

Ecclesiological Developments in Canadian Evangelical Theology¹

Robert J. Dean
Providence Theological Seminary

Abstract

Recent years have marked the publication of several significant monographs engaging with ecclesiological themes by a new generation of Canadian theologians. This paper will probe three such recently published monographs in the attempt to discern signs of an emerging ecclesiological consensus within Canadian evangelical theology. The works considered include: *Participating Witness: An Anabaptist Theology of Baptism and the Sacramental Character of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013) by Anthony G. Siegrist; *Division, Diversity, and Unity: A Theology of Ecclesial Charisms* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015) by James E. Pedlar; and *Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), by Patrick S. Franklin. Through engaging these works by authors representing the emerging generation of theological scholarship in Canada, this paper provides an orientation to the state of the contemporary ecclesiological conversation in Canadian evangelical theology and aspires to contribute to the renewal of theology and the church in Canada.

Introduction

Ecclesiology has long been recognized as a thorn in the side of evangelical theology.² In recent years, ecclesiological issues have come to occupy center stage in

1 This article is a revised version of a paper that was presented at the interdisciplinary theology conference, “Evangelical Theology—New Challenges, New Opportunities,” co-sponsored by the Canadian-American Theological Association and Northeastern Seminary, held at Northeastern Seminary, Rochester, NY, on October 21, 2017.

2 Recent works that have acknowledged and attempted to make a contribution towards remedying this situation include: John G. Stackhouse, ed., *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2005); Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).

the work of a new generation of Canadian evangelical theologians. This paper will engage with three recently published theological monographs representative of this ecclesiological ferment in the attempt to discern some of the emerging ecclesiological themes in Canadian evangelical theology. The three works to be considered include: Anthony Siegrist's *Participating Witness: An Anabaptist Theology of Baptism and the Sacramental Character of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); James Pedlar's *Division, Diversity, and Unity: A Theology of Ecclesial Charisms* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015); and Patrick Franklin's *Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016).

Some may wonder on what grounds these three works can be considered as representative of contemporary Canadian evangelical theology. This is a fair question, but not an easy one to answer. Recent debates in North America surrounding the continuing usefulness of the term “evangelical” have served as a reminder of how notoriously difficult it is to answer the questions “Who is an evangelical?” and “What is evangelicalism?” Kimlyn Bender has observed that the attempt to define evangelicalism usually takes one of two forms: “a narrative history that traces its genetic development” or “a list of key convictions that seeks to capture its essential nature.”³

Beginning with an idealist conception of evangelicalism—perhaps something akin to Bebbington's famous quadrilateral⁴—seemed like an untenable proposition for the current project, as it would seemingly necessitate an extensive prolegomena, or perhaps even an essay unto itself, to demonstrate how the three works measure up to the selected canons of evangelicalism. While there may be a place for such a project, it does not resonate with my stated interest of examining ecclesiological trends in Canadian evangelical theology, nor do I have any interest in establishing myself as gatekeeper of the evangelical tradition. Such an approach also seems to pose the distinct danger that it will introduce a degree of unhelpful, or even vicious, circularity into the investigation. If a work must measure up in advance to an essentialist construal of evangelicalism in order to count as an exemplar of evangelical theology, then there is a good chance that what one discovers in the works will have been already determined at the outset by the criteria one has employed. In the desire to avoid these methodological quagmires, and out

3 Kimlyn J. Bender, “The Church in Karl Barth and Evangelicalism: Conversations across the Aisle,” in *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 180. For a hybrid model that attempts to bring together both streams, see Timothy Larsen, “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–14.

4 David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1–19.

of the recognition that evangelicalism is not a disincarnate set of ideas but first and foremost a movement,⁵ I have opted to classify these works as representatives of evangelical theology on the basis of the authors' situatedness within the evangelical movement in Canada as represented by their involvement with significant Canadian evangelical academic institutions.

While Franklin is the only one who explicitly identifies himself as standing within the evangelical tradition (11),⁶ there is little doubt that each of their academic institutional pedigrees are distinctly evangelical. All three works under consideration emerged from doctoral dissertations written at Canadian schools associated with the evangelical tradition. All three theologians teach or have taught at self-identified "evangelical" educational institutions in Canada. All three of the authors stand in some sort of relation to the Canadian-American Theological Association (formerly the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association), having published articles in *Canadian-American Theological Review* (or its predecessor *Canadian Theological Review*) or presented papers at CATA sponsored conferences.⁷ These sets of institutional relationships, of course, are no guarantee that the theological content of the books is distinctly evangelical. However, they do seem to provide a reasonable warrant for placing these works of theology within the orbit of the evangelical movement in Canada.

In what follows, I will provide an orientation to each book before drawing a few tentative conclusions about some potential trajectories in Canadian evangelical ecclesiology that have surfaced in these works.

Anthony Siegrist's *Participating Witness*

The origins of *Participating Witness: An Anabaptist Theology of Baptism and the Sacramental Character of the Church* can be traced to Anthony Siegrist's doctoral dissertation written at Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto under the supervision of Joseph Mangina. Following his doctoral work, Siegrist served as Assistant Professor of Theology at Prairie Bible College in Three Hills, Alberta. He is

5 This is not to deny the importance of the ideational, only to stress its socially embodied character. Bender strikes a fine balance when he describes evangelicalism as "a movement that coalesced around a set of convictions and issues shared across communions and denominations" ("The Church in Karl Barth and Evangelicalism," 182).

6 However, Pedlar does reveal in a parenthetical remark on p. 1 of his book that he has a Salvationist heritage.

7 James E. Pedlar, "'His Mercy Is Over All His Works': John Wesley's Mature Vision of New Creation," *Canadian Theological Review* 2.2 (2013): 45–56; Anthony G. Siegrist, "Moral Formation and Christian Doctrine: 'The Conjunction against Which We Must Now Struggle,'" *Canadian Theological Review* 2.2 (2013): 70–82; Patrick S. Franklin, "Understanding the Beginning in Light of the End: Eschatological Reflections on Making Theological Sense of Evolution," paper presented at the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association meeting, Rochester, NY, October 19, 2013; "The God Who Sends is The God Who Loves: Mission as Participating in the Ecstatic Love of the Triune God," paper presented at the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association meeting, Rochester, NY, March, 2016.

currently the Lead Minister of Ottawa Mennonite Church. *Participating Witness* is a work of confessional theology rooted in the Anabaptist tradition which argues for the importance of recovering a sacramental understanding of believer's baptism for the sake of supporting a robust conception of the nature and mission of the church.

Siegrist begins by observing that the practice of baptism has fallen into confusion and neglect within the Anabaptist tradition, with the result that children are now routinely baptized. Siegrist suggests this development is symptomatic of theological confusion brought about by the uncritical adoption of the pietistic sensibilities of revivalism by Anabaptist communities. Turning to the confessional statements of five contemporary North American Anabaptist denominations, Siegrist discovers two broad, common features that leave the practice of baptism vulnerable to redefinition in pietist or even spiritualist terms. "First," Siegrist observes, "baptism, a practice central to the Anabaptist tradition, is presented as theologically non-essential to the Christian life" (23). "The second common feature," he observes, "is that the visible church, another central aspect of the Anabaptist tradition, exists in a sort of second class relationship to the individual believer's relationship with God" (24). This eclipse of the church and erosion of the practice of baptism becomes the backdrop for his constructive argument.

Siegrist begins to lay out his case for a theological understanding of baptism as a "participating witness" by observing that the idea of ecclesial mediation is not completely foreign to the Anabaptist tradition. Siegrist shows that Anabaptist confessional documents across the centuries have not shied away from "the interweaving of the actions of the church and the actions of God" when it comes to church discipline (30). However, Siegrist observes that apart from church discipline Anabaptist confessional documents tend to avoid speaking of God's activity through the church and devolve into what he terms "rational-humanist" and "spiritual-pietist" modes of speaking. Both "lack a concrete account of God's ongoing activity and presence in the world" (41) and, therefore, lack the necessary spiritual and theological resources to sustain a life of vigorous discipleship and end up feeding into a virtual semi-Pelagianism (57).⁸ Siegrist suggests that Anabaptist theologians have much to learn at this point from Karl Barth, who points the way towards a robust, non-competitive account of divine and human agency, even as Siegrist acknowledges that Barth's bifurcating of Spirit and water baptism leaves something to be desired (42–50).

Siegrist then turns to a consideration of the work of the twentieth century Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the sixteenth century Anabaptist leader Pilgram Marpeck, whom he proposes provide a set of rich and complementary resources for developing a sacramental understanding of the church. In

8 John Howard Yoder comes under criticism on this score for providing a sociologically reductive account of church practices (54).

seeking to explicate the sacramental character of the church, Siegrist is not proposing that Anabaptists carefully delineate the number of rituals that could be considered to be sacraments, rather he is urging his brethren to recognize that “as the church is in Christ it constitutes the ongoing presence of God in the world in an objective though always subordinate sense” (65). The church does not mediate the presence of God in the world in a mechanical or magical way, but “only in the extent to which congregations take the form of Christ and rightly steward the memory of his ministry” (102). Siegrist’s proposal for understanding baptism as a “participating witness” is properly understood, then, as the obvious outworking of his commitment to ground ecclesiology in the life of the triune God.

If the church truly is the body of Christ, what then are to make of the ecclesial divisions and even violence that consumed the church in the sixteenth century? Siegrist suggests that this original context of ecclesial persecution has resulted in a pneumatologically underdeveloped view of the church in Anabaptist contexts. The original martyrological literature, as exemplified in *The Martyr’s Mirror*, tended to respond to this ecclesiological crisis by simply de-churching the violent persecutors. Siegrist suggest that such a triumphalistic narration of church history is unbecoming for followers of the crucified lamb and, furthermore, is increasingly untenable following the ecumenical developments of the twentieth century. The challenge Siegrist discerns as standing before the Anabaptist theologian is to provide “a thoroughgoing account of the church that upholds the Spirit’s accompaniment of it through time while remaining conscious of its fratricidal past” (131). Siegrist suggests such an account will attend to certain key markers of the Spirit’s activity in the world, which he discusses under the headings, “conversion,” “unity,” and “promise.”

First, the persecution of the early Anabaptists at the hands of other Christians signals the dangers inherent to cheapening expectations of conversion and neglecting the Spirit’s work of drawing the people of God into conformity with their crucified Lord. Second, the Spirit’s work of “the unification of the believers in love” (139), opens the door to understanding the outbreaks of violence in the sixteenth century not as the Spirit’s abandonment of the church but rather as the Spirit’s judgment of the church, which is nothing other than the form that the Spirit’s faithfulness takes when it encounters the church’s unfaithfulness. This recognition should lead to a penitential, rather than triumphalistic, narration of church history—for we are all in it together. Finally, an understanding of the Spirit’s role as the “promise of the fulfillment of God’s reign” (143) encourages patience and relativizes the ecclesial divisions of the past by situating them in the light of the “feast of friends,” the eschatological banquet to come. Understood in this way, the history of fratricide and ongoing ecclesial divisions, though deeply regrettable, need not

invalidate the claim of the Spirit's continuing faithfulness to the church upon which an understanding of baptism as "participating witness" depends.

Siegrist rounds off the book by presenting a proposal that draws upon ancient and ecumenical sources in the attempt to bring the liturgical enactment of baptism into conformity with his theologically-nuanced presentation of baptism as "participating witness." The rationale for this final chapter is actually quite simple. Namely, since "God's grace is actually at work through church *visibly* [in baptism]—then surely how it is done matters" (154). A baptismal liturgy must, therefore, encompass the vertical, horizontal, and eschatological planes so that the form of the sacrament may be congruent with the theological reality that it mediates. For in the waters of baptism the people of God do offer their testimony, but it is a testimony to the saving presence of the living Lord who is forever in their midst.

James Pedlar's *Division, Diversity, and Unity*

James Pedlar currently serves as Donald N. and Kathleen G. Bastian Chair of Wesley Studies and Associate Professor of Theology at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. Although his PhD was ultimately awarded by St. Michael's College, Pedlar was enrolled at Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto and his book, *Division, Diversity and Unity: A Theology of Ecclesial Charisms*, is based upon the doctoral dissertation he wrote under the supervision of Wycliffe professor Ephraim Radner. *Division, Diversity, and Unity* aims to contribute to ecumenical theology through exploring how a theology of ecclesial charisms could be of use in "interpreting the conflicted history of specialized movements in the church" (235). Of particular concern to Pedlar is the way that distinctive charisms and vocations have been used by some movements as a rationale for underwriting church division. Central to Pedlar's line of inquiry is the insistence that the church is "the visible, historical people of God" (7). This conviction bars the door against a retreat into idealistic, ahistorical ecclesiologies, and necessitates the engagement in "thick" historical description of charismatic movements within the concrete, historical life of the church.

Pedlar begins his book by sketching a biblical theology of charisms for the purpose of coming to an understanding of whether and how it might be appropriate to apply the language of charisms to ecclesial bodies. Drawing upon the deployment of the term in the Pauline corpus, Pedlar fills in the traditional understanding of charisms as "*diverse gifts of grace given to the church*" (15) by emphasizing, among other things, their vocational orientation towards the upbuilding of the church, their subjection to discernment and oversight, and their interdependent character.

While a popular way of narrating the story of renewal and reforming movements has been to posit a fundamental opposition between institution and charism in the life of the church, Pedlar argues that the tension between renewal

movements and established churches is best understood “as a *tension between different types of ecclesial institutions*, both of which are charismatic” (42). The discussion that follows provides a necessary corrective to the knee-jerk anti-institutionalism that plagues much of contemporary evangelicalism. An institution, Pedlar explains, is “simply a stable pattern of social interaction” (53). Since the church is a concrete historical community existing across time, it is necessarily institutional. Charisms are always received in an institutional context and these ecclesial institutions, Pedlar writes, “exist as *means of grace* which are taken up and used by the Spirit in order that charisms might be received, discerned, cultivated, and exercised for the good of the church as a whole” (67). Through drawing upon the Wesleyan terminology of “means of grace” to discuss the character of ecclesial institutions, Pedlar hopes to avoid the twin pitfalls of a kind of “enthusiasm” that sets the charismatic in opposition to the institutional, on the one hand, and a kind of “formalism,” on the other, that presumes upon God’s grace by making the charismatic captive to the institutional (62).

Charisms are bestowed for the vocational purpose of building up the body of Christ. Since charismatic movements are organized around a single charism reflecting a distinctive calling (i.e., Isaac Hecker’s vocation of an evangelist to America or William Booth’s vocation of an evangelist to the neglected), rather than the full diversity of charisms intended to function interdependently within the church, a theology of charisms cannot be used to justify the existence of a diversity of separated churches. Pedlar argues that when a specialized vocational movement separates from the larger body of the church, the nurture and exercise of its particular charism will inevitably be hindered, as the new ecclesial body is now forced to take on all of the functions of a local church. This separation also contributes to the impoverishment of the church universal, as the larger body now lacks the full charismatic and vocational contribution of those who have left. On the other hand, remaining in communion with the larger church does not guarantee that a movement’s charism will be exercised in its fullness. The exercise of the charism can be hampered, “if the charism is misapprehended by those in oversight” (119). However, in neither case does the movement cease to be part of the people of God. Reflecting the “Israel-like” ecclesiology of George Lindbeck and the typological reading of the Church’s pilgrimage through time advanced by his supervisor Ephraim Radner,⁹ Pedlar maintains that these movements within the church continue to bear witness to the faithfulness of God which takes the form of both judgment and mercy in the midst of his people.

According to the logic of his own argument surrounding the visible historicity

9 See, for example, George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

of the church, a theology of charisms is only significant to the extent that it allows the church to make sense of the often conflicted and convoluted histories of real charismatic movements. To this end, Pedlar devotes the second half of his book to providing thick readings of the founding and histories of the Paulist Fathers and Salvation Army. These two movements prove to be congenial subjects for study, as their founders, Isaac Hecker and William Booth, shared similar evangelistic charisms. However, the shape of their respective histories allows the two movements to stand as case studies of a misapprehended movement (the Paulists) and a separated ecclesial movement (the Salvation Army). While Pedlar's detailed reading of the histories of these movements succeeds in demonstrating the usefulness of his theology of charisms and is fascinating in its own right, I can do little more in this context than commend it to the reader.

Pedlar's theology of charisms allows for the recognition of the divine impetus in birthing charismatic movements without that divine mandate serving as a blank cheque that can be used to underwrite all aspects of the movement's existence. As a result, movements must carefully attend to the identity of their charism and churches must be open to recognizing the bestowal of new charisms. Furthermore, all must be willing to repent wherever sinful misappropriation of charisms have contributed to the rending of the body of Christ. Pedlar, therefore, concludes his study by reasserting that "the only kind of diversity that is justified by an appeal to ecclesial charisms is *vocational* diversity" (250). Pedlar's work urges us to remember that the Lord has graciously bestowed charisms upon the church for its strengthening, not its destruction.

Patrick Franklin's *Being Human, Being Church*

Patrick Franklin's *Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology* is a work of systematic theology that makes frequent forays into theological ethics and spiritual theology. The book is based upon the doctoral dissertation Franklin wrote at McMaster Divinity College under the supervision of James C. Peterson. At the time of publication, Franklin served on the faculty at Providence Theological Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba. He now serves as Associate Professor of Theology at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto.

Franklin's project is grounded in the conviction that how one conceives of the human person informs how one understands Christian community.¹⁰ This

10 At this point, one could ask whether the ordering of the doctrines of anthropology and ecclesiology should be reversed, as it is from the experience of the reconstituted humanity in Christ made present in the church through the Spirit that we are granted an understanding of the human person. Bonhoeffer seems to signal in such a direction when he suggests that it would be good if systematic theology were to begin with the doctrine of the church. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, vol. 1, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress,

conviction is accompanied by the concern that contemporary church life is being shaped, perhaps unwittingly, by distinctly untheological anthropologies. In Part I of his book, Franklin lays out the challenge of the “anthropological agnosticism” that stands before the church today (16). He observes that confusion about what it means to be human has contributed to the cultural erosion of the foundations for community and human rights. Franklin suggests the various anthropologies on offer in Western culture present problems in that they are inevitably reductionist and lead to polarization and false dualisms. Franklin concludes the first part of the book by providing a brief, but highly suggestive account of how these competing anthropological types have influenced contemporary churches and movements.¹¹

In Part II, Franklin develops his constructive theological anthropology. Franklin draws upon the three historically prominent ways of understanding the *imago Dei* within the Christian theological tradition—namely, the *imago Dei* as relational reality, rational capacity, and vocation—as the organizing motifs for chapters 3–5. Reflecting the systematic character of the work, Franklin situates the anthropology of each chapter in a Trinitarian framework, associated with a specific theological virtue, a characteristic understanding of sin, and a particular understanding of the human telos, as represented in the table below.¹²

Table 1: Summary of “Part II: Theological Anthropology in Trinitarian Perspective” in Franklin’s *Being Human: Being Church*

Human Person as:	Relational	Rational	Eschatological
Trinitarian Basis:	Ecstatic Communion	Divine Conversation	<i>missio Dei</i>
Constitutive Virtue:	Love	Faith	Hope
Sin as:	Alienation	Falsehood	Rebellion
Theological Orientation:	Communion	Wisdom	Vocation

Arguing that the relational interpretation takes theological precedence, Franklin begins his constructive anthropology by considering the human person as a relational creature constituted by the love of the triune God. The second strand of Franklin’s threefold anthropological cord can be summarized by his assertion that:

1998), 134. Franklin, for his part, does acknowledge the dialogical character of the relationship between anthropology and ecclesiology, even as he remains committed to his ordering (9).

11 For example, he partners social contract anthropologies with attractional church models, and existentialism with the emerging church (78).

12 The ordering of the loci within such a systematized presentation of the Christian faith is always open to debate. While things could be organized in a different fashion, Franklin’s presentation does display its own winsome, inner logic.

“Human beings are rational creatures whom God invites to participate in the divine *conversation* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by drawing them to share in the wisdom and *Logos* of God” (111). In the fifth and final chapter of this part of the book, Franklin argues that “human beings are eschatological creatures, invited to participate in the divine *commission* or vocation by sharing in the reign of God” (144).

In the third part of his book, Franklin utilizes the theological anthropology developed in Part II as a hermeneutical lens for considering the church as the new humanity. Reflecting the organization of the anthropological chapters, Franklin treats the church as relational communities of love, rational communities of faith, and eschatological communities of hope. Each chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, Franklin explores the inner community life of the church by elucidating an ecclesiological metaphor for each chapter and discussing distinctive ministries and formational practices associated with the chapter’s theme. The second section of each chapter presents a discussion of the church’s engagement with the world organized around the church’s participation in one facet of Christ’s own ministry, a suggestive Christological model for this engagement, and a discussion of appropriate means of engagement. Following this organizational structure, the contents of chapters 6–8 can be depicted in table form as follows.

Table 2: Summary of “Part III: The Church as Communities of the New Humanity” in Franklin’s *Being Human, Being Church*

Church as:	Relational Communities of Love	Rational Communities of Faith	Eschatological Communities of Hope
Ecclesiological Metaphor:	Body of Christ	People of God	Temple of Holy Spirit
Ministries & Practices:	Reconciliation Mutual edification Bearing burdens	Theological formation	Kingdom character formation
Participating in Christ’s Ministry:	Priestly (Ambassadors)	Prophetic (Witnesses)	Kingly (Heralds)
Engagement Model:	Cross	Incarnation	Resurrection
Means of Engagement:	Discerning God at work Sharing burdens of local community Partnerships	Finding common ground Affirming whatever is beautiful, true, & good	Undergoing continual reformation Advocacy Planting mustard seeds

Franklin's understanding of the church as God's new humanity being formed by the Spirit to reflect the image of Christ, on display in the third part of the book and in the concluding chapter, allows him to overcome the dualisms which often plague contemporary church life. Both the inward aspect of the church's life together and the outward aspect of its engagement with the world are seen, in Franklin's presentation, to coinhere in the believer's union with Christ and correspondingly flow from the church's participation in the life of the triune God. Franklin suggests this understanding stands as a corrective to the ambiguity surrounding ecclesial significance in various evangelical understandings, because the church is then properly seen "not just as an instrumental means or an external aid to salvation but is itself a dimension of the salvific experience" (268). Franklin also suggests that his grounding of the church in the love and ecstatic character of God provides a necessary revision to the functionalism endemic to some missional understandings of the church (277–81). "Being missional," Franklin suggests, "means being a church that exists for others, not merely in the sense of being outward-focused or outreach-driven, but more foundationally in the sense of being *essentially* a relational, ecstatic entity" (283). It is in the church that we discover our true humanity.

Conclusion

Before venturing some concluding thoughts on the ecclesiological themes emerging from these works, it seems appropriate to briefly reflect upon how the Canadian context may have influenced their production. On the surface, it appears that the Canadian context made very little difference, as there are few explicit references to Canada in any of the books.¹³ Now, I suppose it could be argued that the refusal to attribute any significance to Canada is in itself a characteristically Canadian thing to do. However, I am inclined to take it as evidence that all three theologians recognize that Canada, or any nation-state for that matter, is not properly a theological category. While Canada may not be a doctrinal loci, it is important to reflect theologically upon the cultural realities of the Canadian context. Franklin acknowledges this reality at the very end of his book, when he warns readers, "Neither the United States nor England can provide settled models for the work of the church in Canada."¹⁴

While Canada may not be an explicit topic of discussion, the influence of the Canadian context upon the authors may perhaps be evident in other ways, which include the frequent engagement with theologians working in Canada and the

13 Siegrist's reading of Anabaptist Confessional Statements does include the statements from two Canadian denominations. Franklin includes a brief discussion of Brian Stiller's advice surrounding Christian political engagement in Canada found in his book *From the Tower of Babel to Parliament Hill*.

14 Franklin, *Being Human, Being Church*, 283.

deeply ecumenical character of each book.¹⁵ While perhaps borne of conviction, this ecumenism is also reinforced by the current Canadian cultural realities. To put it simply, theologians in a relatively sparsely populated, geographically expansive country like Canada, increasingly confronted by the realities of an emerging post-Christendom culture, simply do not have the luxury of shutting themselves up in the type of theological siloes that often characterize evangelical theological discourse in the United States. Canadian evangelical theology is ecumenical by conviction *and* by necessity.

With respect to emerging ecclesiological themes, we could say at the most basic level that all three authors are united by the fundamental conviction that the church matters and as a result they are deeply concerned about church matters. Contra the Gnosticizing impulse that has characterized much of modern Protestantism,¹⁶ exhibited perhaps most prominently in the spiritualizing and individualistic construals of the Christian faith present in popular forms of evangelicalism, each author emphasizes that salvation is a social reality, materially-embodied in the life of the church. Theologians can ill afford to ignore the concrete form that the church's life has taken over the course of its earthly pilgrimage. The embodied life of the church across time must be carefully attended to because it is the field in which God's promise to his people has played out in the form of the Spirit's faithful presence to the church in the midst of the church's faithfulness *and* unfaithfulness. This investment in providing a theological reading of history, along with the concomitant interest in visible unity, is perhaps more prevalent in the two works emerging from Wycliffe, however Franklin's commitment to understanding the church as a traditioned-community suggests potential openness to moving in this direction.

Recovering a theological understanding of the church as the field of the Spirit's activity in space and time could very well serve as a healing balm for evangelical pastors and church leaders who have been crushed under the weight of constantly having to make the church up from scratch, as a result of their immersion in the untheological, pragmatic assumptions which often dominate evangelical sub-culture.¹⁷ Recognizing that the church is a gift to be received sets pastors and

15 Canadian-based interlocutors include: Jeremy Bergen, Joseph Mangina, James Reimer (Siegrist), Gregory Baum, Margaret O'Gara, Ephraim Radner (Pedlar); Stanley Grenz, J.I. Packer, Clark Pinnock, Steve Studebaker, Jens Zimmerman (Franklin).

16 See, for example, Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); David S. Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology: Reflections on the Costs of a Construal," *Pro Ecclesia* 2.1 (1993): 37–49.

17 For a couple of insightful works that take on some of these assumptions from different angles, see Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), and Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street, *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997; reprint, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2003).

congregational leaders free for genuine ministry as they are liberated from the impossible task of re-creating the church *de novo* in response to ever-changing consumer tastes and preferences. A theologically discerning reception of the tradition also serves as a form of inoculation against the cultural captivity which so often seems to manifest itself in terms of conceiving the church in purely functionalist terms. When evangelicalism loses its connection to the Great Tradition, which is always mediated by a particular socio-historical tradition, some ideology inevitably rushes in to fill the void. In this regard, it could perhaps be argued that while “evangelical” makes for an indispensable adjective, “Evangelical” is a potentially disastrous stand-alone noun.

Interestingly, the shared evangelical concern to recover a truly theological account of the church as the loci of God’s saving activity in Christ through the Spirit leads each of the authors to press for the recovery of a sacramental understanding of baptism and Eucharist. This is on most obvious display in Siegrist’s work, as indicated by the book’s title that points to the centrality of his concern to recover a sacramental understanding of baptism as a “participating witness.” However, Franklin and Pedlar also advance similar interests through introducing the term “sacramental ordinances” and making recourse to the Wesleyan terminology of “means of grace,” respectively. For all three, the sacraments cannot be understood in isolation, but rather must be situated within the larger sacramentality of the church, which is the result of the church’s participation in the life of the triune God. The language of participation also points to a shared interest in recovering a non-competitive account of divine and human agency. Affirming the church as a genuinely theological reality in no way diminishes human freedom or responsibility for each of the authors. Rather, God’s gracious initiative in drawing women and men through the Spirit into conformity with the Son can be understood as the basis and goal of human freedom.

The church is, for all three authors, in a very real sense intrinsic to the Gospel. The church’s mission flows from its identity. For the sake of that mission, each theologian is uniquely interested in the continuing reformation of the church, but that reformation is ultimately inseparable from the recovery of the church’s true catholicity. Perhaps then there is an emerging consensus in alignment with the evangelical theologian Donald Bloesch’s assertion that “a true Evangelicalism is at one with a true Catholicism.”¹⁸ The recent publication of “A Reforming Catholic Confession” by an ecumenical collection of Protestant theologians—many of them evangelical—to mark the five hundredth anniversary of Luther’s posting of the ninety-five theses suggests that Bloesch’s conviction is becoming increasingly

18 Donald G. Bloesch, *Essential of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1, *God, Authority, & Salvation* (Peabody, MA: Prince, 1998), 12.

shared.¹⁹ Reflecting a similar spirit, Ephraim Radner has intriguingly suggested that we may be witnessing the rise of “naked Christianity,” as Christians across historic confessional divides come to recognize the significance of their common baptism into Christ in the face of the increasingly powerful constellation of cultural forces hostile to the faith.²⁰ Such “mere Protestantism” or “naked Christianity” must not be confused with the empty evangelicalism criticized earlier.²¹ Rather, it points to the only true and enduring catholicity, identifiable through the recognition that the source, ground, and goal of the church’s life is found in the triune God of the gospel alone. To the extent that these three works contribute to this “evangelical” end, may they receive a broad and deep reception.

19 “A Reforming Catholic Confession,” A Reforming Catholic Confession, accessed February 23, 2018, <https://reformingcatholicconfession.com/>.

20 Ephraim Radner, “The Naked Christian: Baptism and the Broken Body of Christ,” *Pro Ecclesia* 26.1 (2017): 25–42.

21 The authors of “A Reforming Catholic Confession” describe themselves as “mere Protestants.” One of the co-chairs of the drafting committee, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, makes an impassioned plea for the recovery of a “mere Protestantism” in his book, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).