

INVITING COMMUNITY

How the Church on Earth Engages the World Through Means

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Inviting Community begins with Kolb and Hopkins' essay, stating, "ecclesiology best serves the church by reflecting upon concrete contexts and situations and addressing these situations to help the church..."¹ And again, " 'The church's response to its ever-shifting contexts should not first-and-foremost be to formulate theoretical constructions, be they doctrinal or moral systems, but should be to reconstruct its concrete identity so as to embody its witness in truthful discipleship.'"² The unifying thought behind the essays in *Inviting Community* is that God works through means. Marrs talks about social capital;³ both Kloha and Arand quote Luther's catechism on how God works through his creatures;⁴ and Oschwald points out how God's people consume the gifts God has provided through creation.⁵ Each essay (on topics from technology to environmentalism) points out that God's church (as participants in *Missio Dei*) should invite community by engaging the world through the tangible means God has provided.

Unfortunately, the essays do not propose concrete responses to concrete ministry contexts. Mostly, the essays formulate theoretical constructions, like Schmidt's musings on devotional meditation⁶ and Marr's psychology perspective.⁷ Others claim that we should be cautious in responding to ever-shifting contexts, like Kobs' essay on technology and Biermann's essay on the congregation as sanctuary.⁸ Merker and Meyer's essay on funding mission is ostensibly concrete (stating that money "is the incarnational side of mission"),⁹ but succeeds only in promoting seminary programs and shifting the

¹ Theodore Hopkins and Robert Kolb, eds., *Inviting Community*, Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013, 14.

² *Ibid*, quoting Healy, *The Church*, 21-22.

³ Hopkins and Kolb, 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43, 129.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 146-157.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 107-121.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21-33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

guilt-burden of indebtedness from the seminary institution to students, pastors, and individual congregations. Meyer is to be applauded for his efforts to facilitate conversation, but concrete applications are left for individual pastors to find on their own.

While Kloha claims churches act “all too often like just another 501(c)(3),”¹⁰ Meyer asserts that “we can open our eyes to a new world before us that will link together entrepreneurial ideas with God’s church...”.¹¹ My experience is that churches act nothing like other 501(c)(3) organizations in their peer group. Universities, schools, hospitals, and other non-profit organizations engage the world’s resources to provide needed services in sophisticated ways that churches do not. My financial specialist designation is used in nearly every ministry context I am sent to, to better employ such ministries in useful service.

¹⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹¹ Ibid., 218.