

Church and Organisation

Keith Elford, ordained Anglican and consultant on organisational effectiveness, is being sponsored by the Foundation to carry out his doctoral studies on 'Church and organisation.' His research involves a cross-disciplinary exploration of the role that organisational theory does and could play in the Church – in particular in the Church of England's response to declining attendance and influence. This is not an area of study on which there is an extensive literature. His initial exploration of the field reveals only four writers that apply organisational theory to the Church in a comprehensive and substantial fashion. They are Peter Rudge, Joseph McCann, Patrick Granfield and Mady Thung.

Keith's reading of these works suggests a number of areas for further study which he plans to take up in his research.

1. Overall the books leave theological and ecclesiological questions unresolved. In particular, objections to the basic project of treating the Church organisationally and sociologically require fuller treatment.
2. In general, the books offer a far more extensive and in-depth account of organisational theory but, even so, consideration is incomplete and, now, a little out of date.
3. There is little or no empirical research behind arguments for how the Church does or could use organisational theory in its structure or practice.
4. The problem or opportunity facing the Church is only briefly treated.
5. Although both Thung and Granfield offer their ideas as solutions to challenges facing the Church it is not entirely clear what the value or benefit of engaging with organisational theory would be, of just how it would make a difference or what outcome might be expected.
6. More discussion about how the Church might apply organisational ideas in practice, about how it might manage the change from one state of affairs to another, would be welcome.

Three of these books were written in the '60s and '70s and the most recent, in 1993. These were times when the Churches were engaged explicitly with the implications of social and cultural change whether through informal movements such as the radical theologies associated with thinkers in the Church of England or through more formal processes, such as Vatican II in the Roman Catholic Church. The need to find a credible way of being and managing the Church in a changing world is arguably no less urgent now than then, but few, if any, sociologists or theologians have built on the lead provided by Rudge, Granfield, Thung and McCann. Why is this so? Has the Church become more inward looking, more timid? Have the ideas been put into practice and judged wanting? Have the ideas been examined and discredited? Has the intellectual climate merely changed? These are questions that seem worthy of further consideration.

References

Rudge, P.F. (1968) *Ministry and Management: the study of ecclesiastical administration*, Tavistock, London

Granfield, P (1973) *Ecclesial Cybernetics; a study of democracy in the church*, Macmillan, New York

Thung, M.A. (1976) *The Precarious Organisation: Sociological Explorations of the Church's Mission and Structure*, Mouton, The Hague

McCann, J.F. (1993) *Church and Organisation. A sociological and theological enquiry*, Associated University Press, London & Toronto