

Stackhouse, John G., Jr., ed., *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003. 232 pp. Paper, \$19.99.

Evangelical Ecclesiology documents the presentations of some North American theologians at the Regent College Theological Conference of 2002. The impressive credentials of the contributors are outlined on pp. 7 and 8 of the book. The editor, John Stackhouse, known for his previous writings on the church, argues that “we need ecclesiology so that we can be who and whose we truly are” (9). Unfortunately, evangelicals have traditionally neglected to articulate reflections on ecclesial realities. This book attempts to change this status quo. The book is divided into four parts, with the fourth part presenting responses by Paul Zahl and Richard Beaton to the chapters in the first three parts.

Part 1, “Inspiration from our Heritage,” includes two chapters. In the first, Bruce Hindmarsh answers affirmatively the question, “Is Evangelical Ecclesiology an Oxymoron?” The oxymoron is that, while celebrating the spiritual union of the regenerate, evangelicalism is dogged by separatism. Traditionally, Christians believed in one true, visible church in spite of schisms, and radical dissent was dealt with by excommunication. Later, the Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches constituted a serious challenge to visible unity. However, they continued to define themselves as the church in a specific territory and state. In contrast, the Anabaptists manifested a cellular church structure. However, evangelicalism—as a transdenominational, interdenominational, visible, and public movement—provided an unprecedented challenge to unity. Visible church order was subordinated to a piety that recognized a mystical church among the divided visible churches (cf. Snyder, 89, and Humphrey, 147, 149).

In the second chapter, Kerry Dearborn recommends “Recovering a Trinitarian and Sacramental Ecclesiology” from the ancient Celtic Christians, who derived identity, sacramental vision, liturgical rhythm, and mission from the wonder of the triune God, whose presence illuminates the miracle of life. Jinkins praises Dearborn’s article as “eloquent” and “promising” (180). In contrast, Zahl argues that the essay is an abstraction from an unreal world, because no one really knows anything absolutely verifiable about Celtic spirituality (216). Nevertheless, it seems to me that Dearborn’s trinitarian recommendation is relevant to evangelicalism’s focus on the Word and Spirit of God (cf. Snyder, 82; Hunsberger, 105-106).

“Pragmatic Proposals” are presented in part 2. In chapter 3, Howard Snyder explores “The Marks of Evangelical Ecclesiology,” hidden in a liturgical ambiguity of Anglo-Catholic, revivalist, Pentecostal-Charismatic, and rock concert styles. Evangelicalism’s primary sources are Anglo-Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Catholic, Radical Reformation, Free Church, Revivalist, Democratic, and Entrepreneurship traditions (cf. Hunsberger, 106-109, 131-132). “Strikingly, Scripture is a distinctly remote source in much evangelical ecclesiology” (96). For example, “nowhere does the New Testament use the visible/invisible distinction [common in evangelicalism] as a way of explaining or justifying the frequent unfaithfulness or imperfection of the earthly visible church” (89; cf. Hindmarsh, 17, 18, 33). Snyder’s thesis is that the classical marks of the Nicean Creed (unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity) need to be supplemented with other biblical marks (the church is also diverse, charismatic, local, and prophetic) (81-88).

According to Zahl, Snyder is not faithful to the marks of the church in the Anglican Thirty-nine Articles—preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. Neither is he faithful to the marks of church discipline in the Reformed churches. However, I am encouraged by the fact that Snyder does point toward a holistic biblical definition of the church. According to Jinkins: “The word of God manifests an

astounding ability to resist even our best efforts at reductionism" (202). Snyder's passing mention of marks of word and spirit (82) also deserve the greater attention they receive in the next chapter (cf. Hunsberger, 105-106).

Special attention is due to chapter 4, in which George Hunsberger calls for "Evangelical Conversion toward a Missional Ecclesiology." "Central accents in the ethos of evangelicalism *may* be useful for an ecclesiology . . . *if* they are reformed and transformed by the Word and the Spirit—converted in other words!" (105). In the past, the church was the chaplain, moral glue, and guardian of civility and duty in an assumed Christian society. Today, often the church does not see itself as sent by God into its own social arena. Rather, it is often a "vendor" in a "religious economy," vying for religious consumers in order to sustain organizational goals. Evangelicals emphasize an individual's relationship with God and often find it difficult to understand the church in communal terms. As missiologists have been suggesting, the church must be "converted" into a people sent on a mission to represent the reign of God.

Personal conversion—the essential goal of evangelical missions—needs to be converted in order to renew ecclesiology. First, conversion has been viewed too often as momentary, individual, and oriented to beliefs and morals, and too little as conversion of society. When converted to a dynamic, corporate, and lived conversion, evangelicalism can contribute more to the struggle of the church to become a converting community. Second, we must include examination of our own culture with our usual stress on transmission of the gospel to others. The cultures of both the recipient and the messenger are implicated by the gospel. The message bearer is as much a discoverer of the gospel as the one hearing it. Both cultures are called to conversion.

Hunsberger does not succumb to relativism when he argues that cross-cultural missionary experience should have prepared evangelicalism for enlightenment and postmodern critiques. His call for conversion is compatible with biblical authority as a counter to relativism. Unfortunately, evangelicals are divided over biblical authority as textbook (Bruce Nichols), casebook (Charles Kraft), or storybook (Newbigin). A renewed engagement of biblical narrative renders the meaning of God and of personal truth in Jesus, and stresses lived truth over objective truth. This can cultivate the church as a gospelsed, cross-shaped, and resurrection-voiced community residing in the Bible story (127-130). On the debate over Scripture as casebook and/or codebook, see Frank Holbrook & Leo Van Dolson, eds., *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992).

Many evangelicals will be uncomfortable with Hunsberger's qualification of "the pure gospel" as calling us to go beyond traditional emphases on substitutionary atonement, eternal security, forgiven sins, release from guilt, assurance of divine love, and a transformed life. However, I agree with his critique of a one-sided emphasis on the "What's in it for me?" question, which plays to consumer instincts. We need to also emphasize that with God's reign at hand, we are to repent and believe the good news, to receive and enter this divine reign as those caught up into the mission of God in the world, and to understand that "the gospel of God is intended to be embodied in actual communities" (132).

In part 3, "The Best Ecclesiology?" Edith Humphrey writes chapter 5 on "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic: Awaiting the Redemption of Our Body." In response to the present pluralism, Humphrey argues that the marks of the church are intertwined so that the "one church" is defined as holy, catholic, and apostolic. Also, we must extend our view beyond the present to the past and future in order to see the church as one. Oneness requires mutual deference, as well as a hierarchical order, such as is

manifest in the Trinity. The church is holy because it has been called out of Babylon. In addition, the church cooperates with God, who makes her catholic, and is in historical continuity with the apostolic community that Christ founded. Therefore, the church is sacramental in Christ according to the baptismal formula and according to our partaking in the bread and wine.

Humphrey seems to link apostolic and episcopal governance too closely in her effort to overcome the restriction of the meaning of "apostolic." There is also a subtle tension between her reference to liturgy as a dramatization of the God-man who assumed our time and space reality, and as a creation of "God's ever present moment, stretching across the *chronos* of human history, intersecting (or perhaps merging) with the *kairos* of the cross and resurrection. . . . We enter that eternal present, that 'time-full' moment, in which everything is fulfilled and has meaning" (152-153). The concept of an ecclesiological eternal present is also in tension with the truth that the church "is also in a process of becoming—it has an eschatological dimension," which includes "the redemption, or liberation of 'our body'" (155). Zahl comments: "Humphrey writes with high hopes, which I admire" (216). However, "a closer look . . . discloses not consistent catholicism but rather liberal catholicism. . . . Liberal catholicism cannot stand. Liberal views of authority and Scripture and cultural rapprochement do not finally cohere with a historic, catholic view of the church" (215-216).

In chapter 6, Roger Olson presents "Free Church Ecclesiology and Evangelical Spirituality: A Unique Compatibility." Free church and evangelical are presented as "centered-set" categories related to their centers, rather than "bounded set" categories with clear and precise boundaries (163-164). Therefore, Donald Dayton's paradigms are both "correct in pointing to evangelicalism's roots and incorrect in portraying one set of roots as normative for evangelicalism. . . . The bi-polar center of the evangelical category, then, is doctrinal and experiential" (165). It is a trans- and multidenominational opposition to liberal theology, destructive biblical criticism, and radically sectarian fundamentalism. It is also committed to *orthodoxy* (right belief), *orthopathy* (experience), and *orthopraxy* (right living). Evangelical emphasis on personal conversion "cannot be absolutely confined to the final authorities of creed, clergy, or state." Thus, conversion "falls into tension with human spiritual authority that quenches 'new light breaking forth from God's Word.' . . . Secular and sacral hierarchies tend to quench such reforming light" (167).

Olson suggests that free-church ecclesiology—defined over against Roman Catholic, Anglican, state, national, territorial, and mainline Protestant churches—is most compatible with evangelicalism. This definition is similar to Ernst Troeltsch's "sect-type" designation. However, since 1832, when the United States abolished all formal church-state relations, all denominations have been, in a sense, "free churches." In this context, the free-church heritage involves opposition to formal ecclesiastical hierarchies, sacerdotalism, and creedalism, as evident among Waldensians, Anabaptists, Puritans, Baptists, Congregationalists, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Brethren, Churches of Christ, Evangelical Free, and Evangelical Covenant churches.

Some may object that free-church ecclesiology cannot protect orthodox faith against fanaticism and liberalism. However, church hierarchies and episcopacies are no longer doctrinally sound. Bishops and priests call for "taking leave of God" and for radical revision of basic Christian beliefs. Neither clerical hierarchy nor creeds prevent heresy and apostasy. "The ironic situation is that in spite of their non-creedalism, the vast majority of free churches . . . managed to maintain basic Christian orthodoxy better than most of the magisterial, mainline Protestant denominations. . . . Apparently, requiring clergy to swear

allegiance to creeds is no guarantee that their preaching and teaching will remain orthodox" (177). For Olson, the only alternative would be state support. "A hierarchical denomination seems unable to enforce orthodoxy . . . any better than a free church association . . . without government help" (176). Must we choose between "the risk of doctrinal chaos and anarchy" and "the risk of government or even quasi-government interference in religious liberty"? (ibid.). Zahl argues: "Evangelical Christianity is by nature low-church. . . . Our approach to a listener cannot be ecclesiological. . . . [W]e are not addressed collectively by the gospel" (214). "We have a high Christology and a high soteriology but a *low* ecclesiology" (215). However, the complexity of the issue is evident in Jinkins's comment: "Olson's argument that there is an essential compatibility or affinity between evangelical Protestantism and free church ecclesiology is particularly interesting and, at many points, very persuasive, though this affinity is also, at times, problematic for both evangelical theology and various free church traditions" (180). Jinkins seeks to explore this problem in his chapter.

In chapter 7, Jinkins explores "The Gift of the Church: *Ecclesia Crucis*, *Peccatrix Maxima*, and the *Missio Dei*." I am persuaded by his claim that "[a] doctrine of the church that hopes to be true to the gospel of Jesus Christ is grounded in the *missio Dei* revealed in his life, death, and resurrection[,] . . . *ecclesia crucis*, 'the community of the cross.' No such doctrine of the church is complete without recognition of the sinfulness of the church, indeed recognizing the church to be *peccatrix maximus*, 'the greatest of sinners,' in its failure to live up to its calling" (180). The promise and peril of evangelical ecclesiology is a two-edged sword—the "seed of the evangelical liveliness" and "a hint of the alienation of persons, the dissension and spirit of schism, as well as the impulse to exclusion" (183).

I question Jinkins's replacement of the believer's baptism with infant baptism as a better representation of grace. However, the issues he raises are real. How does the church represent the Triune God, disciple members, avoid schisms, and recognize the diversity of God's creation and callings? He argues that an ecclesiology based on individual choice to follow God, individual sharing in similar faith (*orthodoxy*), faithful behavior (*orthopraxy*), or faith experiences (*orthopathy*), is built upon the shifting sand of human frailty and variability. Rather, the character of the God of grace is the life and pattern of Christocentric community in the world. This means that "the church . . . stretching through time and into eternity, cannot be encapsulated and contained in a single ecclesial movement or institution. Nor does the church of Jesus Christ depend on our faithfulness for its faithfulness. We rest on the assurance that Jesus Christ is Lord of the church and that the church's past, present, and future are in God's hands" (196).

Jinkins proposes that the cross is significant for the church's vocation in two ways. First, the church stands guilty under the cross because of the huge gap between espoused faith and practiced faith. "If we are a sacramental presence among the nations, it is because the world can see among us the living parable of the God whose grace is greater than our sin. . . . The church's message is not 'Behold our goodness!' It is 'Behold God's grace!'" (203). Second, cross-shaped ministry is the church's polygraph, its infallible lie-detecting test. This cross is powerful. We are not called to renounce, but "to renovate power—divine power, creative power, resurrected power" (citing Alan Lewis, 199). Thus "the church does not merely survive. The church lives, suffers, and dies The church bears its cross for the sake of Christ and his gospel over and over again in history. And God raises the church from the dead to new life in Christ repeatedly" (208-209). In his response to Jinkins, Beaton unites both emphases in Marshal McLuhan's famous dictum "the medium is the message." Beaton concludes: "If the church is the *medium* through which God seeks in part to reveal

himself to the world, the effects of the gospel on and within the church become part of the *message*" (222).

Part 4 of *Evangelical Ecclesiology* presents responses to the previous three parts. In chapter 8, Paul F. M. Zahl responds to the previous chapters with the slogan "Low-Church and Proud" (213-216). Various aspects of his response have been mentioned above in my review of other chapters. In addition, Zahl writes: "I cannot be Protestant *and* Catholic. I cannot be evangelical *and* ecclesialogically 'high'" (214). "The point is, too much ecclesiology always turns to Christology-lite, soteriology-lite, gospel-lite. I wish to resist that" (216).

Richard Beaton, also mentioned above, responds in chapter 9 with a call for "Reimagining the Church: Evangelical Christology." "Evangelicalism is in the throes of an identity crisis. . . . It seems far from clear that a well-considered ecclesiology does indeed lie at the center of the movement and, even if it does, that this ecclesiology is robust enough to withstand the global forces that challenge it today" (217). Evangelicalism's legitimate emphasis on personal responsibility, when combined with the individualistic influences of modernity and postmodernity, threaten to push it away from historic Christianity. Beaton holds that "there is something odd about a discussion of ecclesiology from within what is very much a subset of broader Christendom" (222). Study of essential elements of ecclesiology should precede reflection on the various commitments of evangelicalism. Current models of core identity not only describe, but also shape, the identity of the church. Therefore, we would do well to reconsider primary metaphors used in the NT to describe the church. After listing several of the biblical metaphors, Beaton provides a useful overview of the historically grounded metaphor of the church as the people of God. Such a model fits with the narrative approach (Hunsberger); an eschatological framework for past, present, and future (Humphrey); and a response to postmodernism. I agree that "if the church is to reimagine what an ecclesiology might look like in the twenty-first century, it seems that part of that exercise will require a return to the biblical metaphors" (223).

Evangelical Ecclesiology is a useful introduction to its subject and can serve well as supplementary reading for a course in ecclesiology. The book goes beyond the important task of describing evangelical ecclesiology and provides prescriptions for its ongoing reformation, development, and even conversion. The indices of subjects and scriptural texts add to the value of the book. I recommend it to professors, students, and lay persons who are interested in understanding the unique and multifaceted evangelical perspective on the church, which is the body of Christ.

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Vance, Donald R. *A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003. x + 85 pp. Paper, \$12.95.

Donald Vance's *A Hebrew Reader for Ruth* provides the intermediate-level student of Biblical Hebrew with a basic grammar and a verse-by-verse syntactical analysis of the biblical text. Each verse is followed by Vance's translation of the original text, which is taken from the *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia*. There follows a word-by-word analysis, covering morphology, lexicography, syntax, and a discussion that includes citations from standard grammars. The format is simple and immediately understandable. Vance's *Reader* helps students to make the transition from grammatical exercises in a textbook to reading the biblical text itself. His format also provides the student with additional verses for practice outside of class.