Dennis M. Doyle, Timothy J. Furry and Pascal D. Bazzell (eds.)


The book contains 32 articles tackling the thorny theme of ecclesiology and exclusion. The articles are based on papers presented at an international conference at the Catholic University of Dayton (Ohio, USA) in May 2011, organised by the Ecclesiological Investigations Research Network (E1). In theological circles E1 is seen as a progressive force in ecclesiological and ecumenical concerns. The conference in Dayton explored the theme exclusion as well exclusivism as the ‘practice of disregard for opinions different than one’s own’. Or in the words of lecturer Phyllis Zagano: ‘Who is in? Who is out? And why?’ (p. 175). The theme was dealt with from a range of interdisciplinary perspectives and got in the volume seven different parts. Twenty-four lecturers are male and 8 female, which shows that there is still a gender imbalance within the progressive network E1.

The first part with six articles reflects on the book Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time written in 2007 by the renowned Catholic theologian Gerard Mannion. His book functions also as the basis of the Dayton conference, which initially had a Catholic overtone. It is, however, clear that exclusivism is a problem for all churches. Dennis Doyle calls Mannion’s ecclesiology also an attempt to address the postmodern world. Mannion’s book points at the reactionary tendencies to postmodernism that cuts across denominational lines. In his eyes the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) with its overall ‘neo-exclusivism’ approach is an example, which is e.g. reflected in the language of the Declaration Dominus Iesus, or the campaign for the New Evangelization by the Pontifical Council. Exclusivists take their own religion to be superior and reject other religions. Besides exclusivists there are inclusivists and pluralists, but the last two categories are not explored intensely in the book. In his paper Paul Lakeland stresses Mannion’s emphasis on the need for ecclesial humility, he affirms that the virtue of humility is central in his project.

Mannion himself responded to the speakers, which made the conference in Dayton also attractive. He states that ecclesiology and the humility of God is about embracing the risk of loving the world. He is grateful for ecclesial risk takers and dissenters from the prevailing perspectives who discern the signs of our times. In his concluding remarks he states that ‘One cannot have an ecclesiology that is sacramental—both a sign and instrument of God’s love to
the world, if it is bent on running away from the world. Such would constitute a sacramental dereliction of duty. Discerning the signs of times is an act of ecclesial humility and practice of an ecclesial virtue—learning to listen, helping to inform the debates and discussions’ (p. 39).

Two scholars from Italy close part one. Giovanni Pernigotto asked whether the church is a place of exclusion or an intercultural community? In his view the church should choose radically love over exclusion. Intercultural encounter is the hermeneutical practice of correlating differences. It is about overcoming the old ‘them and us’ mentality that based identity on exclusion (against someone) or on inclusion (that often means homologation and denial of the other’s identity). Debora Spini reflects upon the specific condition of Christian religious groups in the public space. She argues against the project of a ‘public theology’ in favour of a ‘theology in public’.

Part Two got the title Exclusion and Marginal People. In short it is about different facets of immigration: the Catholic church and the immigration crises, ecclesiology and exclusion in the context of migration, ecclesial identity and the excluded homeless population. Part Three of this anthology focuses on Exclusion and Racial Justice.

The book Women & Catholicism: Gender, Communion, and Authority of Phyllis Zagano is central in Part Four. The author herself replied to the specific papers. It is noteworthy that in Part Four the theme exclusion and gender, is commented by three women and one Eastern Orthodox male theologian. Moreover the particular theme ‘Church and Homosexuality, Beyond Exclusion’ is also done by a female scholar. One may wonder if male (Catholic) theologians are hesitant to explore the theme of gender or homosexuality, as if these topics are not about them or not affecting them. The Serbia born Vladimir Latinovic expresses that Phyllis Zagano is perhaps too kind when she discusses Orthodox views by always placing them in a positive light. On women deacons—a central theme in Zagano’s book—in the Orthodox Church of Greece one should be more cautious than Zagano. In reality it is not at all that spectacular and it is only permitted for sisters living in remote monasteries. The Church of Greece only confirmed one of the ancient church practices (it was never forbidden), but it was hardly ever practiced. After citing the renowned Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas who once stated that there actually no theological reasons for not ordaining women, only historical ones, Latinovic concludes however that the Orthodox church does not serve as a good example when is comes to the ordination of women.

Part Five is the smallest section and deals with interesting subjects like inclusion and exclusion in the ecclesiology of the New Catholic Movements,