

Michael Budde. *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances and the Church. Theopolitical Visions* (Eugene, CO: Cascade Books, 2011)

Political theology has achieved a resonance and a reach that could not have been anticipated in the world of academic theology two decades ago. In the late decades of the twentieth century it was largely used to refer to the work of European theologians, for example Metz, who seemed to be contextualising the themes of liberation theology. In the first decade of this century political theology has slipped out from this narrow and specific definition, and is associated with a wide variety of theological and intellectual agendas.

Recently European Marxists such as Badiou and Agamben have displayed a substantive interest in the Apostle Paul and have engaged with a variety of themes in his writings as a resource for renewed political challenge to consumer capitalism. Alongside this, there is the project that takes a more historical perspective directed at recovering the theological roots of political theory. Oliver O'Donovan's work represents this project in a theologically orthodox Anglican mode, while John Millbank has articulated a political theology of another kind in his critique of the social sciences as embodying various heretical theologies.

Another strand of theology that I would argue is committed to political theology in its fullest sense has generally not used this label to describe itself, because I assume it would argue that the use of the term 'political' suggests that there can be a form of theology that is not 'political', because it operates from the conviction that the Church is the material, living people of God that crosses all borders and human divisions.

This form of political theology, which is intrinsically ecclesiological in focus, owes much to the work of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. As the Ekklesia Project, an ecumenical network committed to this perspective on theology puts it, we should view *...the Church as an alternative community of practices, worship, and integration at the center of contemporary debates on Christianity and society. We work to assist the Church as it lives its true calling as the real-world community whose primary loyalty is to God's Kingdom that has broken into the world in Jesus' person, priorities and practices, and that continues to do so in and through the gathered Body of Christ.* (<http://www.ekklesiaproject.org/about-us/who-we-are/>)

This development is delightfully represented by Michael Budde's collection of articles *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances and the Church*, published in the Theopolitical Visions series by Cascade Books. Budde has provided us with a good example of what this strand of political theology is all about. The author is an active participant in the Ekklesia Project, and a professor of Political Science and Catholic Studies at DePaul University. Though not by a 'professional' theologian, Budde should open our eyes as to why anyone engaging with political theology that does not have something interesting and important to say about ecclesiology should be viewed with suspicion.

The Borders of Baptism is a remarkably accessible read for people without an academic background in the discipline of theology. The footnotes are brief, minimal in number, and the methodological throat clearing that can go on for chapters in much academic theology is almost completely absent. The book is a collection of articles and addresses, prefaced by two chapters, one on ecclesial solidarity

and our other allegiances, and the other on the significance of ecclesial solidarity and the emergence of world Christianity.

The fact that Budde is accessible does not make his argument unimportant or challenging. The reverse is very much the case. The question that runs through this collection is, what would it look like if we took our baptismal vows seriously and took up their implication that our primary loyalty is to the church as a transnational community.

Budde explores a variety of issues from this perspective. The question of globalization is addressed through an examination of several theological engagements with this issue which Budde addresses under the theme of how not to proceed in thinking about the issue. The author's brisk critique is ecumenical in scope, and brings under judgement, Hans Kung and the World's Parliament of Religions, Max Stackhouse's God and Globalization project and Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis. His discussion of "National Identity: Family, Nation and Discipleship" is driven by engagement with the New Testament, particularly the Gospel of Matthew. The theme of Christianity as a source of 'family values' is left fairly much in tatters by the end of his account.

The church as a transnational body, Budde argues, is a more 'universal' polity against which nations and states look more sectarian and tribal. Should he hand over the body of an illegal immigrant, fellow Christians fleeing persecution and oppression to the United States to immigration authorities in the name of 'civic republicanism' or "national community" he asks? *I think a casual but consistent disregard for the imperatives of state may be the order of the day for those whose sense of commonality, relatedness and obligation is neither familial, or civic, but ecclesial - sealed in the Resurrection that itself was an offense against Roman law (Matt 27: 63-66) ... (76).*

Budde goes on to a consideration of immigration, Christian political responsibility, race, the impact of corporate capitalism on the church, and the significance of martyrdom. All these issues are discussed with reference to particular examples, particularly in the Catholic Church around the world. What Budde makes clear in this discussion is why ecclesiology is important for a substantive Christian engagement with politics that is more than conformity to current political trends and ideologies.

My own observation is that such an ecclesiological discussion might bring together in particular Catholics and those of Anabaptist tendencies. Both in the end hold the church as community to be fundamental to Christian formation and discipleship and both have reason to downplay the claims of the state to a loyalty which claims the right to order us to kill our sisters and brothers in Christ, against the explicit direction and practice of Jesus. Budde here opens up the door to conversation that might lead to greater mutual understanding around the significance of baptism as a key practice in shaping a political theology which points to the significance of the church as a transnational community

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