

Review: Contesting the Body of Christ

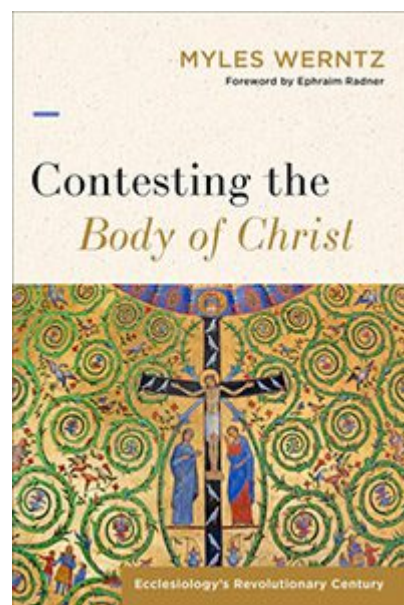
August 11, 2025

Contesting the Body of Christ: Ecclesiology's Revolutionary Century

By Myles Werntz (Baker Academic)

What do the ecumenical, holiness, charismatic, Social Gospel, lay renewal and liberationist movements have in common? Myles Werntz, director of the Baptist Studies Center at Abilene Christian University, contends they all represent ways global Christians in the 20th century wrestled with and responded to questions about what defines the church and its mission.

In *Contesting the Body of Christ: Ecclesiology's Revolutionary Century*, Werntz explores how Christians around the world and in varied contexts followed diverse paths—generally in response to the Holy Spirit's guidance, as they understood it—to live out what it means to be Christ's church.



Since at least the fourth century A.D., Christians have confessed belief in “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” Werntz examines how followers

of Christ in the past century worked out the meaning of each of these four marks—unity, holiness, universality and continuity. He looks not only at Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant and evangelical examples, but also at Orthodox, Pentecostal and charismatic expressions of the Holy Spirit at work in the church.

One of the greatest strengths of *Contesting the Body of Christ* is its international scope. Too often, American Christians tend to assume the Christian landscape as we know it surely must represent the global church, as well. Werntz offers a broad view that encompasses Christianity in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe, as well as in North America and Western Europe.

After Werntz provides a look back at how the marks of the church were reaffirmed in some ways and reshaped in others during the 20th century, he concludes what he calls “a modest proposal” for the 21st century church. *Contesting the Body of Christ* is not light and easy reading, but *Baptist Standard* readers can benefit from considering thoughtfully what Werntz views as reasons for hope and a Spirit-led way forward.

Ken Camp, managing editor

Baptist Standard