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Peter C. Phan, General Editor

# Ecclesiology for a Global Church

*A People Called and Sent*

Revised Edition

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## Preface to the Revised Edition

The first edition of this volume was written during the final years of the pontificate of John Paul II and the very beginning of the pontificate of Benedict XVI. In that moment in history Catholic ecclesiology was in a rather different place than it is today. Although both John Paul II and Benedict XVI were enthusiastic supporters of Vatican II, their implementation of that council's teaching was inconsistent. Some aspects of conciliar teaching—for example the council's call for a more constructive engagement with the world, its commitment to religious freedom, and its greater openness to other religious traditions—were boldly developed under John Paul II. Pope Benedict, an internationally respected theologian, offered rich magisterial treatises on such key theological themes as divine love (*Deus Caritas Est*), Christian hope (*Spe Salvi*), and the relationship between truth, charity, and justice (*Caritas in Veritate*). At the same time, other elements of conciliar teaching were subject to a more cramped, defensive reading. Conciliar teachings on the sense of the faithful and the hierarchy of truths, for example, were left largely unexplored. Many theologians who took positions at odds with this cautious reading of the council or who called for a more capacious development of doctrine were subject to stern ecclesiastical investigation and censure. The liturgical reforms called for by the council were often stymied by the curialization of the reform process.

Fifteen years later the ecclesial climate has changed considerably. For a decade now our church has been led by the first Jesuit and first Latin American pope. His pontificate has inaugurated a fresh and more comprehensive reception of the teaching of Vatican II. Gone is the defensive and often punitive policing of theologians, the preoccupation with a few moral issues in the realm of human sexuality, the re-sacralization of the clergy, a largely monarchical papacy, and the not so subtle encouragement of preconiliar liturgical forms. In their place we find an ecclesial vision shaped by the council's teaching from beginning to end, a vision that finds its interpretive key in the themes of mission and synodality. Indeed, in many ways, this volume's exploration of what a global ecclesiology might look like has been given concrete expression in the Francis pontificate.

And so, in conversation with Robert Ellsberg, the editor-in-chief and publisher of Orbis Books, we decided that the time was ripe for a new edition of *Ecclesiology for a Global Church*. The body of the earlier volume remains the same but the original conclusion has been replaced by a much lengthier concluding chapter. This new chapter explores in some detail the ways in which the ecclesiological trajectories traced in this volume have been concretely realized in this transformative pontificate. It is our hope that the updating of this text in the light of the Francis pontificate will make the contributions of the volume more relevant to those looking for an advanced text on contemporary global Catholic ecclesiology.

# Preface

The Venerable Bede wrote that “every day the church gives birth to the church.”<sup>1</sup> Whether you welcome it or lament it, there can be no doubt that over the past four decades a new church is being born. In this volume I will be outlining the basic characteristics of an ecclesiology adequate to this new ecclesial reality. Such a project requires, however, that one understand something of the distinctive shape of this new church. A preliminary indicator is found in the language of demographics. A number of authors have mapped out the demographic shifts that characterize this new church.<sup>2</sup> John Allen summarizes them well:

In 1900, there were 459 million Catholics in the world, 392 million of whom lived in Europe and North America. Christianity 100 years ago remained an overwhelmingly white, first world phenomenon. By 2000, there were 1.1 billion Catholics, with just 380 million in Europe and North America, and the rest, 720 million, in the Global South. Africa alone went from 1.9 million Catholics in 1900 to 130 million in 2000, a growth rate of almost 7,000 percent. This is the most rapid and sweeping demographic transformation of Catholicism in its 2,000 year history. São Paulo, Jakarta and Nairobi will become what Leuvein [*sic*], Milan and Paris were in the Counter Reformation period, meaning major centers of pastoral and intellectual energy. Different experiences and priorities will set the Catholic agenda as leaders from Africa, Asia and Latin America rise through the system, reshaping the texture of church life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Patrologia cursus completus: Series Latina*, edited by J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64), 93:166d.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> See John Allen, “Ten Mega-Trends Shaping the Catholic Church,” *All Things Catholic* (December 22, 2006). For a much more developed portrait of these shifts, see Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, eds., *Global Catholicism: Portrait of a World Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003).

This demographic shift is but one of the many new features of the church of the twenty-first century. Even when it has pretended otherwise, the church has always existed in and not above the world and the forces that shape human events have always exerted their influence on the church as well. We need to consider a few of these forces, if only briefly.

Cultural commentators have referred to our present epoch as post-modern, although some prefer the term “late-modern.”<sup>4</sup> Without wishing to deny the obvious gains of modernity associated with the Enlightenment—a greater emphasis on human freedom, technological achievement, the dignity of the human person, the autonomy and integrity of conscience, the authority of human reason—there has been a discernible disenchantment with the price the modern world paid for these gains. Given the pervasiveness of the liberal capitalist ethos, human freedom has too often been reduced to consumer choice with little cultural support for the positive exercise of freedom to become a certain kind of person. The emphasis on personal autonomy has too often led to an atomized individualism limited to purely utilitarian conceptions of community. The promise of technology has often been eclipsed by the ravages it has wreaked on our environment. The triumph of reason has opened the door to a stifling empiricism with little room for mystery and wonder. The Enlightenment’s celebration of human progress and universal reason, themes that were oriented toward the liberation of the human spirit, are now seen as unwitting instruments for the suppression of human differences under the specter of totalizing narratives, sometimes referred to as meta-narratives.<sup>5</sup> These are extended theories or systems of thought that offer sweeping interpretations of human history or experience. Examples often given include political or economic systems such as Marxism or capitalism. They are criticized because their totalizing character tends to silence or suppress important elements of human experience that do not fit into the grand narrative. Hence we find in much postmodern thought a preference for “local narratives,” specific accounts that focus on the particularities more than the commonalities of history or human experience. The postmodern sensibility is far more attuned to the reality of human diversity and the irreducible plurality of religions, cultures, and ideologies.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); for a proponent of the language of late modernity, see Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> The classic definition and discussion of “meta-narratives” is found in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition—A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

Finally, the postmodern epoch is shaped by the complex processes associated with the term “globalization.” By globalization I am referring to a tension experienced between conflicting impulses. In the wake of the Second World War, the birth of the United Nations, and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1989, there has been a pronounced impulse toward a more unified view of the world. This sense of global unification has been furthered by advances in modern communications and transportation technologies that have compressed our sense of space and time. Global unification has also been advanced by the unfettered expansion of neo-liberal capitalism, which has brought the ethos of the free market and certain icons of Western culture to the world (consider the ubiquity of McDonald’s).

At the same time, the phenomenon of globalization has also brought with it a sense of social fragmentation. We have become more aware than ever of persistent cultural and religious differences that resist homogenization and force us to come to terms with a deep pluralism that often seems unbridgeable. This tendency, in its most extreme form, has been expressed in a violent tribalism and the growing appeal of various religious fundamentalisms.

All of these cultural forces have had their impact on the church. Contemporary ecclesiology must take these into account if it is to provide a compelling theological framework for understanding something of the church’s nature and mission today. Ecclesiology, the theology of the church, must honor the wisdom of Christianity’s great tradition, even as it carefully considers what is actually happening “on the ground” as the church is affected by these new realities. This volume represents a modest effort to sketch out an ecclesiology that is attentive to both.

My own theological autobiography mirrors general trends in Catholic ecclesiology as it has developed in Europe and North America over the last fifty years. I was fortunate to undertake doctoral studies at the University of Notre Dame. Much of my study was dedicated to exploring the groundbreaking ecclesiological contributions of such figures as Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, and Gerard Philips. Many of these theologians made seminal contributions to the work of the Second Vatican Council as conciliar *periti*. However, every one of these theologians was from Western Europe and, although their insights opened the door to a more global consideration of the church, it was a door through which they were themselves largely unable to walk. Neither were they able to give full and adequate expression to the perspectives of the many Christian women who constituted the silent majority of the church.

In addition to the groundbreaking work of these theologians, my studies also extended to the greatest testimony to their work, the sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council. It was virtually impossible to study Catholic ecclesiology in the late 1980s without the work of the council dominating one's reflections. The four decades since the council have seen an unprecedented participation of Catholic theologians in the ecumenical movement. Bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues produced a wealth of formal papers and joint statements that would provide the foundations for the burgeoning field of ecumenical theology.

Much of the Catholic ecclesiology produced in Europe and North America in the last fifty years has been directly influenced by these three sources: (a) the work of those theologians who paved the way for Vatican II, (b) the council itself along with its postconciliar reception, and (c) the corpus of ecumenical statements that has emerged from decades of formal dialogue among Christians of diverse traditions. My own study has benefited as well from a whole generation of distinguished scholars and ecclesiastical leaders in Europe and North America who have dedicated their careers to a systematic reflection on the three sources mentioned above, figures such as Hermann Pottmeyer, Hervé Legrand, Jean-Marie Tillard, Walter Kasper, Thomas O'Meara, Joseph Komonchak, Francis Sullivan, Avery Dulles, Joseph Ratzinger, Richard McBrien, Patrick Granfield, Giuseppe Alberigo, and others. I am profoundly grateful for all that I have learned from these figures.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to ignore the relatively parochial character of my own background. My education gave me only a limited exposure to a growing body of Christian feminist theological reflection on the church and an even more limited access to the works of theologians and Christian communities from the Global South. My dissertation director, Thomas O'Meara (to whom this volume is gratefully dedicated), often reminded me of the broader horizons of a world church that too often went unnoted in the ecclesiology of the West. Long after the completion of my studies, he encouraged me to visit churches in the Global South and provided valuable connections that made those field research trips possible.

The invitation from Peter Phan to undertake this volume on ecclesiology represented an opportunity for me to pursue more deliberately than had hitherto been possible the global character of the church. For too long, a story of ecclesial uniformity has been told that failed to do justice to a genuine diversity that has always been present in the church. Recent works in church history have tried to rectify this lacuna.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As but one example, see Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001).

Considering the church from a global perspective cannot mean attending to all of the different regional and cultural contexts in which the church is flourishing (or sometimes languishing). In short, this cannot be a *report* on the world church in all of its dimensions. In consideration of various ecclesiological themes, it will be important, however, to attend to select developments and representative theological voices drawn from local churches in both the north and the south. During a year-long sabbatical I was able to undertake three focused field research trips to explore local churches on three different continents in the Global South (the Philippines, South Africa, and Mexico). All three trips were immensely informative. One of those visits was to the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico. There I was fortunate to discover a local church that embodied many of the most significant ecclesiological developments emerging in the church of the South. Consequently, when I have occasion in this volume to offer some specific examples of characteristic features of the changing global shape of the church, many of these examples are taken from the church in Chiapas.

Although a full-blown treatment of contemporary methodological issues confronting ecclesiology today cannot be undertaken here, a few brief considerations and basic presuppositions must be mentioned. First, the ecclesiological vision developed in this volume is intended to be Roman Catholic, not in an exclusive or polemical sense but in the sense that its central claims are in keeping with the great and diverse tradition of Roman Catholicism. All Christians, if they are to give an authentic account of their religious identity, must locate themselves within a particular tradition. To do so is not, in and of itself, to assert the intrinsic superiority of that tradition but simply to acknowledge that such a tradition is, in a theological sense, “home.” Roman Catholicism has been my religious home for almost five decades and to try and mask that would do no service to the cause of genuine ecumenism.

One of the most salient characteristics of our postmodern moment is an experience of fragmentation and rootlessness. The recovery of a thick sense of Catholic identity has preoccupied numerous Catholic intellectuals and even our present pope, Benedict XVI. Unfortunately, this desire to reassert a more robust Catholic identity has led, in many instances, to a troubling neo-triumphalism. We see the emergence of new forms of Catholic apologetics that pursue Catholic identity primarily in a contrastive key, that is, by contrasting the truth of Catholicism to the errors of other Christian traditions.<sup>7</sup> Yet I am convinced that it is possible to ground one’s

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<sup>7</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, “Do We Need a New(-er) Apologetics?” *America* 190 (February 2, 2004): 26–33; idem, “Apologetics, Evangelization and Ecumenism Today,” *Origins* 35 (May 19, 2005): 9–15.



religious identity in a distinct religious tradition without falling prey to neo-triumphalism.

Unfortunately, conversation about the church in contemporary Roman Catholicism has been hampered by the stifling and reductive intellectual framework of orthodoxy versus dissent. Legitimate concerns regarding the preservation of Catholic identity have led to a regrettable reduction of the issue to a preoccupation with what is or is not orthodox. This viewpoint too easily assumes that what constitutes orthodoxy is self-evident and determined by one normative account of Catholic Christianity found in papal teaching, the creeds of the church and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It assumes, in particular, a “standard Catholic ecclesiology.” By definition, whatever is not orthodox—that is, any departure from the standard account—is *ipso facto* either dissent or heresy. This binary view of Catholic identity is far more modern than many realize. Its reductive perspective is foreign to the great Catholic tradition because it fails to do justice to the diversity of theological perspectives that have been the life-blood of the great Catholic heritage. It masks the incontrovertible fact that within the great tradition of Catholic Christianity we find significant disputes—to name but a few: the ancient debates between the theological schools of Antioch and Alexandria regarding the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Christ, the medieval disputes between Dominicans and Franciscans regarding the nature of the theological enterprise, the baroque disputes between Dominicans and Jesuits regarding the relationship between divine grace and human freedom, and the modern disputes between Thomistic and Augustinian accounts of the church’s relationship to the world. For much of the history of the church, a common rule of faith (*regula fidei*) was expressed in a diversity of theological, spiritual, canonical, and liturgical traditions. Normative church pronouncements were few and far between and were read primarily as boundary markers for legitimate conversation rather than as reductive encapsulations of the great tradition. The formality and brevity of these dogmatic pronouncements was never thought to preclude ongoing theological discussion and significant theological diversity. If Roman Catholicism is to have a future beyond that of an antiquated curiosity, it must recover the capacious breadth of its great tradition.

The reflections in this volume will draw from the nascent ecclesiological vision of the Second Vatican Council, the most significant event in Roman Catholicism over the last four centuries. Vatican II did not provide a standard ecclesiology, but it did offer a decisive new orientation for Catholic reflections on the church. It did so in two ways. The council members recognized the reductive and atrophied state of theological

reflection on the church found in the dogmatic manuals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Consequently, the council's reflections on the church took the form not of some normative systematic treatise but of a recovery of the theological breadth and depth of the Catholic tradition with particular attention to neglected theological perspectives from the Christian heritage of the first thousand years. The council also recognized the need for a new and positive engagement with the contemporary world. To the extent that the ecclesiological reflections in this volume are discernibly Roman Catholic, they will be consonant with that conciliar orientation.

Second, the ecclesiological perspectives explored here will be ecumenical. A genuinely ecumenical ecclesiology will not settle for outlining the bare minimum of ecclesial claims acceptable to all Christians but will seek out fruitful avenues for moving toward a more formal and visible unity. Yet another characteristic of our postmodern epoch is our increased awareness of cultural and religious pluralism. It is inevitable that as the dramatic particularity and diversity of the great world religions becomes more evident in our world today, the differences *within* Christianity will have to be seen in a new light. Contemporary reflection on the church axiom "unity in essentials, liberty in doubtful matters, and in all things charity" will acknowledge the not inconsiderable unity among the churches that already exists. It will also highlight the need for far greater discrimination in the determination of what is indeed essential for the unity of the churches and an enhanced willingness to celebrate a life-giving diversity in Christian beliefs and practices.

Third, this ecclesiological account pursues a more global perspective insofar as it acknowledges the unfortunate dominance, throughout much of the history of Christianity, of Western narratives of Christianity's origins. Christian historiography has often imposed an artificial unity on world Christianity. One consequence of this universal Christian narrative was the masking of the character of early Christianity as a diverse global movement. The rediscovery of the global character of the church requires that we reassess many of the presuppositions that provided the theoretical underpinning for four centuries of Catholic missionary work. During that period the Roman Catholic Church often functioned, as Karl Rahner famously put it, as

an export firm which exported a European religion as a commodity it did not really want to change but sent throughout the world together with the rest of the culture and civilization it considered superior.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Rahner, "A Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," in *Concern for the Church*, vol. 20 of *Theological Investigations* (New York:

This process of cultural exportation accompanying the evangelical mission of the church often naively assumed that the principal identity markers of Western Catholicism were universal and transcultural in character. An ecclesiology attentive to the global character of the church, as we shall see, must recognize that there is no transcultural expression of the Christian gospel and that, too often, what has been presented as transcultural and normative was in fact a very particular Greco-Roman inculturation of the Christian faith. In the same essay in which Rahner made his insightful observation regarding Catholic missionary endeavors, he also noted that the greatest contribution of the Second Vatican Council was its shift from the church as a cultural export firm to a genuinely world church. This study is inspired by that vision and hopes to illuminate, in particular ways, how a Christian vision of the church can be enriched by a greater awareness of the diversity of its inculturated forms flourishing in the world today.

With these perspectives in mind, let me briefly outline the structure of this book. Chapter 1 will lay out the wide range of biblical conceptions of religious community. Discussions of the biblical foundations of Christianity are too often limited to consideration of the New Testament. This approach ignores the fact that Christianity emerged from the bosom of Israel. If ecclesiology takes the incarnation seriously, then it cannot ignore the Jewishness of Jesus and the ways in which the earliest followers of Jesus drew heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures in developing conceptions of Christian community. Christianity emerged out of Judaism, and it retains to this day a distinctive relationship to Judaism that cannot be ignored in any Christian theological reflection.

One of the first attributes applied to the church in the early centuries was that of “holiness.” The church was referred to as the *sancta ecclesia*, on the assumption that the church’s holiness was a gift of God made effective in the church not by the effort or merits of the church’s members but by the animating presence of the Holy Spirit. In the second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch would refer to the church as “catholic” (a Greek compound of *kata* and *holos*, meaning, literally, “pertaining to the whole”) as a means of describing the church as an inclusive and expansive reality. In the third and fourth centuries, the “catholicity” of the church took on a somewhat different meaning; now it denoted the whole church over against various sectarian or dissident groups. Thus, one of the earliest formal creeds, the so-called Apostles’ Creed, refers simply to the “holy catholic church.” When the Council of Constantinople (381) added an article on

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Crossroad, 1981), 77–89, at 78.

the church to the creed that had been approved by the Council of Nicaea (325), four marks were now ascribed to the church, adding the marks of “unity” and “apostolicity.”

These four qualifiers have been applied to the church in quite different ways. Since the Protestant Reformation, Roman Catholic theology often referred to them as “notes” or “properties” that were empirically verifiable and allowed one to identify the one, true church.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary theological reflection has largely moved away from such polemical enterprises. Nevertheless, these four qualifiers represent one of the more ancient heuristic devices for reflection on the nature and mission of Christian community. To assert that the church was one, holy, catholic, and apostolic was to make a set of theological claims regarding those qualities of the church which it possessed as a gift made possible by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. As gifts of the Spirit given to the church, these four qualities could be distinguished but never separated. Today these ecclesial qualifiers represent not only gifts but also challenges to the extent that the church’s oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are never perfectly realized in the life of the church. Fidelity to the Spirit demands that the church continue to grow into these claims.

Chapters 2 through 7 in this volume will be loosely structured around these four marks reread, however, from the perspective of the global shape of the church today. We will not follow theological custom and begin with the unity of the church; chapter 2 will consider instead the church’s catholicity in view of the Christian call to dialogical mission in the world. Beginning with catholicity as an invitation to dialogical mission highlights one of the most important ecclesiological insights of the past few decades, namely, the recognition that the church does not so much have a mission as Christian mission has a church.

Reflection on the church’s catholicity will then lead, in chapter 3, to a reappraisal of the church’s unity, now conceived within the framework of communion, an increasingly influential theological concept that foregrounds church unity as essentially differentiated. The church is not just a spiritual communion; it is an *ordered* communion built up for mission by various forms of public ministry. Chapter 4 will address the ordering of the church’s ministries.

Chapter 5 explores the “holiness” of the church read through the lens of the priority of baptism and the call to Christian discipleship that has been so central to the renewed vitality of many of the churches of the

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<sup>9</sup> See “Notes of the Church,” in Christopher O’Donnell, *Ecclesia: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 331–32.

Global South. Chapter 6 examines traditional claims to the church's apostolicity through the lens of communal memory. Chapter 7 then investigates how questions of apostolic office might be illuminated by seeing that office as a service to the preservation of the church's communal memory.

This project has been in the works for several years, and because of the extensive travel associated with it, a debt of gratitude is owed to many. First, I must thank both the University of Toledo for providing me with a year-long sabbatical to do research for this book and the Louisville Institute for Faith and Culture for offering a grant to help support this research. During my travels I benefited from the generous hospitality of the Dominican Friars in Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg, South Africa. Without the advanced planning of Kees Keijsper, O.P., my time there would not have been nearly as productive, or as enjoyable. In like manner, I was graciously welcomed into the provincial house of the Franciscan friars in Quezon City, Philippines. There I benefited from the advanced planning of Dan Kroger, O.F.M., who put together a full itinerary of on-site visits and interviews. My appreciation for the riches and diversity of the Asian church was greatly enhanced by conversations with Fr. James H. Kroeger, a Maryknoll missionary who teaches on the faculty of the Loyola School of Theology in Manila and who has dedicated his life to the Asian church; Prof. Jose de Mesa, one of the most accomplished lay theologians in the Filipino church; and Catalino Arévalo, S.J., a Filipino theologian who was for decades at the center of the work of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences and was the first Asian to serve on the International Theological Commission.

My travel to Chiapas, Mexico, was facilitated by my friend and New Testament scholar Barbara Reid, O.P., who also accompanied me to Chiapas. Her expert facility in Spanish was of invaluable assistance to me when my own halting Spanish failed me during several interviews. While in Chiapas we joined company with a small delegation from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago led by Prof. Michel Andraos. It was Michel's many connections in the region that gained us entrance into Zapatista-controlled territory in the Highlands of Chiapas. I wish to also offer my gratitude to Fr. Miguel Alvarez, a Scalabrini priest residing in Mexico City, who arranged for my interviews with the now retired bishop of San Cristóbal, Bishop Samuel Ruiz.

Although it at times appears otherwise, theology is not a solitary profession. All theologians rely on the generous contributions of our peers, both through studying their work and by inviting them to respond to our own efforts. For all its failings, this volume has been improved by

the careful reading of early versions of this manuscript by James Bacik, Stephen Bevans, and Peter Phan.

As most married scholars will attest, a book-length project can put a strain on one's family life. When such a project also requires extended travel, the strain increases exponentially. Yet I have benefited from the Job-like patience of my wife, Diana, who with good cheer kept our household running well when this project took me away from home. My sons, David, Andrew, Brian, and Gregory, have also provided their support and, on many an occasion, a much-needed distraction from the demands of this project. Finally, I want to thank Peter Phan and Bill Burrows of Orbis for their insightful editorial leadership and support.