

Guy Chevreau, *Vital Signs of a Healthy Church. A Diagnostic*  
(Chichester, West Sussex: New Wine Ministries, 2007).

For those with eyes to see, life contains numerous providential serendipities. In a second-hand bookstore in Westdale, Hamilton, I recently picked up Guy Chevreau's *Vital Signs of a Healthy Church. A Diagnostic* (Chichester, West Sussex: New Wine Ministries, 2007).

The author's name was familiar to me, for in the early nineties he had written a book defending the Toronto Blessing, *Catch the Fire: The Toronto Blessing. An experience of renewal and revival* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), in which he heavily used the writings and experience of Jonathan Edwards to legitimate what was happening at the Airport Vineyard in Toronto. I had some problems with his argument, believing, as I still do, that Edwards cannot be fit easily into the mould of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century third wave/charismatic perspectives. But Chevreau is not your typical observer/participant in recent charismatic movements. He is a skilled historical theologian, resident in Ontario, and got his Th.D. from a school very familiar to me, namely, the Toronto School of Theology. And this book that I picked up, his latest, well reveals his ability to grapple with ecclesiological issues in Scripture and Church History.

I must confess I bought the book, expecting to find myself disagreeing with much of what he wrote. I was surprised to find that I found myself "amening" a number of his key points. The book seeks to lay out what makes for a healthy church—it is interesting that a number of writers in recent days have been turning their attention to this issue, most notably Mark Dever, the Southern Baptist pastor-theologian, in his *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* and *What Is A Healthy Church?* It would be fascinating to compare Dever's *Nine Marks* with this work by Chevreau, who discerns five marks of a healthy church: true worship of the Triune God, leadership with biblical priorities, a loving atmosphere, generosity (especially with regard to finances), and a passion for evangelism and missions.

Now, there were some points where I winced and had a difficult time endorsing the argument, particularly in the section on the present-day ministry of apostles (p.48-52). I am simply not convinced that the office/gift of Apostle still exists in individuals alive in this realm. For me, Ephesians 2:19-22, a reference to the universal church, grounds apostolic ministry in the first-century work of that handful of Apostles chosen by Christ, of whom Paul was the last (1 Corinthians 15:8). Once the foundation is laid—and it has been laid in those men's apostolic ministry—there is no need to build the foundation again. Having said this, though, I would agree wholeheartedly about the necessity for churches being interdependent. Chevreau is surely right to argue that this is a biblical given.

But this section aside, there was so much here that I agreed with, from an emphasis on the transformative work of the Spirit in human lives ruined by sin (p.29-30) to the discussion of the importance of biblical meditation (p.40-44), from the importance of servant leadership (p.52-54) and the necessity of accountability among Christian leaders (p.54-57) to the argument that "love

is the hallmark of the healthiest churches” (p.65). I am afraid that the number of Baptist and Reformed works that are solid when it comes to doctrine, but that are essentially unloving places, are much more than a handful.

So reading this work has been one of life’s small serendipities, to find agreement on many issues despite key differences when it comes to matters as to how the Spirit works. Given my love for the Fathers, I was thrilled to see that the book opens with two patristic quotes about the church, both from the Latin tradition, one from Cyprian and one from Augustine. Having finished the book, I was convinced of another ecclesiological truth from the patristic era—what the Fathers regarded as a key mark (*nota*) of the church—namely, that there is One true church, crossing space and time, and second- and third-order theological differences, and all who genuinely name Jesus as Lord and Christ belong within her bosom.

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