Jeremy M. Bergen. *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts*. London: T & T Clark, 2011.

"I'm sorry." These are two simple words that we (hopefully) give and receive on a regular basis. Realizing that we have sinned, owning up to our error, and asking forgiveness is basic to the Christian faith. Saying we are sorry is even enshrined in worship and liturgy, albeit in rather more ceremonial language. For the most part, we make these expressions of repentance and requests for forgiveness as individuals. But what is the case when the church as a whole needs to repent and seek forgiveness? This is the subject of Jeremy Bergen's *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts*.

The fact that expressions of repentance for past sins have become more and more common in the last few decades belies the complex nature of such acts for Christian doctrine and practice. "Given that churches are repenting of the actions of generations long past, in what ways, if any, are such actions meaningful?" asks the author. "In what sense is a penitent twenty-first century Catholic Church the same church as the thirteenth-century one? Does whatever ties the present Catholic Church has with the crusades also tie the present day Mennonite churches, for example, with the crusades?" (156).

As a development of Bergen's doctoral dissertation, *Ecclesial Repentance* requires a level of theological literacy on the reader's part. The first half of the book is a socio-theological investigation of contemporary expressions of repentance from various church traditions on such matters as disunity, colonialism, war, and personal injustice. While this does set the stage for the doctrinal framework in the second half of the book, there seems to be a significant disconnect between the two parts.

To make sense of ecclesial repentance from a doctrinal perspective, Bergen draws from Robert Jenson's future-oriented ecclesiology to envision the church primarily as a communion of saints rooted in the eschatological life of the Triune God. When contemporary churches repent of wrongs committed long ago, they testify that the church—past, present, and future—is bound together in Christ, the Living Head. Historical wrongs are thus claimed as part of the self-identity of the whole church as the Spirit brings the church to repentance.

The goal of this repentance is to bring about a healing of memories between the two parties. This requires a dialogue, where a penitential reading of history overcomes the separation created by sin, allowing the two memories of the past sins to become one. It must also be done eucharistically, by which Bergen means that "the church must find itself fully dependent on—that is, in the real presence of—the forgiveness that Christ makes possible through his death and resurrection; in repentance the church declares its intention to do so. However, to the extent that divisions exist at the Lord's Table, the church is not yet in the presence of the forgiveness it needs. It does not manifest the unity proper to it, and its memories have not been healed and reconciled" (195).

One of the strengths of Bergen's proposal is that his ecclesiology is not primarily institutional. This allows his understanding of ecclesial repentance to apply as much to the confession for the sack of Constantinople by the Roman Catholic Church as to the confession of their animosity towards other ecclesial traditions by the Mennonite churches. The connection between the church past, present, and future is a challenge for non-episcopal churches, which tend to reject those unsavory events in church history as acts of the fallen church. Bergen reveals this approach to be a cop-out. Rejecting sinful acts as the acts of a "fallen" church creates a schism that is just as real as the schism between contemporary ecclesial traditions.

An added benefit of this approach, although mentioned only briefly by the author, is the opening it creates for ecumenical dialogue. If the unity of the church can be maintained through time, even when the shared history of the church includes the persecution of members of one tradition by another, it can likewise be maintained through space—that is, as a starting point for separate ecclesial traditions to come together and create both a reconciliation of memories and a reconciliation of future hope.

Ryan P. Klassen, ThD student, Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology