

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

# Ecclesiology: A Reformed Understanding of the Church<sup>1</sup>

DONALD ALLISTER

In his address to N.E.A.C. 3 at Caister last year on the subject of Ecclesiology, the Archbishop of Canterbury said:

If the current evangelical renewal in the Church of England is to have a lasting impact then there must be more explicit attention given to the doctrine of the church.

Samuel Wilberforce, son of William but himself a high church Bishop of Oxford, wrote this to Hook, the high church Rector of Leeds, last century:

Our struggle with men such as Lord Shaftesbury is for our existence as a *Church*. They believe only in separate spiritual influences on single souls.

Even if Dr. Runcie was encouraged to say what he did by evangelical leaders, his words express very well the anglo-catholic perception of evangelicals: that we have no doctrine of the church, we simply believe in individual salvation and in voluntary attendance at worship for the purpose of individual edification. There is some truth in this charge, but only if it is aimed at certain parts of the evangelical movement, which are in fact caricatures of true evangelical or reformed anglicanism. However it is those strands of evangelicalism, weak on their doctrine of the church, which are most prominent in what the Archbishop calls 'the current evangelical renewal in the Church of England.' And it is becoming increasingly common and fashionable for leaders and members of the doctrinally weak and individualistic new evangelicalism to see and to say that they need a doctrine of the church. This is why Dr. Runcie's words were so welcome to many at Caister, and so necessary—even though they could have seemed almost offensive to those with a longer evangelical pedigree who have and rejoice in a much better developed and more biblical doctrine of the church than anything seen in anglo- or Roman catholicism.

Let us not be conned: if we go back to our roots in the Old and New Testaments, in the early fathers, in the English church, in the protestant reformation and the puritan movement, in the evangelical revival, the modern missionary movement and in this century the *Inter Varsity Fellowship* and the *Universities and Christian Colleges Fellowship*, we will find an exciting and adequate doctrine of the church. Of course if we focus on just part of our heritage we will be weak on some aspects of ecclesiology, and if we imagine there is nothing more for God to teach us we will be arrogant and foolish.

But the danger—and it is a very real one—is that our new evangelical brothers and sisters, by and large ignorant of the doctrinal treasures which are theirs as evangelical anglicans, will look for a satisfying ecclesiology and accept the modern liberal-catholic-ecumenical consensus doctrine, which will appear better than nothing. It is up to us to ensure that this does not happen, both by teaching afresh the truths that are ours in Christ, and by challenging what has become the orthodox establishment ecclesiology but is in fact a slow poison to any evangelical and reformed church.

The rest of this paper is in two sections. First I shall outline some of the riches that are ours (and indeed which belong to the whole church of God even though they are not always recognized). This will be done by describing the church in four different ways. Secondly I shall present seven contrasts within the life of the church, which I hope will both clarify our evangelical doctrine and also challenge some commonly held errors.

## **I. Four ways of looking at the church**

### **a. Attributes of the church**

In the *ASB* version of the Nicene Creed, used at Communion services, we declare belief ‘in one holy catholic and apostolic church.’ This is an improvement on the Prayer Book version of the same creed which omitted the word ‘holy’ because of doubts among the reformers as to whether it was part of the original text; scholars now agree that it was. These four attributes: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity have been recognized for centuries as the heart of any description of what the church is. All four are capable of serious misunderstanding, and indeed frequently are misunderstood in modern anglicanism. For example, apostolicity is nothing to do with tactile continuity in ministry, the so-called necessity of laying on of hands in an unbroken historical link going back to the apostles. It is to do with apostolic doctrine and, frequently forgotten today, being sent out as a missionary evangelistic church. I trust that we can take these attributes as read without proof: I shall return to all of them later on in the paper.

### b. Marks of the Church

During the reformation certain marks were introduced to distinguish those churches which were seeking reformation under the authority of scripture from those which were not. Three marks were commonly used, though not all reformers gave equal weight to the second and third, and there is still not full agreement in reformed churches as to how important these last two are. The first is the preaching of the word of God, the second the administration of the two sacraments, and the third the exercise of discipline within the congregation. Article XIX of the Church of England explicitly insists on the first two, and can be argued to include the third—though the Holy Communion rubrics, for example, make it perfectly clear that our reformers saw the necessity for discipline.

It is interesting, and perhaps encouraging, that these marks, once so controversial, would now be accepted in most if not all denominations and congregations. But of course the second half of Article XIX, pointing out that the Roman Church has erred, and most of Articles XXI, XXII, XXV, XXVI, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIV and XXXVII, all of which bear on the doctrine of the church, are still unacceptable to Rome.

### c. Aspects of the Church

The ways in which the word *ekklesia* is used in the New Testament, and the meanings it has taken on from the two main Old Testament words for congregation and assembly, allow for four different groupings to be called 'the church.' Conventionally we speak of the visible or local church and the invisible, universal or catholic church, but New Testament usage definitely allows two further meanings. House-churches, such as those which met in Rome, were part of the one church to which Paul wrote, but also merited the title 'church' for themselves. And the actual gathering together, the weekly or more frequent assembly, the church meeting, is also called 'the church,' most clearly in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. So we have the universal church, the local church (which may be bigger than just one congregation), the house-church (a smaller unit of worship, teaching and witness but in some way belonging to a larger group), and the actual meeting together of believers: all are called 'the church.'

### d. Models of the Church

It has long been recognized that a church which emphasizes one aspect of the truth at the expense of others will develop and grow unhealthily. A good example of this is the Roman Church, with its undue stress on the incarnation leading not just to the cult of Mary but also to many other aspects of incarnational theology in which the church itself is seen as the present manifestation of Christ on earth continually re-enacting his death in the mass. But ecclesiology

focussing on the incarnation is not the only possibility. The Eastern Orthodox churches see themselves more in the light of the transfiguration, transcending their incarnate state and sharing Christ's glory. The Lutherans concentrate on Christ's cross and atonement, putting justification by faith alone at the heart of ecclesiology and insisting that the sacraments are the means by which we receive the benefits of his death. The pietist and Wesleyan movement makes much of the resurrection, with its insistence on new birth and triumphant living, but shows a relative neglect of sacraments and church. There is an otherworldly evangelicalism, more common fifty years ago than today, which focusses on the ascension, looking at Christ on the throne and longing for his return.

But true evangelicalism sees its deepest biblical roots in Pentecost; not the shallow contemporary fixation on immediate experience of the Spirit, but the utterly comprehensive truth that the crucified, risen and ascended Lord Christ has returned to his church in the person of his Spirit. Christ is on the throne, but in his Spirit he lives and works in his church. This perception both undermines the weaknesses of incarnational and other partly developed ecclesiologies, and also contains and unites the great truths to which they bear witness. In our true reformed and evangelical ecclesiology the Holy Spirit applies the whole work of Christ to his church. He alone is the vicar of Christ on earth.

Thus the best ecclesiology—the doctrine of the church—is one arising from pneumatology—the doctrine of the Spirit. And with the evangelical heritage of men like Calvin<sup>2</sup> and Owen and their writings on the Spirit it is hardly surprising that our tradition, once understood, deals more thoroughly with the church than any other. Indeed if Dr. Runcie understood the reformed doctrines of Spirit and church, he would not have spoken as he did at Caister. And if today's evangelical leaders understood them they would not have encouraged or applauded him.

That our doctrine of the church arises from our doctrine of the Spirit is perfectly obvious from the creeds, although in this case it is the *Alternative Service Book* which has weakened the point of the original. Both the Apostles' Creed, used at Morning and Evening Prayer, and the Nicene (Communion) Creed are strongly trinitarian, with one paragraph devoted to each person of the Trinity. In both, the affirmations about the church come in the third paragraph, as part of the doctrine of the Spirit. And in the original language of the Nicene Creed we affirm belief 'in one God the Father,' 'in one Lord Jesus Christ,' and 'in the Holy Spirit;' but not *in* the church. The church is something we acknowledge to be from God, but not something *in which* we believe or trust. So in the Prayer Book we read, 'I believe *in* the Holy Ghost . . . And I believe one Catholic and Apostorick Church.' *Alternative Service Book* Rite B is of course the

same, though with the welcome return of the word 'holy.' But Rite A makes two unfortunate changes, which in charity I ascribe to ignorance, as I did the Prayer Book's omission of 'holy'. The first is to start a new, fourth paragraph with the church, thus separating it from the doctrine of the Spirit. The second is to introduce the word 'in' so that congregations now declare belief '*in* one holy catholic and apostolic church.'

Changes such as these indicate both a defective theology of the church in the Church of England as a whole, and also the lack of any strong reformed theology in the synodical structures. Those who say they want us evangelicals to have a better ecclesiology in fact mean one more like theirs, where the church is elevated to the level of a fourth person of the Trinity, but cut off from the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is robbed of his supremacy as the Lord among his people. What we have is a church which thinks its ecclesiology is better, deeper, than that of its evangelical wing, whereas in fact that ecclesiology has been torn away from its proper anchor in the doctrine of God where any good evangelical theologian would unhesitatingly place it.

## **II. Seven contrasts within the church**

### a. Universal but also Local

We believe in a church which is one and catholic, that is a universal, worldwide church. We sing of 'one church, one faith, one Lord'. We read of 'one body and one spirit.' But in the main we experience the church locally, either in our own congregation or more widely through a council or fellowship of churches, a diocese or denomination. Many questions arise here, not least those concerning the ecumenical movement, the attempts at re-union with the Church of Rome, relations with dead, liberal or wild charismatic churches, and our doctrinal and practical differences within the Church of England and the Anglican Communion.

On many matters, some comparatively unimportant, some crucial, but most in a difficult grey area, there are differences of belief and practice. Some of these differences we can live with quite happily. Some of them may only allow for limited co-operation—perhaps in publicizing a Billy Graham mission or in fighting for moral standards or Sunday observance. More major differences may mean that we feel we can have no fellowship at all with other churches, other parts of the one church. But to say that they are not churches, not any part of the universal church, will almost certainly be going too far. All churches err, as did that at Corinth, in doctrine, morals and practice. They do not cease to be churches unless and until the Lord himself removes the lampstand and the Spirit of Christ departs; and even then restoration may be possible. It may be right in extreme cases to break or refuse fellowship. But to deny others the right to the title of

'church', the right to belong to the same universal body of Christ as ourselves, is much more difficult.

Ecumenism raises problems, but not as acute as those within our own denomination, the worldwide Anglican Communion. We may feel that such multi-national church groupings are unfortunate and unhelpful, but this particular one has come about through the missions and the migrations of English anglicans, so we can hardly disown it. We may be confident from Scripture that women should not be appointed presbyters or bishops but that does not mean that there will never be any women presbyters or bishops within churches with which we remain in full or partial communion. On the one hand we need to be clear that this is less serious than having bishops who claim to affirm the incarnation and resurrection while denying the virgin birth and the empty tomb: compared to that the issue of women's ordination to the presbyterate is only a second-degree heresy. But on the other hand we do need to argue, charitably but clearly, that when the church takes its lead from the world in this sort of way it is provoking its Lord and risking his wrath.

b. Eternal but also temporal

God chose us in Christ 'before the creation of the world;' he chose us to be his body, 'the fullness of him who fills everything in every way;' he chose us to embody his glory 'throughout all generations, for ever and ever.' The church is called into being in God's eternal plan, and it has a special eschatological character. Election and eschatology are not our subjects in this—would that they were!—but both are necessary to a New Testament understanding of what the church of God really is. It is too easy to look only to our historical roots when we want to discover our identity or to avoid heresy. Those historical roots are important, but the church is far bigger than that.

If I may be allowed to speak of eternity by means of a temporal analogy; the church was founded in eternity's past, it lives, worships and witnesses in eternity's present, and will be fully revealed in all its glory in eternity's future. Our self-understanding, our daily life as the church, and our vision, must all take eternity and our place within it fully into account. In this respect much evangelical piety leaves a lot to be desired, though anglo-catholic piety often turns the vision of the eternal into romanticism and near-idolatry. But if we look to Cranmer's liturgy or Newton's hymns we will find the great cloud of witnesses, the whole company of heaven and the everlasting kingdom.

But we are called to be the church in the world, in time. We are therefore to be up to date without being slaves of fashion, to understand our age and culture without being led by them, and to bear witness to eternal truth without being anachronistic. This is not easy. The more reformed evangelicals, in this country at least, often

tend to be out of date, to be left behind by culture and to appear anachronistic. The newer evangelicals are with the fashions of the age, but sometimes lose sight of eternal values and truths. A simple example of this is the way in which we react to divorce, remarriage, and the general breakdown of family life. Some of us seem critical and unhelpful, others are very helpful but make no judgment at all. We must be *in* the world, genuinely understanding and caring for it; but not *of* it, boldly and lovingly holding forth God's better way. The church in all times is to live as did St. Paul, ready to be 'all things to all men' for the sake of the gospel and of their salvation. We are not at liberty to claim that sixteenth-century liturgy or nineteenth-century hymnody or twentieth-century ideas of community are eternal truth, but neither may we so insulate the gospel or the church from our world and time that our contemporaries cannot hear or see what God is saying and doing.

### c. Historical but also changing

In Paul's teaching on the church in particular we see these two great truths: first that the church is the continuation and fulfilment of the historical people of God, chosen by God in Abraham and bound to him by covenant and promises; and second that it is the body of Christ, something new, alive and often surprising. Old and new covenants both belong to the church of today. The God who is the same yesterday, today and forever, and the God who is making all things new, are one and the same. This must be reflected in his church.

A sense of history, which includes a knowledge of history; an identification with God's people in the Old Testament as well as the New, which necessitates a knowledge of scripture; an understanding, recognition and welcome of the element of newness in the gospel without falling into the superficiality of being neophiliacs, lovers of newness for its own sake; and some conception of the relationship of the church to both Old Testament and present day Israel, and their place in God's plan of salvation: all these are important for the church's self-understanding.

It is certainly right and good that our liturgies should have within them elements of the Old Testament, the apostolic age and the Reformation: but that must not mean that those things remain in sixteenth-century language for all time, or that there is no room for anything new. It is proper for ministers of the gospel to identify with and learn from their counterparts of earlier centuries—this is part of the communion of the saints: but does that really mean they must dress in the same way? It is healthy that our patterns of Sunday worship have developed over the ages from Bible times, through the monks who kept the faith alive in very dark days, through the reformers who tried to keep the best of what they received: but does

that mean that the sixteenth-century pattern of Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Communion will be repeated in the eternal sabbath?

In our century evangelicals have had to resist unpleasant changes: some of the 1928 Prayer Book, which was rejected after fierce battles, and some of the 1980 *Alternative Service Book*, which was accepted after some changes and some capitulations, are quite unacceptable to reformed and biblical Christians. We have had our backs to the wall and to some extent we are still in that position. But if we fight wrong change by clinging to the past, if we are seen as 'a Prayer Book or bust' brigade, we are in danger of becoming totally inaccessible to most people today, and (much worse) of losing sight of the fact that God is always doing something new and is expecting his church also to be *semper reformanda*, always reforming.

d. Corporate but also individual

Evangelicals are often accused, as Bishop Wilberforce accused Lord Shaftesbury, of only being interested in individuals and individual salvation, and it may be that we need reminding of some of the teachings of Scripture and of our evangelical, reforming and Puritan forebears on this great theme. But it also needs to be said that many who make such criticisms have little or no doctrine of individual salvation and little or no involvement in personal evangelism, and that some of them have so high a doctrine of the corporate church and so little of the gospel that they are prepared to leave the reformed Church of England to join the unreformed Church of Rome. So we may accept the criticism without going the whole way with those who make it.

Calvin in the sixteenth and Ridderbos in the twentieth century echo the faith of Abraham twenty centuries BC, of David ten centuries BC, and of the first-century apostles, that there is no salvation outside the church. Simeon speaks for all true evangelicals when he calls schism a sin. Packer and Stott are right when they resist the call of Lloyd-Jones to come out and be separate from the impure Church of England. We do believe in the church, in our calling to belong to the whole body, even though our belief in the necessity of doctrinal and moral purity often makes that church membership and loyalty very painful. Those in the free churches who taunt us with the sins of the Church of England, and the anglo- and Roman Catholics who accuse us of not believing in the church at all, simply fail to realize that it is precisely our high doctrine, our doctrine of the church, that keeps us both within the Church of England and also sane.

A passage like Ephesians 3:14–21, much loved of evangelicals, feeds and strengthens our belief in the church as corporate, as a body. Space does not permit an exposition of this passage, but we can at least be reminded of the second-person plurals, the 'you's which are

not to be read individualistically. We read of the Father strengthening you [plural], Christ indwelling your [plural] hearts, of you [plural] living in, understanding and experiencing his love, and of you [plural] being filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. These are infinitely precious truths of which our present sweet fellowship with other believers in Christ is only the slightest foretaste. We do believe and rejoice in the church as corporate.

We believe also, to our cost, as did Daniel, in corporate sin. This is not the structural sin of politicized liberation theologies, but a recognition that as part of the Church of England, or the Anglican Communion, or the worldwide church, or the church of all eternity, we share in its guilt for the numerous heresies and follies that it has perpetrated. We believe in this sort of solidarity, and recognize that we cannot purify ourselves by separation from the rest of God's church.

But we believe too in individual accountability before God, in the need of every man, woman and child to be justified by grace through faith, and in the responsibility of every one for his or her own sanctification and full involvement in the life of the church. No amount or degree of church membership or involvement can remove the personal imperatives: 'You must be born again' and 'You must be holy'. However it is clear, and important, that rebirth, growth as Christians, holiness and witness are intended by God to take place *within* the fellowship of the church. Therefore the individual's responsibility for her or his own development as a Christian includes active responsibility within the church.

And we can go further, with Ephesians 3:16–19, insisting that true Christian growth, in holiness and in understanding, is a corporate matter. If one of us grows in understanding or experience of Christ and does not share it within the fellowship, that is not true biblical Christian growth; and if our church is not growing in understanding or experience it is very hard biblically to claim that any individuals within it are. Similarly we cannot claim to be growing in holiness if the rest of the church is not and we are just becoming increasingly isolated from the body. We are accountable to God not just for ourselves, but also for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### e. Guarding but also exploring

Part of the church's calling is to guard the gospel, to preserve the truths committed to us. By and large as evangelicals we have done that, although in recent years many evangelical ordinands seem to have been sent from parishes to colleges and from colleges into the ministry, with little or no real doctrinal understanding, and I suspect that we need reminding of this solemn charge.

But it is also true that the church of God is to be fearless in searching the Scriptures and in finding new ways of expressing and

proclaiming what it finds there. We are to believe that God has more light to break forth from his word. We are forbidden to presume that we, or our evangelical books, or even the whole catholic church, know it all. Every Bible student, every home study group, and in particular every preacher, should be striving to bring out of the storeroom new treasures as well as old. When we fail to do this we fully deserve the complaints that the sermon was boring and the itchy feet that make for the heresies of the local house-church because all we are offering is old and apparently stale treasures. We do not do justice to the living and powerful word of God if we serve it up dead and overcooked or mouldy. This is not to justify speculative theology, certainly not for new Christians or unbelievers; nor can it ever excuse heresy or misunderstandings of scripture, unbalanced teaching or unedifying doubts and questionings from the preacher. But to be guardians alone without exploring is little better than the liberals who explore without teaching or holding firm to what they ought to know.

This principle applies not just to the study and exposition of Scripture, but to many aspects of church life, worship and witness. Sometimes in our ministry, lay as well as ordained, we need to take risks—prayerfully and with very careful monitoring—and we will see God honouring such behaviour. How can we find the best ways to evangelize and nurture unemployed, unskilled and illiterate men unless we are prepared to try new ways of reaching them? How can we minister the gospel in the drug scene unless we, or some within our churches, get close to those trapped there? How can we make our worship appear attractive and appealing to those brought up with absolutely no contact with Bible, Prayer Book, *Alternative Service Book* or church unless we are confident enough in the truth to strip it of its anglican or evangelical clothes and present it naked? This is hard work and it involves taking risks, but it is what we are called to do. I suggest that we often do not even know whether many of our traditions and ways of doing things as the church are necessary and biblical or unnecessary and therefore a possible help to some and a certain stumbling block to others. God grant us boldness that we may not guard the gospel so tightly that we lock it up or hide it away.

f. Comprehensive but also cultic

The church is to be comprehensive (or public, or inclusive or national) in the sense that it is to be genuinely open to all, none is to feel excluded or unwanted; and that the Lordship of Christ which it represents is over all areas of life, political, social, cultural, work, home, recreation and so on. This is why I am happy, more than happy, to belong to a national church which is expected to be involved in many areas of national life. Nationhood is part of God's common grace to us, and conversion to Christ does not remove us

from society but rather gives us greater responsibilities and duties to society. We are to be a comprehensive church, in that all classes, races, abilities, cultures, age-groups, families and singles, rat-racers and drop-outs, yuppies and unemployables, feel we are for them, open to them, and a place or a people where they too are welcome to come and find God. We are to avoid becoming a church for the middle class—this will involve the hard work of choosing and encouraging working-class leaders and letting them lead in their own way. We are not to become a church solely for any group or a church which rejects any group. We are to be a truly comprehensive church.

But we are also a cultic organization with specifically religious aims, priorities and practices. We are a holy and covenant people, for whom the covenant signs or sacraments are important and the covenant demands are absolute. Sometimes this will appear to conflict with our comprehensiveness. Personally I think that a weekly main communion service veers too far towards the cultic, but that no main communions will make us too comprehensive and not cultic enough. The same can be said, though perhaps less strongly, of non-sacramental but still liturgical acts of worship. Every church will have to work out this sort of tension for itself, and be ready to change as necessary. If we are to be comprehensive in the late twentieth century we need to consider very seriously indeed what sort of worship is appropriate for the unchurched and if necessary to sacrifice some of our cultic preferences for the sake of the gospel.

This tension between comprehensiveness and cultus is very relevant to the rôle of the clergy, who are basically cultic functionaries and therefore not always the best people to be the public face of the whole church. Article XXI, 'Of the Authority of General Councils', makes the point that such councils 'may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes.' This of course assumes that those princes, and the states they govern, are Christian, but it is asserting the vital principle that the leading lay people in the church have a major part, perhaps the major part, in shaping the future of the church. Clergy and bishops are not the rulers in every aspect of church life, though they are in the teaching, worshipping and other cultic aspects.

We are used to thinking of what is really only the cultus, the worshipping body, as the true church. But this is a serious reduction of the church, which is the whole life of all its members at all times. Denominations and congregations are allowed the title 'church' by the New Testament, but are really only the church's cultic expression, its confessional core. They are responsible for teaching, preaching and reaching, but not for all the activities of the church. This understanding will help to avoid many of the problems of the church's involvement with politics: the church is to be so involved, but its cultus and its cultic functionaries are rarely the best to exercise that

involvement. The same will apply to social work, education and many caring ministries. Some may argue that on this basis some bishops and many diocesan and synodical officers have ceased to be cultic functionaries and are instead operating legitimately as part of the lay church. If so, why not admit that and stop pretending they are still clergy? The true cultus will both promote and encourage its Christian members to be fully involved in society as the national church, and also to be careful not to transgress its own cultic boundaries.

g. Missionary but also pastoral

The chief calling of the church in this world is to be God's missionaries, his apostolic church. It was for its failure in this respect that historical Israel was cut off and replaced by the gentiles as the Israel of God. To receive mercy without showing mercy is unforgivable.

In this century mission has been so watered down, not least by some of our own anglican missionary societies, that it now includes virtually everything except evangelism and church planting. Perhaps we have reached the stage where in our synods, boards and councils we need to use the word 'evangelism' and drop 'mission' altogether if we are to be understood. It needs to be realized that the broadening and watering-down of mission is something of which evangelicals are guilty. We cannot confess this as a sin of the whole church and at the same time bask in the self-righteous knowledge that it was really the liberals' fault. We have allowed the less conservative evangelical societies to go this way, and the same will happen with the more conservative ones unless strong action is taken. We have allowed parish and town missions to lose their evangelistic thrust, often because of well-meaning ecumenical involvement or social concern. We are guilty of dropping mission—evangelism home and away—down our order of priorities.

And the main gainer in the priority stakes has been pastoral care, often at the expense of evangelism in terms of clergy and lay time and energy. Now pastoral care is very important. It is the work of caring for the sheep of Christ. But more of it should be from the pulpit and less in extremely time-consuming, one-to-one, so-called counselling sessions. We need to remember the shepherd who left the ninety nine sheep to fend for themselves while he sought out the lost one. It is very easy indeed to be self-indulgent in our local churches, to spend too much energy on trying to minister to and meet every felt need of the members. If this can be done without in any way denigrating the rôle of preaching in pastoral care, or slowing down the work of evangelism, or building-up even higher expectations of the level of wholeness that people expect; all well and good—provided we

remember that often the best solution to a problem or felt need is to immerse ourselves in some worthwhile activity such as evangelism.

**DONALD ALLISTER** is Rector of St. Mary's, Cheadle.

### NOTES

- 1 A paper read to the Church Society Spring Conference, Swanwick 1989.
- 2 It would be impossible to acknowledge all the authors who have influenced my thinking on Ecclesiology. I simply mention two great classics which are very important to me, and five modern authors whose influence in particular areas of this paper was considerable.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960 edition).

John Owen, *Works* (Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1960 edition—especially volumes 3,4,14,15,16).

G.C. Berkouwer, *The Church* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975).

G.L. Bray in *Word and Spirit* (Journal of the Church of England Reformed Fellowship, [now the Fellowship of Word and Spirit] No 1, 1982, edited by D. Allister and G. Fyles).

Hendrik Hart in *Discovery of the Church* (International Reformed Bulletin, No. 49–50, Wedge Books, Toronto, 1972).

Herman Ridderbos, *Paul*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975).

Calvin Seerveld in *Out of Concern for the Church* (Essays by J.A. Olthuis *et al.*, Wedge Books, Toronto, 1970).