

# RECENSIONER OCH BOKANMÄLNINGAR

Harri Huovinen, *Images of Divine Participation: A Reappraisal of Fourth Century Views on Church Membership*. Doctoral Dissertation. Studia Patristica Fennica 18. Helsinki: Societas Patristica Fennica, 2022. ISBN: 9789526956787

Harri Huovinen's book explores the fields at the cross-section of patristics, ecclesiology, and sacramentology. It substantially contributes to the promising field of baptismal ecclesiology, which supplements eucharistic ecclesiology.

Huovinen focuses his research on three authors of the fourth century: Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil of Caesarea, and John Chrysostom. They belonged to different generations and milieux. Other patristic authors from the same period might have also contributed to Huovinen's argument, but he chose to be restrained by only these three. Therefore, the thesis is more a case study than a systematic exposé of the topic. This is both an advantage and disadvantage of the book. Among its disadvantages is that the book does not provide a full picture of theological developments regarding the topic that Huovinen researches. At the same time, the in-depth analysis of the mentioned patristic authors provides the researcher with enough material to draw convincing conclusions. It should also be mentioned that Huovinen sufficiently explores both similarities and differences between the three authors studied in his book.

The book is replete with merits that significantly enhance our current research and understanding of the theological and ecclesial processes during the fourth century.

First, it demonstrates that the initiation to the church and the following membership in ecclesial communities is not a quantum leap but a journey. This journey is related to the process of spiritual healing, which the researcher calls psychotherapy. He, thus, draws a link between psychotherapy and ecclesiality. He also argues that this journey is intended not for individuals but for groups, i.e., ecclesial communities. He, thus, affirms the reciprocity between a person and a community in their mutual influence. From this perspective, one could say that his ecclesiology is community-centred.

The book's important conclusion is that the church's membership should be perceived not as static but dynamic. In other words, Christian initiation does not cross a demarcation line, but a gradient that leads from less-ecclesiality to more-ecclesiality. The researcher convincingly demonstrates that baptismal candidacy constitutes an ecclesiological category of its own between the initial-stage catechumenate and full membership – based on the ecclesiological insights from Cyril, Basil, and John. He also applies his conclusions to the modern discussions about the borders of the church. He argues that the church and non-church are separated not by a clear-cut borderline, but by an undefinable frontier. This gives an important clue to interpret ecumenically the ecclesiality of the churches, which are seen as heterodox ecumenical partners. Such conclusions have far-reaching implications, which Huovinen tries to apply to some areas of the ongoing ecumenical dialogue by drawing parallels between the views on church membership by the fourth-century authors and Martin Luther and his followers. For example, he juxtaposes Basil's terminology of initiatory illumination and Luther's *Kleiner Katechismus*. These parallels can boost the Orthodox–Lutheran discussions, which are especially important in the context of Finland.

Speaking about the research methods that Harri Huovinen has chosen, he has clearly described and adequately implemented them. Notably, he combines the methods widely applied in patristics and systematic theology with the specific scientific approaches favoured in the Finnish academia. He sufficiently and critically explores the parallels and borrowings between the patristic and classical philosophies. Importantly, Huovinen relies on the imagery produced by the early church authors. He sorts the images out into three categories: therapeutic, illuminatory, and martial. This is a correct method because the images of

the church were the main way of speaking about the ecclesial phenomenon in the fourth century.

The researcher provides detailed and illuminating summaries of modern ecclesiological studies relevant to his topic. He even refers to the Japanese scholarship, which is a unique added value of this study. Among the Orthodox theologians, the author relies on Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos. However, the latter is known not so much for his systematic approach but for anti-Western prejudices. In this spirit, Hierotheos perceives even ecclesiology as such, i.e., the attempts to define the church, as a Western phenomenon. As for another modern Orthodox theologian, to whom Huovinen refers, Jean-Claude Larchet, his theological views are also questionable, as he appears to be biased by the agenda of radical conservatism and even fundamentalism. This agenda does not help him to perceive the phenomenon of the church adequately. Finally, Vladimir Shmaliy, to whom Huovinen refers as well, is an insightful Russian theologian, but he has not written much or systematically, including on the topic that constitutes the subject of the book.

In sum, the book offers a comprehensive overview of both patristic and modern Orthodox ecclesiologies. It expands the latter by incorporating the baptismal dimension and enriches the scholarship on the church's sacraments.

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