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Haight's Christian Community in History
for Evangelical Resourcement**

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Introduction

Due in part to its late arrival within systematic theological loci, ecclesiology remains fertile soil for wide-ranging investigative inquiries from academic scholars and thoughtful clergy.¹ Paul Avis, doyen of academic ecclesiology, positions the discipline in the forefront of modern theological attention, even claiming, “during the past couple of centuries, ecclesiology became a major theological discipline; today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century of the Christian era, it is at the heart of theological research and debate.”² Ecclesiology lies at the heart of modern theological dialogue because the identity, purpose, and power of the church are inextricably connected to all other biblical and theological emphases. One can hardly discuss any salient aspect of Christianity without acknowledging its connection to the church as God’s people, or explain in some sense how God uses this eschatological people as the conduit through which he presently engages human history.³ As research progresses to analyze global ecclesiological phenomena or specific issues within any longstanding church tradition, debates will persist as interlocutors grapple with multiform critiques and proposals.⁴

Broadly speaking, contemporary theological works fall within two approaches. One approach is decidedly categorical and/or descriptive. In this sense, authors seek to explore an aspect of theology for the purpose of summarizing or making accessible

1. Scholars frequently attribute the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century Conciliar Movement and the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation as the genesis of modern ecclesiology as its own systematic field. This claim, however, does not suggest ecclesiological constructions and formulations were absent in previous generations or traditions.

2. Paul Avis, “Introduction to Ecclesiology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, ed. Paul Avis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

3. John Webster’s caution warrants mentioning at this point. Due in part to its contemporary emphasis among academic theologians and clergy, one can mistakenly advocate for an “inflation of ecclesiology so that it becomes doctrinal *substratum* of all Christian teaching.” This error inevitably leads to a diminished view of theology proper, for as Webster famously noted, “a doctrine of the church is only as good as the doctrine of God which underlies it.” See John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 155-56. Emphasis in original.

4. The growth of Christianity in the global south alone will fuel new ecclesiological inquiries undoubtedly requiring fresh reappraisals. See, especially, chapter five in Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

a topic for their intended audience. This approach benefits readers by providing assistance in understanding relevant information within a field, or framing for readers where historical tension points exist among theologians and church traditions. In descriptive theological approaches, church history is routinely consulted.⁵ Consequently, this approach is decidedly pedagogical in purpose and presentation.

Alternatively, a second contemporary approach proves more constructive in design and presentation. In this sense, authors seek to build upon or challenge the descriptive theological material and impose new models or alterations to theological constructs.⁶ Within academic ecclesiology, descriptive works focus upon longstanding discussion points such as the church's origination, its marks, its sacraments, its purpose and mission, and its varied geographical history replete with struggle and complex ecumenical ambitions. Because of the importance and frequency of the church's practices and doctrinal formulations, however, academic ecclesiology remains active with constructive approaches spanning Christian traditions throughout the world.⁷

Some constructive proposals jettison previously held views, while others expand upon or clarify the work of others. Further, that constructive approaches are critical within ecclesiology is seen in Avis's definition of ecclesiology. Avis asserts, "ecclesiology may be defined as the discipline that is concerned with *comparative, critical, and constructive reflection on the dominant paradigms of the identity of the church*."⁸ One can quibble with what Avis's definition omits while affirming what he substantiates, and in that sense, constructive ecclesiology encourages assessment across traditions for critique and contemporary resourcement.

With these parameters in place, this review article explores Roger Haight's ecclesiological trilogy, believing Haight's pioneering work warrants both critique

5. A clear example of this approach is the "Doing Theology" series recently published by T&T Clark. This series of books introduces major Christian traditions in concise, accessible volumes where readers are exposed to major thinkers, key concepts, and key theological and historical developments within each tradition. As of this writing, there exists volumes on Catholic Theology, Baptist Theology, Anglican Theology, Methodist Theology, Lutheran Theology, and Reformed Theology.

6. For introductory reading on constructive theology, see Jason A. Wyman, *Constructing Constructive Theology: An Introductory Sketch* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017). See especially chapter one.

7. A few notable examples are worthy of mention. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); Neil Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic-Historical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014). Scott MacDougall, *More Than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015); Gordon T. Smith, *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal: Why the Church Should Be All Three* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017). As for systematic theologies, perhaps the most significant constructive effort among modern theologians belongs to Lutheran Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

8. Paul Avis, "Introduction to Ecclesiology," 3. Emphasis in original.

and resourcement for its descriptive *and* constructive proposals.⁹ It is probable that many Evangelicals are unaware of Jesuit theologian, Roger Haight (born 1936). Yet his broad theological corpus, his leadership roles within worldwide ecumenical endeavors, and his tenuous relationship with the Roman Catholic Church all evidence the requisite ingredients for Evangelical curiosity.

Earning his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and his S.T.L. (The Licentiate in Sacred Theology) from the Jesuit School of Theology at Chicago, Haight taught for numerous institutions throughout the world and served as the president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. His widely published works received both acclaim and criticism, but the substantive and lingering criticism arose from his 1999 work, *Jesus Symbol of God*. Among the usual critics from within various academic scholarly societies, Haight faced increasing scrutiny from The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF).¹⁰ This focused critique against Haight led to a longstanding disruption of his official position as a Catholic theologian.

The Vatican's evaluation and eventual censure of Haight occurred during Pope Benedict XVI's tenure, 2005-2013. Benedict's eight year reign included a conservative realignment within Roman Catholic theology; thus, the CDF enhanced its scrutiny of theological approaches which challenged, adjusted, or borrowed ideas from other sources, inevitably challenging longstanding Catholic dogma. Haight's work received continual scrutiny, leading to his official censure in 2005. According to The Vatican, Haight was censured for "causing great harm to the faithful," and initially, he was prohibited from teaching in Catholic institutions.¹¹ As the controversy endured, in 2009 the CDF barred Haight from writing on theology and prohibited him from teaching in any institution. As a result of this action, Haight transitioned to a scholar in residence for Union Theological Seminary, an interdenominational seminary.

During Pope Francis's reign, however, Haight has been allowed to teach and write again, publishing among other things, *Spirituality Seeking Theology* (Orbis, 2014). While Haight's in-house controversy with The Vatican yields interesting discussion points for evaluating Haight's theology *in toto*, his ecclesiological trilogy can be assessed without making definitive conclusions regarding his official status with the CDF or The Vatican. In other words, his ecclesiological project can be isolated for Evangelical resourcement with or without Haight's reconciliation with

9. Gerard Manion published an edited volume where academic scholars evaluated Haight's proposals from a broadly ecumenical approach. See *Comparative Ecclesiology: Critical Investigations*, ed. Gerard Manion (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2008).

10. The CDF is The Vatican's doctrinal agency tasked with evaluating and protecting Catholic theology. This group is responsible for a collective doctrinal unity among Catholic teachings throughout the world. For further reading on Haight's doctrinal conflict with The Vatican, see Thomas P. Rausch, "Postmodern Jesus: The Vatican's Quarrel with Roger Haight," *Christian Century* (May 3, 2005): 28-31; John L. Allen, "Rome Orders Roger Haight to Stop Teaching, Publishing," *National Catholic Reporter* (January 5, 2009). <https://www.ncronline.org/news/rome-orders-roger-haight-stop-teaching-publishing>. Accessed May 19, 2019.

11. Allen, "Rome Orders Roger Haight to Stop Teaching, Publishing," para. 1.

Rome. The nature of his work calls for an academic compartmentalization of his ecclesiological project alone. In the following assessment, each volume will be succinctly reviewed individually before providing general areas of resourcement for Protestant ecclesiology.

Volume One: Historical Ecclesiology

Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Historical Ecclesiology*, vol. 1 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), pp. 464, \$39.95, softcover.

Before proceeding, it seems prudent to clarify Haight's intended audience throughout this multi-volume project. He notes,

I intend this work to be read by all Christians; its projected audience is not limited to one particular church or Christian denomination. I am in fact Roman Catholic, and this membership surely manifests itself in a variety of ways. But we live in a pluralistic church in a pluralistic world. Thus I do not write confessionally as a Catholic but try to represent an evenhanded approach to the many ecclesiologies that have developed in the course of history and thus speak to all Christians.¹²

This generous ecumenical tone lingers throughout Haight's work in both his critiques and assertions of all ecclesial traditions. Readers should take note of Haight's admission that his goal is *not* to defend Roman Catholic ecclesiological foundations; instead, constructing an ecclesiology *out of* the church's pluriformity will to some degree challenge and perhaps amend aspects of his tradition's confessional commitments. Haight is aware that his approach will necessarily move beyond Catholic formulations, but he believes this consequence proves necessary because the church *and* the world are decidedly pluralistic. These aims and his constructive approach require a specific methodology to move forward any substantive proposal. With this in mind, the initial challenge of volume one is to identify and evidence a method for his project.

Consisting of six expansive chapters under the rubric of three broad headings, Haight's first volume acknowledges the inseparable relationship between the church's history and any ecclesiological formulation. Irrespective of any specified tradition, ecclesiology is inherently historical, but this fact creates critical methodological questions when evaluating the church and the historical contexts of her existence. How does any one group within the church judge rightly any other group belonging to the same global organism? Is there an overarching standard? Or how does any contemporary investigation give contextual integrity to those Christians whose lived experiences were in previous periods of church history?

12. Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Historical Ecclesiology*, vol. 1 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 9.

Aware of these and other challenges, Haight rightly begins volume one of his trilogy with a robust account of theological method, critiquing the ease with which methods are adopted and haphazardly instituted, yet carefully defending his approach which he interestingly labels an “ecclesiology from below.” In fact, ecclesiology from below *is* historical ecclesiology in Haight’s estimation.¹³ Before defending an ecclesiology from below, Haight juxtaposes an ecclesiology from above approach in helpful detail. Because Haight intends a wide audience (he is writing for “all Christians”), readers new to the field of theological method will appreciate Haight’s clear descriptions and distinguishable categories.

Haight rejects an ecclesiology from above methodology for the following six reasons. First, Haight believes ecclesiology from above is ahistorical, resulting in an ignorance to the church’s contextual moorings in its varied history. For Haight, one is methodologically employing an ecclesiology from above approach when one evaluates the church with broad summations absent any critical examination or appreciation of contextual factors. An example of this error could be the descriptions of post-Reformation views of the Eucharist which often mistakenly and narrowly focus on the theological conclusions of each position while ignoring the experiential and contextual narratives surrounding the formulation of those views. Whatever one may conclude about Luther’s view of the Eucharist, one cannot provide an adequate evaluation absent an honest consideration of his experience as a Catholic priest. His lived experience in Catholicism necessarily shaped his later views of the Eucharist. Thus, the first mistake in an ecclesiology from above approach is its tendency to view the church in the abstract. This inevitably leads one to a truncated view of the church based on “constitutive elements that transcend its particular instantiations.”¹⁴ For Haight, the instantiations are critical, and the church’s historical nuances have to be mined for constructing a contemporary ecclesiology.

Second, Haight rejects an ecclesiology from above approach because it inevitably shifts into a denominational focus. Christians have a tendency to “appeal to one’s own tradition to understand one’s own ecclesial community or communion,” Haight claims.¹⁵ The danger of this practice is the tendency to norm all other traditions based upon the accepted practices of one’s own. Denominationalism blinds the viewer from incorporating beliefs and practices which may prove beneficial. The inevitable consequence of this posture is that it fails to take advantage of what could

13. In the field of Christology, theologians commonly speak of “Christology from above,” and “Christology from below.” This terminology addresses methodological approaches one employs in Christological inquiry. Generally speaking, a “Christology from above” approach focuses upon Jesus’s pre-existence, the Divine Logos who entered human history via the incarnation; on the other hand, generally speaking, the “Christology from below” approach examines Jesus’s human history through the Old Testament anticipation and the witness of the synoptic gospels. While others may use the “from above/from below” verbiage for ecclesiological method, Haight appears to be the modern pioneer of this distinction borrowed from Christology.

14. Haight, *Christian Community in History: Historical Ecclesiology*, 19.

15. *Ibid.*

be learned among the pluralistic expressions of Christianity. Third, Haight rejects an ecclesiology from above approach because he perceives it to be authority-driven, seeking to source its doctrinal formulations in the sacred texts it upholds. This action bifurcates the church from the secular world, certainly creating an authority and a language for each. In doing so, the church loses a potential audience because the church and the secular world salute differing authorities, and their allegiances often fall into conflict.

Fourth, Haight rejects an ecclesiology from above due to its tendency of viewing the church's history through the lens of doctrinal commitments. Thus, an ecclesiology from above approach could "simply cite scriptural and traditional sources as proof-texts that reflect divine authority in representing the character of the church."¹⁶ But Haight senses this practice could lend one to have an underdeveloped view of God's providence, which for Haight, is how one is to view the historical developments and changes within the church's doctrinal commitments and practices. In fact, Haight desires a "confidence in God's providence guiding the church."¹⁷ This could mean, for Haight, that instead of concluding a changing culture has led to theological compromise, one should consider if God's providence has led the church to adjust her theological constructs.

Fifth, Haight believes an ecclesiology from above methodology tends to blur the lines between Christology and ecclesiology. Because the risen Christ is head of the church, Christians can overwhelmingly view the church in soteriological terms and purposes, rather than exploring how Christ is present in other forms which may not have, at first, clear ties to the institutional church. This tendency could lead, Haight fears, to a bifurcation of who is in and who is out of the church, thus, leading to what Haight refers to as "ecclesiocentrism."¹⁸ Instead, Haight wants to account for those Christian traditions who view Christ's total work to provide salvation, in some way, for *all* of humanity. In so doing, Haight desires to seek areas where Christ's presence may be located outside of the presence of institutional churches and among those whose beliefs and practices do not align with the Christian tradition.

Sixth, and finally, an ecclesiology from above views the church's ministries as hierarchical forms of power, and these forms of power descend from God to man. Regardless of tradition, those occupying the roles of minister or clergy wield power over their parishioners because they are tasked with word and sacrament (which have inherent power). For Haight, an ecclesiology from above muddles the power intended for laity, creating a dependence of the people upon clergy and a stifling of one being used in new ministerial ways. Leaning on history, Haight observes how the church "has undergone considerable change as it adapted to new

16. *Ibid.*, 21-2.

17. *Ibid.*, 22.

18. *Ibid.*, 23.

situations.”¹⁹ Accordingly, these new situations birthed “new ministries” containing some form of power unexplainable in a tiered power structure. An ecclesiology from below prevents this mistake in that it validates the Spirit’s work in those leading new ministries, recognizing new forms of authority among the laity’s work in its particular social context.

An ecclesiology from below, on the other hand, corrects aforementioned errors. In short, Haight constructs his project with a broad formulation of an ecclesiology from below. Haight believes contemporary ecclesiology requires this approach due in large part to this approach’s pliability. An ecclesiology from below possesses “historical consciousness,” which requires the church to take seriously the “social forms and ideas of the age in which it existed.”²⁰ Haight argues the Second Vatican Council demonstrates how historical consciousness takes seriously the church’s past while requiring a certain openness to the church’s future. Further, an ecclesiology from below takes seriously the critical issues of globalization and pluralism. With new forms of media, the church is now connected in ways previous generations could not imagine. Ecclesiology from below incorporates how this connectivity can inform needed changes and adaptations blurred by old denominational or authoritarian restrictions.

Haight believes his method also takes seriously the lived realities and challenges facing the contemporary church and the societies where they exist. Whether it is specific issues of human suffering, social injustice, poverty, or dehumanization, or more broad topics such as western individualism and secularization, Haight argues for an ecclesiology that considers these issues germane to the church’s purpose and power. In sum, Haight’s ecclesiology from below flows from five interrelated characteristics: history, sociology, theology, apologetics, and hermeneutics.

The remaining chapters in volume one explore the necessity and integration of these characteristics throughout church history. Thus, parts two and three of volume one offer a historical exploration of the first fifteen centuries of the church. In each chapter within these two sections, Haight includes a section incorporating “Principles for a Historical Ecclesiology.” The summaries he provides prior to these sections are well written and provide clear depictions of relevant information. Haight uses the “Principles” sections to employ his ecclesiological method of exploration and critique to that particular period of church history.

Even if one does not agree with Haight’s conclusions, he equally confronts all traditional interpretations, applying his method across periods with fairness and insight. For example, using his method to critique Roman Catholic institutional power during the Reformation, Haight avers, “the doctrine of papal sovereignty alone as the bond of unity would not be able to accommodate the demands for pluralism that

19. *Ibid.*, 24.

20. *Ibid.*, 28.

erupted in the sixteenth century.”²¹ This critique challenges the depth and application of papal authority, certainly, but this critique also exposes Haight’s belief in the legitimacy of non-Catholic forms of authority in wider Christianity.

Throughout volume one, Haight helps readers grasp the importance of theological method for contemporary inquiry. For students, this volume helpfully introduces critical considerations when approaching theological construction. Students will benefit from his usage of common terms and categories within the discipline. Further, his approach to integrating his own method into historical overviews demonstrates for students how to implement one’s method carefully across traditions. For scholars and other informed readers, Haight provides an interesting contribution from a Catholic theologian who proves willing to question and amend his own tradition in the hopes of forming a contemporary ecclesiology that can withstand present challenges.

Volume Two: Comparative Ecclesiology

Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Comparative Ecclesiology*, vol. 2 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), pp. 528, \$75.00, softcover.

Of the three volumes, Haight’s pioneering work in volume two is principled, robust, and the lengthiest of the series. He carefully advances a constructive approach to produce his comparative historical ecclesiology. If volume one asserts an historical approach from Jesus’s ministry to the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, volume two exposes the ecclesial plurality resulting from the ecclesiological restructuring of Christ’s church.

Haight helpfully explains that until the Reformation, one could employ two distinct ecclesial traditions, Greek and Latin. These two self-contained camps were geographically settled, and both were insulated within their own traditions and forms. Yet the Reformation altered the simplicity of this arrangement because, as Haight observes, “the different churches that emerged in the sixteenth century were forced to give a more or less complete defense of their new polities.”²² An unwillingness to compromise in areas of theological disagreement and practice could not be overcome, inevitably creating new paradigms and challenges for what constitutes the church. The Reformation birthed plurality, and this disunity is unlikely to cease. If one desires to construct an ecumenical ecclesiology overcoming these ecclesial divisions, one must seek to do so with a willingness to appreciate but ultimately overlook unrealistic ambitions of the church moving beyond longstanding issues of disunity. Haight believes plurality and division should, therefore, cause ecclesiological aims to now shift towards a transdenominational ecclesial expression

21. *Ibid.*, 419.

22. Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Comparative Ecclesiology*, vol. 2 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), vii.

(Haight employs the term “transdenominational” in volume three). In other words, it would be an exercise in futility if one sought to undo the last five hundred years of division; instead, one must work toward realistic goals for future realignment with present divisions in mind.

Haight believes comparative ecclesiology affords the necessary tools for such a project. He states, “comparative ecclesiology is a study of the church that formally recognizes various levels of pluralism that affect the church and factors them into an understanding of the whole church.”²³ How does comparative ecclesiology of volume two relate to historical ecclesiology of volume one? “Comparative ecclesiology,” Haight notes, “unfolds within the larger embrace of historical ecclesiology; it is not opposed to an historical approach, but a subspecies of it.”²⁴ Volume two, therefore, narrows the broad historical summaries Haight critiqued in the first volume.

Haight’s approach consists of seven robust chapters under the rubric of two main parts. In part one, Haight utilizes four chapters to explore the church in the sixteenth century. One can hardly overlook the importance of the sixteenth century for ecclesiological movement, and Haight wisely and patiently navigates the necessary thinkers and indispensable issues. Part two consists of three broad chapters analyzing the church in the modern period. Finally, the volume concludes with a brief summation of ecclesiology in the twenty-first century. Before concluding each chapter, Haight includes a section entitled, “Principles for a Historical Ecclesiology.” Similar to volume one, Haight applies his methodology in these “Principles” subsections.

The first two chapters are the only two devoted to specific historical persons. In chapter one, Haight explores Luther’s ecclesiology, followed by an exploration of Calvin’s ecclesiology in chapter two. The entry point for both chapters is mostly biographical material where readers are given succinct summaries and descriptions of key contextual points which shaped both Reformation giants. In his observation of Luther, Haight argues for a strong Augustinian influence to Luther’s ecclesiology, and the “distinctive character [of Luther’s ecclesiology] rests in defining the church primarily in theological terms of being grasped existentially by Christian faith and refusing all sociological reduction of the church to external organization.”²⁵ Luther’s pioneering work produced a “new ecclesiology,” one which preserved some aspects of the medieval church, but whose reforms changed the understanding of authority, congregational focus and identity, institutional norms and practices, and a newfound interest to the role of the church’s relationship to the world.

In his concluding section, Haight observes numerous applications of Luther’s ecclesiology. Chief among them is Luther’s commitment to reform the church. “Constant reform of the church is necessary,” according to Haight, and Luther is the

23. *Ibid.*, viii.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, 41.

historical example who embraced this axiom throughout his reforming acts.²⁶ When considering Haight's own history with the Catholic Church, his emphasis on this principle is unsurprising. In various ways, Haight's project seeks to reform his own tradition to twenty-first century challenges through ecclesial protest, all in hopes of demonstrating how such a revision benefits every tradition in their ecclesial existence.

Surveying Calvin's life, teaching ministry, and his work throughout Geneva and Strasbourg, Haight's evaluation centers upon the church's ordinances, mission, and organization. This chapter does not offer a considerable amount of new information, nor does it offer any new critiques of Calvin's ecclesiology as it is developed through the published editions of the *Institutes*. The significance of this chapter rests upon Haight's principles for incorporating Calvin's ecclesiology into contemporary application. Haight rightly praises the trinitarian shape to Calvin's ecclesiology, claiming, "Calvin supplies ecclesiology with profound theological warrant in the trinitarian summary of God's dealing with humankind in history."²⁷ Whatever one makes of transdenominational ecclesiology as the goal of contemporary discourse, the trinitarian shape of the church's identity, mission, and message prove indispensable. Calvin's emphasis on this point is directly relevant to any contemporary construction.²⁸ With the deluge of pragmatism in modern church growth emphases, coupled with the increasing presence of biblical and theological ignorance in church gatherings, the church's grasp of its trinitarian identity might be the one principle preventing further doctrinal compromise.

The remaining two chapters in part one evaluate The Church of England and Anabaptist, Baptist, and Roman ecclesiologies. Like the previous chapters, Haight gives historical overview, carefully explaining the relevant nuances necessary for each tradition. Regarding the Church of England, Haight insists church development cannot go backward, and this is one of his primary principles of comparative integration. He claims, "church development that goes backward is regression and will not last."²⁹ This belief, in part, comes to light in volume three where Haight constructs a future oriented ecclesiology that appreciates its varied past but is unhindered by its boundaries.

Haight's chapters on Anabaptist, Baptist, and Roman ecclesiology follow similar patterns of development. Considerable analysis is brought to facilitate what distinguishing features exist in and between these traditions. While Haight's summaries do not tread new ground in their descriptions, he nevertheless seeks to identify fairly what enduring features warrant inclusion in comparative analysis. For example, Haight believes these traditions promote the principle of personal faith,

26. *Ibid.*, 77.

27. *Ibid.*, 143.

28. On this point, see Marcus J. Serven, "The Care of Souls: John Calvin's Shepherding Ministry," *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 3.1 (2018): 154-74.

29. Haight, *Christian Community in History: Comparative Ecclesiology*, 212-13.

spiritual formation, and personal and corporate holiness. While these traditions do not agree on institutional identity, Haight sees institutional structure as beneficial to norming the unity of the church's witness and social posture. Institutionalism inevitably causes questions related to church polity, but Haight avoids delving into which form has the most to offer the best model for a transdenominational construction.

Titled, "Ecclesiology in the Twenty-first Century," Haight's conclusion identifies three pressing ecclesiological issues. One, the church can no longer employ labels to dismiss the challenges arising from what Haight refers to as "inculturation." By way of example, one can no longer dismiss inculturation with the old labels of syncretism, a verdict which would end serious discussion if true. Instead, according to Haight, twenty-first century ecclesiology must take seriously the fast-paced cultural changes confronting the church. Haight claims, "it seems that a new level of historical and cultural consciousness is arising spontaneously and will not be put off by an authority that comes less from the gospel and more from a different culture."³⁰ This challenge, in part, mirrors Haight's usage of the ecclesiology from below method, and it evidences his willingness to engage and perhaps incorporate elements from what many others would label as dubious sources.

Two, Haight believes twenty-first century Christians will be required to amend their views and attitudes toward other religions. Acknowledging the difficulty of such a task, for Christian doctrine emphatically denies the tenets of other world religions, Haight suggests other world religions are "intertwined systems of value and meaning," and Christian theology must assume a posture of honest evaluation of what these religions offer. For example, what could Christians learn about worship, prayer, or service from Islam, Hinduism, or various mystic expressions of spirituality?

Three, twenty-first century ecclesiology requires churches to embrace pluralism and strategize appropriate plans of action. This strategy must maintain unity above all by welcoming differences which do not rise to the level of seclusion. Haight uses the differences of sexual behavior as an example of how the church views the subject differently, and these varied views do not rise to the level of importance as "the unity that the Spirit forges in faith's attachment to Jesus Christ." In this sense, Haight urges churches to seek out that which is primary and explore avenues of compromise on other secondary matters. Inevitably, this posture leads to a harmful separation of Jesus's person and Jesus's teachings.

Any student of ecclesiology will benefit from Haight's work in this second volume. It is thrilling to observe Haight, the controversial Jesuit critic, explore these topics and offer insightful reflections on historical movement, doctrinal nuance, and ethical evaluations. His concessions are clear, and his appreciation of his own tradition emerges even in his critiques. The weaknesses of this volume abound, however. For all the good intentions of Haight's work within this volume, much of this proposal appears to lead toward theological reductionism. For example, as he applies

30. *Ibid.*, 497.

his methodological principles to twentieth-century ecclesiology, he emphatically claims “no adequate ecclesiology today can ignore the issues of justice that prevail in a society.”³¹ Whatever one may believe about the church’s responsibility to social justice, Haight fails to acknowledge the innumerable complications of this idealistic requirement. For example, questions related to the church and social justice are vastly different for Christians worshiping freely in the United States and those Christians living in areas where worship must exist in secrecy due to the clear and present reality of persecution. Additionally, Haight’s conclusion proves to be the most glaring weakness or disappointment in the second volume. At just over two pages, the volume ends abruptly without any significant tying together of the volume’s themes, nor does he engage further the three pressing issues mentioned above.

Volume Three: Ecclesial Existence

Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Ecclesial Existence*, vol. 3 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), pp. 320, \$32.95, softcover.

In this final volume, Haight promotes an ecclesiology of existence, proposing ways the church can confront present and future challenges. Consisting of eight chapters, this volume is the smallest of the trilogy. He envisions an ecclesiology that reaches across the whole tradition, thriving in an “existential mode of being in the world made up of basic beliefs and practices.”³² Readers unaware of the first two volumes will appreciate chapter two. Here Haight summarizes the main emphases of this overall trilogy and their integration into this final presentation. The core of this volume is Haight’s insistence upon the church’s shared common “ecclesial existence” that forms what he describes as a “transdenominational ecclesiology.”

With a precipitous decline of Christianity in the west, coupled with Christianity’s explosive growth in the developing world, Haight urges contemporary Christians to enter into a thorough examination of the universal commonalities that unite the faith from the local beliefs and practices that may be not of universal importance. In a sense, Haight seeks to create a new theological triage for modern ecclesiology. Interestingly, Haight does not appeal to systematic theology, biblical exegesis, or missiology to construct the parameters for his ecclesiological project. Instead, Haight incorporates sociology as his guiding source, presenting five organizational principles of application, each presented in its own chapter.

His analogical approach serves his desire to confirm the maximum amount of similarities among the pluralistic forms of the church. With frequent appeals

31. *Ibid.*, 426.

32. Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Ecclesial Existence*, vol. 3 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), viii.

to Schleiermacher, a transdenominational ecclesiology “seeks to formulate a characterization of the church that is common to the Christian churches or denominations. It is a form of comparative ecclesiology that explicitly deals with pluralism by integrating into its method of understanding church sources that transcend the boundaries of a single church.”³³ Viewed from the field of sociology, Haight’s five organizational principles are evaluated in chapters three through seven. The nature and purpose of the church (chapter three), the church’s organization (chapter four), church membership (chapter five), the church’s activities (chapter six), and the church’s relationship to the world (chapter seven) form the structure of his argument. Like the first two volumes, Haight employs a similar structure to each chapter. Finally, each chapter includes critical questions for further research.

Haight’s work on the nature and mission of the church provide his most robust inclusion of systematic and biblical categories. The church is a sign community, and the sign signifies God’s eternal mission which is to “keep alive in history the message and ministry of Jesus, indeed, to make them effective in the members’ own lives and through them in the world, in society, and in history.”³⁴ From a sociological perspective, globalization creates complications to this mission, thus requiring new forms of implementation. Regarding the organizational principle, Haight eschews the tiered approach which limits power away from laity. Instead, the ecclesial existence needed, according to Haight, is one where “any given church may actually be a community held together by a balance of power, by oppositions in tension with each other, by tacit agreements to disagree forged in some hostility.”³⁵ How could such an authority exist long-term? By a reliance upon the Spirit to help churches reach consensus through balanced authority structures of clergy and laity. This construct, in Haight’s view, allows for a wide applicability among local churches, and it evidences more avenues for diverse thought.

Chapters on church membership, church activity, and the church’s relationship to the world furthers Haight’s visions for a new ecclesiology. Sociological data suggests humans enjoy group membership, often forming communities with shared values and identities. Related to the church, taking advantage of this tendency requires a renewed interest in what constitutes the parameters of membership. Haight rightly notes the difficulty and complexity of constructing a new vision for church membership due to the denominational differences of this process. With regard the church’s activities, Haight demonstrates the critical importance of the Lord’s Supper, and he notes its indelible placement in spiritual flourishing.³⁶ He offers a brief overview of the pastoral office, mainly emphasizing issues of calling and ordination

33. Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Ecclesial Existence*, vol. 3 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 4-5.

34. *Ibid.*, 111.

35. *Ibid.*, 155-56.

36. *Ibid.*, 227-29.

while avoiding the complexity of issues related to gender roles. Finally, Haight urges churches to embrace the tensions emerging from their interaction with the wider world. “Even when churches resist certain cultural norms,” he claims, “by that very fact they engage culture.”³⁷ Haight calls for a “missionary openness” to other cultures, religions, beliefs, and practices, claiming “one of the strongest ecumenical agencies in our world today is friendship.”³⁸

This volume’s strength rests in its formulation of principles to help Christians grapple with the difficult work of common mission, of finding the areas of common ecclesial existence subsisting in all churches. One can discern Haight’s noble ambition to see a church more unified, more in line with the foundations of the faith, and less inclined to fight over minor doctrinal skirmishes. The totality of this project and the five organizational principles of this volume all require further attention from various traditions whose interests align with Haight’s transdenominational goals. For all the good one finds in this volume, this volume begs for further development before seeking formal means of integration.

Assessing Transdenominational Ecclesiology

Protestant resourcement of Haight’s trilogy will first depend on the acceptability of his method. The bifurcation of ecclesiology from below and above helpfully clarifies approaches to a discipline whose emphases range from doctrinal formulation to an endless array of practical applications. As with all theological verbiage, specificity of meaning must demonstrate how these descriptions differentiate methodological approaches. In an anti-denominational age, Haight’s ecclesiology from below accommodates a path forward where historical context is observed and noted. Further, this methodology respectfully acknowledges the reality of denominationalism while not inadvertently making any one denomination superior by its longevity, doctrine, practices, or resources. Additionally, in Haight’s estimation, when Christ’s church is empowered and dependent upon the Spirit, an ecclesiological flexibility emerges, thus allowing for the formation of unique corporate ecclesial expressions.

This loose methodological entry point avoids the issues surrounding denominational differences, allowing the church to assess which cooperative options work best in pluralistic societies. Because it is governed by her God, history belongs to the church, and for her to flourish, the church must not allow the nuances of a local gathering to subvert the church’s longstanding diverse tapestry. An ecclesiology from below does indeed give room for assessing the prominent lived realities of God’s people regardless of theological, geographical, or experiential differences. Twenty-first century ecclesialogists could integrate the strength of Haight’s proposal as it will assist in preventing idiosyncratic errors.

37. *Ibid.*, 268.

38. *Ibid.*, 269.

While an ecclesiology from below does thwart any tendency of oversimplification or abstraction to the church's identity, Haight's proposal is not without fault. Protestant resourcement largely depends on how comfortable one feels in establishing an ecclesial paradigm where one is required to overlook the very issues causing so much denominational separation. Many of these issues are profoundly complex, entailing the beliefs and practices across longstanding periods of church history. Historical ecclesiology helps the church explore the lived experiences of previous generations, and integrating what can be resourced from these explorations will assist emerging leaders who are currently training for church ministry. But one must remember that historical ecclesiology does not *create* the doctrinal disagreements of previous generations, it exposes them. History objectively acknowledges points of conflict and separation, and rightfully used, it exposes the responses one could seek to deploy again as it searches for clarity and unity. Further, with an ecclesiology from below, how precisely does one evaluate the strength or weaknesses of unresolved disputes without an overarching rubric? The practices of any tradition flow from its doctrinal obligations, so one cannot avoid the reality of persistent disruptions among Christians due to the unresolved doctrinal conflicts upon which these practices are grounded.

An ecclesiology from below exposes the reality of the past and present ecclesial expressions, but if not properly adjusted, this method does not adequately point to the transcendent standard by which all Christians will be judged. Further, without care, this approach could cause some to avoid using Scripture as a means for norming belief systems. The greatest weakness of this method, at least as it is presented, centers upon its tendency to distance the church from its biblical roots, ultimately overlooking the exegetical work put forth on a series of unavoidable texts. One cannot genuinely construct a Christian ecclesiology with history as its genesis. Historical evaluations must serve what one discovers first and foremost through what God has revealed in the sacred text. Perhaps a development of Haight's methodology with a corresponding ecclesiology from above would balance the benefits of both approaches. The broad nature of ecclesiology essentially warrants this sort of modification.

Haight's desire to move outside of his own tradition is evidenced by his reticence to rely exclusively upon Catholic theologians. Each volume indicates an overall commitment to make wide appeals across traditions, incorporating diverse voices and constructs throughout his project. Exploring the usefulness of diverse theological voices for contemporary application requires fairness, patience, and flexibility. Within evangelical thought, recent attention to theological retrieval matches many of Haight's ambitions. The contemporary church must retrieve from its ancient sources. This practice necessarily includes a willingness to evaluate not only what beliefs and practices allow for contemporary resourcement, but how one goes about incorporating agreed upon customs. Current evangelical work in theological retrieval could stand to benefit from Haight's work.

It seems an unintended consequence of transdenominational ecclesiology is the tendency to resort to pragmatism, at least as it relates to using a sociological entry point for evaluation. Determining how churches should exist based upon how people relate and act among sociological measurements risks obfuscating what God has already revealed. Further, it seems suspect to substantiate the theological dimensions of transdenominational ecclesiology without clear and inextricable moorings in sacred Scripture. Tacit omissions undermine the complexities of the very problematic texts which persist in modern ecclesiastical dialogue, and Haight's heavy reliance upon social theory makes his overall project theologically and practically capacious. Haight's project is wide enough to encompass the various world-wide strands of Christian expressions, but void of significant attention to the biblical parameters and emphases which inevitably cause these separations.

"We cannot wrench Christ loose from the Church, nor can we dismantle the Church to get to Christ," wrote Hans Urs von Balthasar, a twentieth century Swiss theologian and Catholic priest.³⁹ One might sense that Haight's overall project loosens the firm grip between Christology and ecclesiology. One might sense in Haight's project an ecclesiology where Christ is passive, being the recipient of the church's worship and not the active cause of her identity. In a sense, this is a wrenching Christ loose from his body. To be clear, this does not appear to be Haight's intention, but the inevitable conclusion to some of his proposals diminishes the church's transdenominational identity in their union to Christ.

Concluding Thoughts

Areas for Future Research

At least two areas of future research emerge from Haight's ecclesiological project. One, further work is needed in the ongoing search for a post-Vatican II ecumenical framework in the context of twenty-first century challenges. Globalization, theological pluralism, increased political tension, shifting economic forecasts, and the growth of Christianity in the global south are all factors which make such a quest necessary for interested parties.⁴⁰ Haight rightly notes, "the ecumenical movement explicitly recognized pluralism, and Vatican II opened the church up to dialogue with the modern world and its various histories and cultures."⁴¹ Haight's work should compel further evangelical analysis, particularly as it relates to renewed

39. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 11.

40. For a lucid explanation of the distinguishing features of Vatican I and II, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Ecclesiology," in *Mapping Modern Theology*, eds. Kelly Kapic and Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 346-53.

41. Haight, *Christian Community in History: Historical Ecclesiology*, 27.

ecumenical endeavors that advance continuity over longstanding issues of division. New ecumenical constructs will have to create templates which differ from twentieth century conclusions, incorporate more voices from emerging traditions, and include critical discussions points on the probability of increased global scrutiny upon the church's message.

Two, contemporary efforts to explore catholicity in the wider evangelical movement require a proper assessment of historical ecclesiology. Haight only devotes a few pages to catholicity in volume three, but the entirety of his project underscores his insistence upon a hopeful catholicity from the emerging ecclesiologies present today. Haight's project matters because he invites conversation with the wider Christian tradition. An ecumenical catholicity protected by the church's historical creeds and confessions reinforces how plurality serves the church's global mission. One does not have to employ the totality of Haight's method to appreciate his presence as a Catholic voice willing to question the longstanding motifs of Catholic dogma. His critiques and his willingness to converse on these matters could assist in the ongoing work of academic constructive ecclesiology.