



Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America

Edited by Darrell L. Guder

Reviewed by Ron Eberhardt

About this book:

This book was suggested by Amy Wilkins for reading by the Missions Leadership Team because it was required reading during her studies at Truitt Seminary. To quote from John M. Mulder, “North America as a mission field – the idea sounds strange to North American Christians who associate ‘mission’ with something that happens in other parts of the world.” This book issues a firm challenge for the church to recover its missional call right here in North America. The book was written by six noted missiologists – Lois Barrett, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Darrell L. Guder, George R. Hunsberger, Alan J. Roxburgh, and Craig Van Gelder. Following are some excerpts from the book.

General Status of Current Church

The book begins with the current status of the church and Christianity in North America which is that it has lost its position of dominance in numbers, power and influence. North American religiosity is becoming more pluralistic, more individualistic and more private. This is resulting in diminishing numbers, clergy burnout, loss of youth, end of denominational loyalty and division in the ranks, just to name a few. A suggestion is made that the church should be contextual, that is it must be culturally relevant. The church relates constantly and dynamically both to the gospel and to its contextual reality.

History of the Church

As America was in its early stages of development the church was influenced from many different directions. The Puritans influenced the Northern colonies. The Puritans sought a more thorough reformation of the Church of England. The southern colonies were shaped mostly by the Anglican Church. The middle colonies were influenced by many diverse traditions. Some of these traditions were the Reformed from Holland, Lutherans from Germany, Presbyterians from Scotland, Mennonites and the Quakers. No one church could establish complete domain so a new structure evolved, the denomination. Diverse churches began to accept one another’s legitimacy. As the church was struggling to be established and integrated within social and government organization, three disestablishments occurred. These disestablishments were 1) separation of church and state, 2) Protestant, Catholic and Jew unprecedented immigration and 3) the individualization of society. The church lost its focus.

The Mission of the Church

Church must refocus its direction. This has to start locally within the church and with its relationship with the community within which it exists. The church should represent the Reign of God as its community, its servant and its messenger. Evangelism would move from an act of recruiting or co-opting those outside the church to an invitation of companionship. The church is a preview of God’s Reign to come. Mission is not just what the church does, it is what the church is. A missional church should follow Jesus in healing, preaching and teaching. A missional church must seek God’s will and truth. This cannot be legislated by prudent and efficient decisions, but by open conversation, listening for the Spirit in the midst of communal dialogue, recognition of the gifts of all believers and making time to listen, share, study, struggle, pray and plan together. The cultivation of faithful missional communities is an ongoing process of formation and transformation.

Recommendation:

I would not recommend this book for the casual reader. I personally did not receive any outstanding insight that would have an impact on my thinking about our focus on missions. This book is highly regarded in missional circles so I am sure it was me and not the book. I just was influenced much more by ‘When Helping Hurts’ or ‘Radical’

I found this book to be a very difficult read at a high academic level. I have no doubt that the text is rich with content that I might have not been able to discern. I would encourage anyone interested in the theology of a true Missional Church to dive in!