

Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper provides a fascinating, informative, and theologically stimulating argument that is ecumenical in its tone and yet strongly Reformed in its theological orientation. It is specifically written for Evangelicals who are Baptist or Reformed with the intent of stimulating further dialogue between the two on sacramentology and developing closer reciprocal relations where in the past there has been bitter dispute. Baptists may not like the idea of infant baptism and Vander Zee's arguments will probably fail to persuade them otherwise. But what Vander Zee does so well is to pinpoint what theological issues are actually at stake here, and then present a challenging and robust defence of his reading of Scripture and the tradition. It is precisely works such as this which Baptist theologians and pastors should be reading and interacting with so as to lead their denomination ever deeper into the mysteries of the faith.

D.G. Hart. *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004. (224pp.)

The primary thesis of Hart's work is that modern 'evangelicalism' is a fiction. According to Hart, certain fundamentalist ('neo-evangelical') leaders of various denominations in North America constructed the notion of an evangelical identity in the 1940s in order to counter liberal Christianity on that continent and initiate a conservative Protestant face-lift (p13). The leaders in this new movement called 'evangelicalism' included Harold Ockenga, Carl Henry, John Warwick Montgomery, and most importantly Billy Graham. Together these men, and many others, created such associations as the Evangelical Foreign Missionary Association (1945), The Evangelical Theological Society (1949), the World Evangelical Fellowship (1951), and 'the mother of all these endeavors' (p24) the National Association of Evangelicals (1942). In addition to these associations many institutions arose to support the growing movement, foremost of which was Fuller Theological Seminary, founded in 1947, which functioned as the think tank for the movement. The magazine *Christianity Today*, founded in 1956, continues to be one of the more successful forums for the dissemination of evangelical ideas. In Hart's estimation, 'One of the interesting features of this organizational growth was the use of the term *evangelical* to describe these agencies and efforts. Almost by sheer tenacity neo-evangelicals had created a new religious identity, and *evangelical* was its designation' (p24).

Hart defines the identity or 'recipe' of evangelicalism as follows: 'Combine two cups of inerrancy, one cup of conversion, and a pinch of doctrinal affirmations; form into a patchwork of parachurch agencies, religious celebrities, and churches; season with peppy music professionally performed; and bake every generation' (p183). By 1976, the *Time* 'year of the evangelical', the construction of 'evangelicalism' was complete. Two decades later, however, and so-called 'evangelicalism' is, in Hart's estimation, in serious trouble. One solution is offered by Hart in light of this 'crisis': 'Instead of trying to fix evangelicalism, born-again Protestants would be better off if they abandoned the category altogether' (p16). The rest of Hart's work sets itself the task of defending this thesis and solution.

Hart is director of academic projects and faculty development at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in Wilmington, Delaware. His past appointments include director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College and academic dean and professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, in California. As such, this is a bold and controversial work written by someone who is both sympathetic to evangelicalism, indeed he can be called an evangelical himself, but also one who wishes to call the church back to its denominational roots and in that movement find renewed strength. Hart's work appears amidst a current wave of literature which asks 'evangelicals' to regain a sense of tradition and not merely opt for the latest and greatest. According to Hart this means recapturing the essence of what it may mean to be Presbyterian, or Anglican, or Baptist, for instance. Hart argues that 'evangelicalism is, [a]t its best...a sentiment. At its worst, it is a solvent of tradition because religious traditions are too narrow for evangelical purposes; they are too dogmatic and therefore too confining' (p187). In fact Hart appeals to the recent work of Baptist minister and professor at Loyola University, D.H. Williams, who argues a similar point in *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism* (1999).

What Hart is most concerned about in his analysis of 'evangelicalism' is the way in which, because 'evangelicalism' is a transdenominational movement and not a 'church', it tends to splinter because it lacks the discipline and rigor of the church: 'Evangelicalism is a seemingly large and influential religious body, but it lacks an institutional center, intellectual coherence, and devotional direction' (p176). This has resulted in an entire generation of conservative Protestants dislocated from mainline churches. Far better, argues Hart, that the term 'evangelical' be given away by academics and pastors alike and that the old ways are returned to, whatever that may mean denominationally. Presumably, Baptists would reclaim their own

theological tradition in distinction from Presbyterians, for arguments sake, and in the ongoing dialogue between the two groups the church on earth would be strengthened and nourished.

What are we to make of this work and Hart's claims? Evident throughout his critique is a rather glaring inconsistency. While his thesis is that evangelicalism is a fiction, an abstraction, a non-entity he continues to speak of *evangelicals* and *evangelicalism*, referring to its key figures, institutions, and theology. Clearly *something* exists and that something can legitimately be called *evangelicalism*. Hart's work never finally succeeds in convincing the reader of his thesis. This does not mean this is not a good book! Quite the contrary. This is a provocative historical critique of a movement which Baptists generally inhabit. As such it is worth reading and interacting with Hart's diagnosis, even if one is not convinced in the final instance. The call to reclaim the Great Tradition of the church, to return to a robust denomination identity (whatever that denomination may be), and the urgent call to rigorous theological thinking are all to be applauded and we would do well to heed this call. But to abandon evangelicalism will take more convincing than Hart provides, regardless of how beautiful the prose is or how provocative the argument.