely moment. He writes as a lay American Roman Catholic and towards the end of the book sets out with admirable clarity the ‘ecclesiological bridge’ he has tried to build. On one side of the bridge he includes: ‘(1) the impressive theological achievement of the generation of theologians who paved the way for, and participated in, the Second Vatican Council; (2) the Second Vatican Council itself, including its ongoing reception in the postconciliar church; (3) the bilateral and multilateral dialogues of the ecumenical movement’ (p. 290). The other side of the bridge takes us into the global South, including theologians, individual bishops and regional bishops’ conferences. Also on this side of the bridge are gathered other voices from the northern hemisphere including the work of black, latino/a, feminist, mujerista and womanist theologians.

The plan of Gaillardetz’s thesis and the structure of the book is set out concisely in his brief preface. So, the first chapter charts the course of the biblical background, the next four chapters examine the Church, using the traditional four marks – one, holy, catholic and apostolic (but in a different order) – and using imaginative tools for analysis. The final two chapters focus on the nature of tradition and then, through this lens, the significance of memory in forming or, perhaps better, defining the Church. The scripture chapter is a succinct examination of the ‘people called by God to community’ in the Old and New Testaments. In such a short compass his survey cannot be exhaustive, but it does describe some crucial strands and emphases. Remembering the dangerous shoals that can be encountered in contemporary biblical scholarship the balance of Gaillardetz’s analysis is impressive. He highlights tensions rooted in community and exclusivity in Old Testament Judaism. In the New Testament he highlights the significance of Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom apparently without any intention of founding a church. Pneumatology is another key issue.

In his second chapter, Gaillardetz chooses catholicity as his subject. He defines it by describing the Church as a People Sent in Mission. His most
obvious emphasis here is on catholicity and dialogue and so naturally, alongside the Council, the pontificate of Paul VI is crucial. He cites Paul’s encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* and his apostolic exhortation on evangelism *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. He identifies the positive note on human culture struck by both *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* amongst the Vatican II documents. In his third chapter he focuses upon the unity of the Church under the title of a *People Called to Communion*. Building upon the ‘communion theology’ of the Second Vatican Council, which has been further developed in both bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues, he describes the Church as receiving its identity and unity through the eucharist. He shows, however, how this classical understanding (as he believes it is) of the Church was lost from the early Middle Ages onward, particularly through the growth of papal power. Indeed he lists a number of influences which eroded this understanding which had been clearer in the early Church. Following from this rediscovery of communion theology, he also adverts to the crucial debate between Ratzinger and Kasper on the universal and local in ecclesiological debate. Gaillardetz follows Kasper in seeing the universal and local as being mutually essential and nourishing to each other. In his fourth chapter, apostolicity is analysed under the heading of a *People Called to Ministry*. Here he argues that an inappropriate understanding of ‘hierarchy’ has been destructive. Hierarchy should mean ‘ordered’ rather than pyramidal, and he lauds Cardinal Suenens’ rediscovery of the term ‘charism’ in ministry. He is critical of the *cursus honorum*, setting deacon, priest and bishop in pyramidal hierarchy; he is also critical of the manner in which priestly celibacy has become almost part of dogma. The Church precedes individual ministries and our fundamental Christian identity issues from our baptism. Finally, among the marks of the Church, Gaillardetz focuses on holiness in the chapter *A People Called to Discipleship*. Here he shows how, in the early Church, the distinctions between the Church and the world were far more important than those between lay and ordained. This second distinction grew in very late antiquity, aided by a retrospective study of early Judaism and its priestly distinctions, and followed by the Constantinian settlement, then strengthened with the growth of both catechesis and monasticism. This division was clear by the end of the fifth century and was reinforced in the Carolingian period. Again Vatican II has tried to get behind this shift, arguing that the call to holiness begins with baptism. Discipleship is thus the primary Christian vocation and is defined by the vocation of the Church. Gaillardetz is critical of the individualisation of vocation by both the Reformers and Roman Catholics following the Reformation/Counter Reformation.