ABSTRACT
THE UNSETTLED CHURCH: THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND RELEVANCE
IN THE ECCLESIOLOGIES OF NICHOLAS HEALY,
EPRAIM RADNER, AND DARRELL GUDER

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Marquette University, 2014

This dissertation examines the efforts of three contemporary theologians whose work is a part of the search for a new methodology for doing ecclesiology located on the continuum between the Church’s identity and relevance. They are the Catholic theologian Nicholas Healy, Anglican theologian Ephraim Radner, and Presbyterian theologian Darrell Guder. They come to the subject matter from different ecclesiological backgrounds, and, as such, their work can be taken as representative in as much as it stands for their unique efforts to theologize within their own traditions and contexts. By critiquing and analyzing their proposals I will bring them into dialog which will yield what I hope are the contours of a new way of thinking about ecclesiology.

In my study of their ecclesiological proposals I examine first their approach to the Holy Scriptures relative to their search for the Church’s identity. Special attention will be given to Christological and Pneumatological concerns, but also to the role of corporate and individual repentance (or conversion), as a means of re-appropriating one’s true identity as Church. Second, I take a critical look at their proposals of how the Church’s identity can and should enable its practical embodiment in the context of the 21st Century’s marketplace of ideas and be expressed in its God-given mission, i.e., the Church’s relevance.

Then, based on a careful examination of the postmodern context, I argue that the aforementioned theologians represent the emergence of a new methodological axis, namely the one defined by “identity and relevance,” for doing ecclesiology. I will argue that this methodological axis gives rise to a new model, which I will call, “missional ecclesiology.”

My critical evaluation of this new methodology concludes with an evaluation of its potential viability arguing in favor of missional ecclesiology as a viable model.