
Reviews

Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism by Reinhard Hütter. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. 313+pp. ISBN: 0-8028-2750-0. \$28.00.

This is an important and engaging volume that advances substantial arguments in a frequently clear and compelling fashion. This book is not, however, an easy volume to review for several reasons. First, the author describes his work as “evangelical catholic.” Within this somewhat ambiguous term, the author both strongly engages and strongly criticizes his own tradition and much of Catholic tradition, appearing to leave him (to borrow a phrase from Hütter’s Duke colleague Stanley Hauerwas, whose influence on this volume is clear) “ecclesially homeless.” The additional challenge in reviewing this is that this book is a collection of essays rather than a monograph. To his credit, the author has helpfully grouped the essays together into three broad categories under the overall rubric of freedom: the first is “free to be church”; the second, “free to live with God”; and the third, “free to speak ecumenically.”

The author begins by noting that his goal is to show how each of these categories “interrelate and, indeed, interpenetrate. This mutual interpenetration, or perichoresis, has long been obscured by ongoing Christian division.” Christian divisions, the author rightly suggests, have often been perpetuated by the mistaken belief that speaking freely is irreconcilable with speaking ecumenically, that unity can only be purchased at the cost of ecclesial identity. Hütter sets out to debunk these notions, and does so convincingly in most respects.

In his first section, “Free to be Church,” Hütter (especially in chapters two, three, and five) undertakes detailed discussions of intra-Protestant debates about ecclesiology among Erik Peterson, Adolf von Harnack, and especially Karl Barth. This is a less than scintillating section of the book in part because the debates are intramural, and in part because the conclusions—e.g., the “church’s public character is reclaimed only and precisely by overcoming the internal splits and by (re-)creating a truly catholic and evangelical church and theology”—seem banal expressions of the author’s desire to get evangelicals to take ecclesiology and liturgy more seriously.

Hütter’s second section, on the freedom to live with God, displays some of his richest thinking, especially in chapters seven and eight that form the heart

of the book. In the most sustained reflection about freedom properly understood Hütter forcefully debunks notions of freedom generally found in Western culture and certain strands of particularly Protestant theology. In doing so, he draws extensively on *Veritatis Splendor*, the 1993 encyclical of Pope John Paul II on moral theology. Through these reflections Hütter attempts to correct “the deeply problematic opposition that is widely assumed to exist between freedom and law.” In the end, he concludes this section by arguing that freedom, properly understood, leads to liturgy and finds its perfection in praise and doxology. This underdeveloped doxological connection could be further explored in conjunction with recent scholarship of Catherine Pickstock and Marva Dawn.

In his final and shortest section, the author engages three Roman Catholic documents, chiefly the 1995 encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (henceforth: *UUS*). This final section is quite disappointing.

Hütter claims that the encyclical’s “core thesis” is that “*the primacy of the bishop of Rome in its present form represents the condition for the possibility of Christian unity—visible Christian unity can only mean one thing: ‘redintegratio,’ that is, reunification with the Roman Catholic Church understood in terms of absorption*” (p. 190; italics in original). Hütter nowhere cites a single passage from the encyclical to back up this egregious interpretation. He does not cite because he could not: the very words “absorption” and “reunification” (and their cognates) do not occur in *UUS*. Moreover, the language of “absorption” that Hütter imputes to *UUS* is not only not found in the encyclical or other relevant Catholic documents of the postconciliar period: it is positively and explicitly refused by them! In a 1977 address in the Vatican to a visiting Anglican delegation, Pope Paul VI—picking up a phrase from the Malines Conversations of the 1920s—spoke about that day when “these words of hope ‘the Anglican Church united not absorbed’ are no longer a mere dream.” Earlier, in 1970, the pope had spoken about the coming unity between Catholics and Anglicans when “there will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church—this humble ‘Servant of the servants of God’—is able to embrace her ever beloved sister in the one authentic Communion of the family of Christ.” It is—or it should be—clear that “absorption,” like “return,” is no longer a part of the Roman ecumenical vocabulary. As Joseph Ratzinger said some years back, the goal of ecumenism as Catholics see it is that “the churches should certainly remain churches, but also progressively become one Church.”

The author’s claim that papal primacy “in its present form” is the condition of unity is flatly contradicted by the encyclical in what is indisputably its most novel and important passage in paragraphs 95 and 96 (my emphasis added):

as Bishop of Rome I am... convinced that I have a particular responsibility in... acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising

the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless *open to a new situation*....

Hütter ends this chapter by claiming that “Roman Catholic papalism and Protestant antipapalism correspond to one another in an ecumenically prohibitive way.” Perhaps sixty, and certainly a hundred, years ago they did, but this claim is hard to accept in light of the many documents on the papacy published since 1970, especially that extraordinary document produced by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission in 1999, *The Gift of Authority*.

Since the publication of this book, it has been reported that Hütter has found his home and has been received into full communion with the Catholic Church. This suggests that his “engagements” with questions addressed in this volume—above all the papacy—will likely undergo further development and thereby invite continued discussion. That is a prospect that theologians of all traditions can look forward to because this book—though not without problems—reconfirms Hütter as a substantial theologian whose work is important both in itself and in the cause of Christian unity.

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