



## Book Reviews

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Book Review Editor

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**Buxton, G. (2014). *An Uncertain Certainty: Snapshots in a Journey from “Either-Or” to “Both-And” in Christian Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.**

Reviewed by Dr Jon K. Newton

At Harvest Bible College we have a Masters level subject called “Theological Reflection for Ministry.” This subject seeks to help practicing or preparing Christian ministers to reflect with some theological depth on the situations they face in ministry and hence deal with them better. Graham Buxton’s new book may well become a sought-after text for this kind of course and compulsory reading for ministers of all persuasions and varieties of service, since it is a stimulating and paradigmatic model of theological reflection for ministry in practice.

Buxton contends that many Christian ministers “are tired of simplistic certainties, often associated with formulae for church growth, and narrow, dualistic ‘either-or’ thinking; what they are looking for, and what they need, is permission to live with uncertainty, with mystery, ambiguity, and paradox” (p. 214). He urges us instead to increasingly move towards a “both-and” pattern of thinking, that is, one that engages with insights and truth from both “sides” in various questions and hesitates to proclaim answers with absolute certainty (though affirming the certain truths of the Faith strongly). This is the objective that he explains at the outset of the book.

The reader is then taken on a stimulating and, at times, provocative journey through a range of issues that ministers face—perhaps especially those who, like Buxton, have been influenced by the charismatic movement. The author discusses theological issues such as the transcendence and immanence of God without getting bogged down in “theology-speak” and always with a view to the practical outworking of

the theology in actual ministry. He also considers controversial ministry-focused topics, such as the nature of local church leadership, in a balanced and considered way, having himself faced the hard choices involved.

One of the best features of this book is the way that Buxton draws on personal experience *and* distils wide reading across a range of recent and older authors, to make practical and illuminating points. For example, in the chapter on church leadership, he begins with a simple anecdote about a conference and goes on quickly to introduce insights from Martin Luther, Alister McGrath, Brian Harris, Howard Friend, John Goldingay, Stephen Pickard and Margaret Wheatley, among others! He brings in ideas from Appreciative Inquiry, Open Systems and Receptive Ecumenism. All these threads are woven together skillfully to create an insightful meditation on the leadership of local churches that also draws in sound New Testament teaching. And in keeping with the “both-and” thrust of the whole book, he promotes a participatory style of leadership, emerging from below as well as from above, while emphasizing that “this way of thinking *does not eliminate hierarchy*” (p. 135).

Another great quality in the book is Buxton’s ability to surprise the reader (well, this reader, anyway) with little glimpses from Scripture that flood the mind with light. For example, his short commentary on Job 38–39 (p. 187) includes this line: “having listened patiently to Job and his friends, God responds by inviting Job to consider the immensity of his creation, with the implied question: ‘Who, then, do you think *you* are?’” Perhaps the shortest, most effective indictment of anthropocentrism I’ve read!

Of course the argument does not always convince. There is the inevitable difficulty of avoiding “either-or” thinking: am I using *either* “either-or” *or* “both-and” structures as I consider any particular topic? Sometimes this seems like a device used more to make the “unacceptable” acceptable as a possibility, as in the most risky chapter in the book “A hell of a problem.” Here Buxton seems to be advocating a quasi-Origenist form of evangelical universalism and I think he loses sight of the “both-and” in his effort to answer the objections to this view. But even here he is moderate, honest, practical, clear and mostly fair, though I think he fails to give the Scripture passages implying eternal torment sufficient weight and avoids the Book of Revelation with a somewhat cavalier dismissal (p. 68).

This book is comprehensive in its coverage of the kinds of issues Christians wrestle with today, the issues they need wisdom and pastoral guidance about from those who have truly thought through the problems in a way similar to Buxton. It could be used as a kind of handbook, but I’m not sure that would do it justice. For me it functioned more as a thought-starter, one that opened my mind to new illumination of the Spirit. I found Buxton’s thinking enormously helpful to me as a pastor and theologian and I think it will be a book I recommend to all my pastor friends.

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**Foster, T. (2014). *The Suburban Captivity of the Church*. Moreland, VIC: Acorn.**

Reviewed by Ps Andrew A. Groza

The way churches proclaim their message and practice their faith is often moulded by the culture they inhabit. Tim Foster takes this concept of the shaping power of culture seriously in his powerful and thought provoking book *The Suburban Captivity of the Church*. Foster argues that the Australian church’s message has by-and-large been

shaped by the cultural narrative of suburbia. In the process of moving from the suburbs to take on a parish in Sydney's inner city, Foster realised that the "...way we had come to understand the gospel, church and the Christian life, as well as our values and aspirations as Christians, was not simply a product of the Bible, but of a spirituality that was shaped, more than anything, by life in the suburbs" (p. 2).

Foster begins by examining afresh the gospel message. He labels the message that is often proclaimed today as the "punitive gospel." Frequently, today's articulation of the gospel centres around the following tenets: humanity's rebellion towards God, the punishment that rebellion requires, the death of Jesus that assuages God's wrath, forgiveness of sins for repentant humans who trust in Jesus' death, and entrance into heaven in the afterlife. That was very much the message I preached as a pastor in church when seeking to see people open their hearts to Christ at the end of a service. The effect however is that it makes humanity the focus of the message rather than God, and it makes the gospel all about "me"; "Rather than challenging my human self-centredness, this approach capitalised on it, presenting God as the servant of my needs" (p. 12). Foster makes it clear that the above elements are all vital, but insists that the biblical narrative paints a much broader, more God-centric vision. He argues, rather persuasively, that the framework for that gospel, which centres on God's punishment—hence the punitive title he ascribes—does not do justice to the good news Scripture teaches. Rather than seeking to answer the question of how an individual can be saved, the biblical witness focuses on answering, "How is God recovering his purposes for the world?" (p. 14). Framing the articulation of the gospel around God and his purposes—what Foster calls the telic framework, from the Greek *telos*—puts human salvation in the right perspective, as well as makes sense of the rest of the biblical story which is so often overlooked. Foster proceeds to trace the trajectory of the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation, creation to new creation, and shows how the gospel declares that the old order of life (marked by self-interest, greed, exploitation, poverty, relational breakdown, ecological disaster, etc.) has been dealt with in the life, death *and* resurrection of Jesus, which proves that God's new order (the Kingdom of God) has come. This opens a new way to relate to God, ourselves, other humans and to the world (pp. 24–25).

Framing the gospel in this way, brings it into dialogue with a church's inhabited culture in a way that the punitive framework, with its predominant focus on the afterlife, cannot. Chapters 2 and 3 therefore, deal with this issue of cultural narratives (the stories that shape our culture, and thereby shape a person's values, aspirations and identities), and the need for the church to contextualise its message so that the gospel can critique, affirm and subvert the culture that so shapes us. He argues that the gospel must engage at the deep level of cultural narrative, for if it does not, "...we will produce converts who remain highly accommodated to their culture, failing to truly and fully embrace God's vision for the world" (p. 42). Chapters 4 through 6 contain cultural analysis of three separate subcultures and what contextualising the gospel using the telic framework could look like to suburbanites, urbanites, and battlers. The chapter on the suburbs particularly ties into his thesis that the contemporary expression of church is very much tied to suburban values and aspirations, and the potential problems this brings; "[p]eople are far more likely to embrace a less-demanding gospel, one that offers eternal security while allowing people to pursue their dreams uninterrupted" (p. 83). Could it be that we struggle to build our churches because our people have been conditioned to view life through this aspirational suburban lens and we have perpetuated it by preaching a message that aligns to it?

It is difficult to find fault with Foster's work. One thing that would have been appreciated would be a more thorough process of discerning meanings behind the symbols, myths, and rituals of a culture discussed in chapter 2. As Foster himself notes, these artefacts are sometimes well camouflaged and even if they can be spotted, "...their meaning can remain elusive." (p. 38). Being equipped to read symbols, myths and rituals well would go a long way to being able to intelligently dialogue with the cultural narrative. Yet, not having confidence of accurate interpretation, given the potential for misunderstanding and imprecise meanings, makes the process difficult to engage with. This is why a more thorough process would have been welcomed.

Pastors would benefit greatly from reading this book, (or at the very least, the chapters, "What is the Gospel?" and "Good News for the Suburbs"), irrespective of whether their context is suburban or not. This book affords the church the opportunity to critique its current message and practice, and to question just how much message and practice has been shaped by the suburban story. It is hoped that it spurs fresh efforts at contextualisation, so that the glorious message of our Saviour is not ignored outright because the church is still seeking to answer questions our society is no longer asking.

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**Giles, K. (2012). *The Eternal Generation of the Son*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP.**

Reviewed by Lucia Hosking

The title of Kevin Giles' new book may seem somewhat obscure, and for some, yet another example of how Christian theology is concerned with expounding on primarily minor, sideline issues that have little impact on everyday life and ministry. However, do not let the title fool you. The book is concerned with a cornerstone of the Christian faith; Jesus' very nature.

Many Christians would affirm that the Son is indeed eternally begotten of the Father, especially for those familiar with the Nicene Creed, and yet would not be able to explain why this is the case or why it should be so. In recent discussions it has been suggested that the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son be abandoned given it is at best, inconsequential, and at worst, unbiblical; a doctrine that implies the eternal subordination of the Son, even the Arian heresy. It is in this context that Giles mounts a rigorous defense of this cornerstone of Christian doctrine.

The nature of the Son's relationship to the Father is the crux of Christianity. Jesus' nature is the point of contention between the world's three monotheistic religions, as his claim to divinity is what divides Muslims, Jews and Christians. Moreover, as the hope of salvation lies in Jesus' nature and work on the cross, the question of Jesus' role in the Godhead has profound implications not only for evangelism but the entirety of the Church universal. In a world of increasing pluralism and declining Biblical literacy, Giles' book is a welcome resource for those in ministry who need to understand why theology matters and why we must hold on to the faith as passed down to us.

In his introduction, Giles seeks to show that this doctrine is indeed under attack, with one section titled 'The Evangelical Call to Abandon the Doctrine of the Eternal Generation of the Son' (p. 29). He recalls a lengthy, and disconcerting, list of contemporary evangelicals such as Wayne Grudem and Mark Driscoll who would

eagerly abandon the doctrine, given its apparent lack of clarity or biblical support. This apparent lack of biblical support is one of the strongest arguments in favor of casting off the doctrine and in his second chapter, Giles examines what exactly a 'biblical warrant' looks like. Or, as Giles frames the question, how does one engage in evangelical theology? Is it simply a matter of finding Scriptural proof-texts or are other sources needed?

Giles has discussed and defended his theological method before, in books such as *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, where he was then accused by some of advocating a dangerous 'slippery slope' view of Scripture where there is no one correct answer, but rather a multiplicity of answers that depend on one's context and culture. In later books, such as *Jesus and the Father*, and the book under review now, Giles adamantly rejects this and states unequivocally that "The Bible is the ultimate authority in answering theological questions, but doing evangelical theology involves more than direct appeal to the Bible" (p. 40).

His second chapter explores the essence of effective evangelical theology. He is critical of any approach to theology that claims the 'Bible alone' as a source, as this is impossible, since "everyone comes to the text of Scripture with beliefs that they have inherited" (p. 52). 'Sola Scriptura' is not 'Solo Scriptura.' He believes that an effective safeguard against allowing individual presuppositions and beliefs to color our interpretation of Scripture is to let those beliefs be informed by "... the ecumenical creeds and the Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant confessions" (p. 55).

Giles claims that chapter three is about examining the biblical evidence for the doctrine, however, it may be a disappointment for those looking for rigorous exegetical work. Giles acknowledges this and states that as the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son does not stand or fall on the basis of certain verses, (as these verses are precisely what makes the issue contentious), his defense of the doctrine will come from other sources. Chapters four through to seven function as a helpful historical overview of the doctrine of eternal generation from the third-century apologists through the post-Reformation Protestant theologians. It is in the subsequent chapters that Giles mounts his most rigorous defense, as he rebuts the arguments of those who are questioning the doctrine's necessity.

Given Giles' pedigree as a staunch opponent of the view that the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father, the question with which chapter eight is concerned, "Does the eternal generation of the Son imply or necessitate the eternal subordination of the Son?" is one that is often posed to him by some who struggle to see how the Son's eternal generation and eternal subordination could possibly be separated. He points out that our concept of 'begetting' cannot be likened to the Father's begetting of the Son. Giles makes it clear that "[t]he eternal begetting of the Son does not involve a change in God. He is eternally triune. There never was a time when the Son was not" (p. 219). He also shows how the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son is perhaps the best way of differentiating the persons of the Godhead, as it does not differentiate them on the basis of power, authority or being, but only as "begotten God" and "unbegotten God". This safeguards the *aseity* of God.

In chapter nine Giles counters arguments that there are better ways to ground the Father-Son distinction than the eternal begetting of the Son, and is quite persuasive in showing how the only two other alternatives have heterodox implications. Here is where he must address the 'subordination' issue, as many have argued from the false

notion of ontological subordination within the Trinity, that women are to be subordinated to men. Giles deals with this particular doctrine in far greater depth in his book *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, a book that has stirred up so much debate that it has its very own discussion website. However, he briefly shows how this injures the nature of God and does a disservice to our understanding of the Trinity. The other option put forth by contemporary Evangelicals is that the “differing works of the divine three seen in the economy eternally and primarily differentiate them...” (p. 220). Both alternatives are problematic as they “ground divine self-differentiation on what is revealed in the economy” (p. 235) and this would mean God is bound by history and time.

The strength of this book is Giles’ willingness and ability to critically engage with almost every major theologian on the issue, giving the reader a good grasp of the doctrine’s historical and theological development. However, strength can also be viewed as a weakness, since so many church fathers and theologians do come to the same conclusion, and this may come across as repetitive to some readers. Ultimately, Giles mounts an impressive defense of this important doctrine, and in doing so, sheds light on the relevance of church history and tradition for contemporary ministry.

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**Hey, S. (2013). *Mega Churches: Origins, Ministry and Prospects*. Preston, VIC: Mosaic Press.**

Reviewed by Dr Angelo Cettolin

*Mega Churches* is a valuable resource for both the ministry practitioner and the scholar. This monograph is based on Hey’s thesis exploring the phenomenon of megachurches in Australia, which he defines as Churches with over 2000 members. Hey has unique insights, because he is a Pentecostal minister and insider as well as possessing extensive experience as a church growth analyst and academic.

Hey traces the origins and developments of megachurches in Australia and provides an in-depth examination of the megachurch through his association with the Christian Outreach Centre, Brisbane, the flagship church of the COC denomination. The book contains many valuable insights into the religious social scene in Australia and how this differs from other Western situations. The benefits and challenges to its adherents are honestly examined in addition to prognostications of the future.

Hey analyses the rationale for the origins and growth of megachurches, and the lessons that can be learnt from their revival methodologies, leadership styles and organisational structures. He explores how mega churches have made forays into politics, developed schools, colleges, welfare programs, mission initiatives, and morphed into church networks and newer denominational movements. He also looks at the application of church growth principles in Australia’s unique cultural milieu.

This book reflects extensive research for a doctoral thesis, covering a decade of work. At times it is repetitious and can be dense in style. It would have benefited from more rigorous editorial attention. There are a number of errors with regard to church names and dates. Likewise, the table of Australia’s largest churches is helpful, although there are some inaccuracies as to information on dates and leaders’ names and some newer church are missing (p. 11). The book, however, provides a goldmine of information on the founding of some important churches in Australia, and it includes

some fascinating insights into the giftings, proclivities and flaws of significant church pioneers, founders and senior leaders.

One of the telling insights is that in contrast to the USA, almost all of Australia's megachurches are found within the category of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Hey suggests that, in the Australian context, "Pentecostal churches have found the organizational freedom and revivalist religious characteristics that favour mega church growth" (p. 10). Hey raises the question, but does not fully answer, why other "varieties of Australian churches appear resistant to the adaptations that are needed to promote mega church growth" (p. 10). He notes that even the few megachurches in traditional denominations are indebted to charismatic and Pentecostal-type practices to draw and hold their congregational members.

The more important questions Hey seeks to tackle are: how effective is the mega church in preserving core belief? in contributing to the *Missio Dei*? and in communicating the grace of God as revealed in Christ? He provides a thorough critique although it is difficult to generalise as there are significant differences from church to church.

Hey proposes that megachurch growth was aided by drawing power of revivalist beliefs and practices, providing a pragmatic experiential theology. A fascinating insight is that Australia's megachurches emerged as part of global cycles of renewal in evangelical Protestantism. These are related to cycles of social, religious and economic change and are a response to a loss of faith in the institutional traditional churches. Hey also claims the popular appeal of megachurches is based on the contemporary, postmodern and individualistic societies in which they are found. However, the evidence suggests otherwise, as borne out by the global growth of classical and neo-Pentecostal and charismatic mega churches in more communal (and some pre-modern) societies on the continents of Africa, South America and Asia. Some of the world's largest megachurches are located in non-Western societies with the world's largest megachurch, Yoido Full Gospel Church, located in South Korea.

Hey's study reveals that some of the megachurches' weaknesses have been an over-emphasis on intuitive experientialism, hard-to-prove supernatural claims, pragmatic methodologies, isolationism from broader society and wider sources of knowledge, an unquestioning obedience to charismatic leaders and an insufficient regard for scholarly reflection. He does note nonetheless, that the second generation of megachurch leaders appear to be taking steps to address the limitations of earlier revivalist methods and engage more fully with contemporary society and its needs. This has resulted in a decline in emphasis in some revivalist practices and beliefs such as speaking in tongues, healing, and expectation of the parousia. Reference to my own doctoral research in 2006 into the practices of Assemblies of God in Australia (AOG) ministers would have confirmed Hey's views of this decline. However, my dissertation also points out that while public expressions of speaking in tongues in congregational meetings has declined, it has remained consistently strong in the ministers' own private practices.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Angelo U. Cettolin, unpublished doctoral thesis: "AOG Pentecostal Spirituality in Australia: A Comparative Study of the Phenomenon of Historic Spirituality and its Contemporary Developments within the Assemblies of God in Australia", *Australian College of Theology*, 2005, 2006.

While increased institutionalisation has led to a positive increase in certain aspects of quality it has had less favourable effects in the loss of innovative, supernatural and experiential practices which fostered the initial growth of megachurches in the first place. Hey claims this has resulted in less lay involvement and the plateauing of attendances. However, clearly this is not consistently the case across the board as there is evidence of increased and continuing growth in some churches such as the now-global *Hillsong* movement and the new *Planetshakers* megachurch in Melbourne. Further, other newer megachurches are not mentioned, for example *Stairway Church* in Vermont, Victoria (formerly a Christian City Church) led by Peter McHugh. This church is enthusiastically embracing an emphasis on the presence of the Holy Spirit in worship and evangelism as championed by leaders such as Bill Johnson from *Bethel* in Redding, California.

Hey asserts the trend towards the lessening of supernatural, revivalist and Pentecostal practices is likely to continue but if the 20-30 year cycle of global religious renewal patterns since the Azusa Street revival holds true, we are also likely to see further renewal and revival movements emerge in the future. I think there are signs of renewal already here.

The study also highlights the role played by charismatic megachurch founders in making innovative responses to religious needs. Hey identifies a transition that is now taking place from the revivalist founders to second-generation megachurch leaders. These are not infrequently, the biological sons of the founders. These leaders show less emphasis on revivalist charismatic practices and more on institutional management. Although they appear to be dealing with some of the weaknesses of charismatic leadership such as lack of accountability and an over reliance on, and unquestioning obedience to, leaders, they are currently facing the dangers of over-institutionalisation. The results already seem to be showing with less lay involvement and less innovation. However, it is also likely that new groups led by charismatic leaders will re-emerge with all the inherent dangers.

One of the insights of this study is that growth has been assisted by the adoption of forms and business practices that promote growth through the various organisational development phases. In particular there has been the adoption of structures that balance diversity and the free growth of decentralised sections together with tight central control. However, Hey expects that logistical constraints in our societies together with organisational maturation will lead to the plateauing of growth. He predicts this will be interspersed with periods of renewal, the development of new 'products' and programs as emerging gaps in the market are responded to. Continued mergers and takeovers of smaller or less viable churches by the megachurch franchise model are likely. He highlights the role of diversification and reproduction through low-cost franchise methods.

Hey notes that although this market orientation has shown an ability to attract and hold large crowds, it often leads megachurches to reflect the negative aspects of consumer oriented societies, with an over emphasis on individualism, simplification, unquestioning certainty, and superficiality. It is heartening that more challenging and prophetic alternatives that address these weaknesses and injustices are now starting to emerge. The megachurches' development into the area of politics, education and welfare have resulted in better social engagement that will have benefits for church life but they need to be well thought through to be effective.

Hey explains that the continued growth of mega churches was helped by their effective responses to changing market conditions arising from social change, including responsiveness to the younger generations and the rise of postmodernism. Deliberate efforts will be needed to avoid maturation and decline from market saturation, over-institutionalisation and to provide continual effective responses to social change.

Hey's study has demonstrated that while megachurches have shown some limitations and weaknesses from their revivalist origins and their modern consumer focus, they do actually change over time and develop responses to these issues. As a result they have emerged as an alternative to the older and more traditional forms of church. The Pentecostals' emphasis on Spirit empowerment, the commissioning of all believers, their mission focus, and their desire to attract more people to maintain the megachurch facilities, has created an alternative to secular society. It has resulted in a creative engagement with modernity and even postmodernity.

Hey concludes that it is a mistake to dismiss these "Conservative supernatural groups as outdated, superstitious, and authoritarian" (p. 285). This would demonstrate a failure, "[t]o fully understand the changes that are taking place, or the ways in which these new groups develop and mutate over time" (p. 285). Nevertheless, to maximize their positive impact they will need to avoid the dangers of social withdrawal, over acceptance of individualism, consumer orientation and over-dependence on charismatic leaders. They will need strong systems of accountability and allow greater participant involvement in decision-making. They must learn to critically evaluate the prevailing culture while offering credible alternatives.

Hey admits there is a wide diversity in the current Australian and global church, so recognising there are limitations to his study. Nevertheless, he has successfully pursued a middle course of critical observation but with an insider's understanding and sympathetic insight. This book provides a welcome resource not only for those in the academy but also for leaders of mega churches seeking to steer their churches and movements through choppy, ever-changing seas into the opportunities that the wide horizons ahead afford.

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**Rose, G., Hughes, P. & Bouma, G. (2014). *Re-Imagining Church: Positive Ministry Responses to the Age of Experience*. Melbourne: Christian Research Association.**

Reviewed by Dr Jon K. Newton

Over the past half-century, dramatic and fundamental changes have been taking place in Australian society and culture. The tide of Christendom has gone out, often leaving the boat of the Christian church "high and dry." But more than that, so has the tide of modernity and rationality, the worldview that sustained our western culture since the Enlightenment. This book explores the efforts of the congregations of the Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania to respond to this "discontinuous change" and "re-imagine" the church in ways that can relate to postmodernity, in particular what Gerald Rose calls "the experiential shift."

After a short introduction by Philip Hughes and a longer analysis of "what happened to British Protestants" by Gary Bouma, two of the most prominent analysts of contemporary Australian religion, Gerald Rose presents us with an analytical survey of

how the Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania are travelling. In an even-handed and sympathetic account based on in-depth interviews with Churches of Christ ministers, Rose shows us the incredible variety of responses and models adopted by these churches as they attempt to pursue “a ‘missional’ approach to doing church” (p. 31) and gives the reader at least some sense of why these choices were made and what the results have been.

The first model studied in this book was “intentional missional ministry” (p. 44), which springs from a rejection of the traditional church, and an attempt to do something quite different so as to connect with the non-Christian context, based on the idea of “belonging before believing” (p. 47) and a theology of hospitality. Other models place more emphasis on charismatic gifts, relational ministry, reclaiming secular space for the transcendent and practicing classical spiritual disciplines. Some of the churches studied have embraced gradual, “adaptive” change, to the changing society, whereas others have sought a much more radical shift. And not all the changes studied have proved successful in the end.

Rose explores the influences that have caused churches to go in one direction or another; this analysis is insightful and quite comprehensive. The influences of the minister’s own spiritual experience (such as whether they had had a dramatic conversion experience or not), the Charismatic movement, specialist church consultants, denominational programs, the denominational training college and denominational traditions (going back to the roots of Churches of Christ in the Restorationist movement of the early nineteenth century) are carefully examined. For instance, Rose shows us that the leaders of the largest Charismatic congregations had had no theological training when they began and that ministers influenced strongly by the theological college (especially female ministers) tended to move towards a more ecumenical and classical spirituality.

Most important is his thesis that the strongest factor is the churches’ response to the “experiential shift.” The Churches of Christ had been somewhat locked into an outlook and worldview shaped by rationality and evangelical modernity, but that is changing. While many ministers in this research study have embraced a more experiential form of Christianity somewhat unconsciously, and only realized this when interviewed, most of them had embraced experientialism deliberately, if not suddenly. Some made this change by encouraging spiritual gifts and overt Holy Spirit experiences associated with Pentecostalism. Others encouraged an experience of the transcendent through serving the poor, or through the classical spiritual disciplines like *Lectio Divina*, or through a revitalized practice of believer’s baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But almost without exception, these churches have responded positively to the experiential shift and their response has been a primary factor in revitalized and growing congregations. The strength of this thesis is enhanced by Rose’s attention to a range of other factors in church growth or decline as well.

I came away from reading this book with increased respect for the Churches of Christ as one of the more vital, diverse and flexible Christian movements in Australia and with an appreciation of the range of varied models God can use to reach Australians. I also strongly admired the impressive qualitative research methods used by the author. Obviously the thesis of the book would be enhanced by broader data from church attenders in addition to the reports of the ministers, but nonetheless this is a valuable piece of research which, I think, offers hope for leaders of all Christian churches trying to navigate a way forward in an increasingly difficult cultural context.

**Sanders, M. (2014). *Art and Soul: Generating Missional Conversations with the Community through the Medium of Art*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.**

Reviewed by Dr Jon K. Newton

This book is a spinoff from a Doctor of Ministry thesis but don't expect a dry academic tome. The best thing about Michelle Sanders' book is that the author is doing what she writes about, both in the missional church she and her team are planting outside Melbourne and in missions tours of the USA. She thus demonstrates the strength of the book's argument in practice.

Sanders' basic thesis is that the world is not going to come to church; rather the church needs to go out into all the world (guess who said that?) and engage it in ways unchurched people can understand. It is a cross-cultural challenge now that we live in a post-Christian world. In a sense this is not a new proposal, and Sanders bases her ideas on the model of the earthly Jesus, but many of us have asked, "How?" This book gives an exciting answer. Michelle Sanders uses her ability with a paintbrush to engage unchurched people in "missional conversations" which include praying for their needs. It is a different approach designed to cross bridges rather than the traditional literature stands and open air campaigns of old. It is not just art as a kind of sermon but a way of connecting with people's felt needs. Other ideas are offered for those who are no good at art, such as a street party (p. 18) or getting involved in social justice causes, since "many unchurched people want to have an impact in their world, but are unsure how to go about it" (pp. 47-48).

This book is not just a collection of "tips for starting conversations" or the like. It has strong arguments that draw on wide reading and theological reflection, interacting with figures like Karl Barth (p. xvii), Alan Hirsch (pp. xviii,17), N.T. Wright (p. xix), Reggie McNeal (pp. 13-14), Paul Fiddes (pp. 14-15), Stanley Hauerwas (p. 32) and others. It is also grounded in credible research from the National Church Life Survey and other sources in Australia and equivalent sources elsewhere. The use of art is also defended from theological and historical standpoints (pp. 20-29) as well as by its therapeutic value (pp. 30-37).

But what makes the book really engage the reader is the short anecdotes that illustrate the arguments. We meet a host of characters that you won't find in church: a bikie gang opposing child abuse, Sergio the "sexican Mexican," Katrina the suddenly bereaved mother and daughter, Max the confirmed and rude atheist, three young "practicing pagans," Julie the school teacher who introduces "Art and Soul" to her classes and "Tricky Paul" the unpredictable social worker. And what we learn from all these stories is that the most unlikely people are just that—people with real needs, hurts, longings and an openness to God if he is presented without 'preachiness' or judgementalism and by people willing to listen, who encourage people to tell their own stories rather than trying to push the Bible story on them. Sanders surveys a range of felt needs in Australian society that could thus be openings for the gospel.

The last few chapters flesh out the argument with case studies from Sanders' own ministry: her church plant Kaleidoscope, her marketplace ministry "Art for Justice" and her psychotherapeutic ministry "Art and Soul" (a course that involves teaching on life issues, painting and small group discussion), together with some other ways this ministry has reached needy people in Australia and inmates in some US prisons. The

honest accounts about people's journeys and the struggles of the Christian team members (for example, the struggle to avoid religious jargon) are very relevant.

There are some strong, even confrontational, claims here. Sanders is very critical of the average church's priorities: maintaining the systems (p. 11), focusing on numbers (p. 13). She insists that the church must engage the unchurched world.

Overall I found Sanders' book stimulating, provocative and inspiring. My only reservation is the patience required. How can we possibly reach a nation with just non-threatening missional conversations? It will take forever! Clearly Sanders' strategy will not be the whole answer. Yet such is the indifference to Christianity in our society that this may be the main place at least to begin.

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**Standing, R. (2008). *Re-Emerging Church: Strategies for Reaching a Returning Generation*. Abingdon, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship.**

Reviewed by Ron Jessop

Recently a friend told me about a conversation she had had with three women at a 40-year reunion. One shared she had had a baby out of wedlock, another that she had chosen to become a celibate lesbian since her forties and the third that she had had an affair. Each of the three stories had come from women of baby boomer age that had Christian faith 40 years earlier when they met at university, but no longer attended church.

If these three women returned to church searching for spiritual truths how would the church respond to them? It is this question, borne out of his sincere desire for people to have faith in Jesus, that Roger Standing addresses in his book *Re-emerging Church: Strategies for Reaching a Returning Generation*.

Aware of the reality that the baby boomer generation (those born 1946–1964) are approaching retirement and old age, Standing believes that during the next season of their lives, many boomers will begin to ask important and searching spiritual questions. He says, somewhat categorically, that “on a whim, baby boomers will return to church, seeking help in making sense of the questions with which they are beginning to engage.”

Out of his concern that a bad or disappointing experience could well extinguish such a search, he seeks to provide resources that will enable traditional denominational churches to help them engage with the issues that are likely to surface as matters of sensitivity with Boomers who want to explore their Christian faith once more.

He does this by identifying nine issues, some of which include: the faith journey, a lifetime of ethical choices, institutional suspicion, distrust of authority, the impact of music and media, inclination to social justice and discipleship and conformity to Christ.

The main body of the book is taken up with a chapter devoted to each of the nine identified issues. In each chapter Standing provides a reflection on a biblical text related to the topic, a case study, a summary of issues arising from it, theological resources to dig deeper, suggestions for action, and finally a contemporary sociological snapshot, usually taken from studies related to the particular theme.

The author writes from a British context. In recognition of that, he acknowledges that data in countries such as the USA and Australia may have their own nuances. Readers not from a British context should be aware that the examples used in the case studies are all British, and thus may require some interpretive work in order to connect them with other contexts.

A strength of the book is the author's capacity to weave contemporary issues (e.g. homosexuality, co-habitation, and social justice) into his case studies and also to be honest regarding churches' potential reactions to returning boomers e.g. biblical and moral rigidity and judgementalism. The research update at the end of each issue and the descriptions of baby boomer culture are insightful.

The book is a helpful resource for churches seeking to prepare for and welcome baby boomers who are returning to the church "on a whim" in search of a renewal in connection with God. The author achieves his stated aim of providing resources that will equip traditional churches to respond positively to the return of the boomer generation that he foresees.

What sort of a reception any of the three women mentioned above would receive at a church in Australia I do not know. However, the possibility of a positive outcome would be greatly enhanced by a church willing to use Standing's book as a resource and put work into discussing and applying it in their local situation.

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**Walton, J. H. (2009). *The Lost World of Genesis One*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP.**

Reviewed by Jozua van Otterloo

In *The Lost World of Genesis One*, John Walton, Wheaton College Professor of Old Testament studies and author of many related publications, presents a different exegesis of Genesis 1, which assists in engaging with the book of Genesis as well as with science. Walton argues that in order to remain true to the text, we should read it as the original author intended it in the context of his worldview. Therefore, for his exegesis of Genesis 1, he has reconstructed the ancient Near Eastern cosmology. Genesis 1 explained in light of this worldview provides new insight into how God is presented as the Creator. Walton successfully reclaims this topic for a Church that has grown weary of the creation-versus-science debate. He also encourages Christian scientists by his positive engagement with the modern sciences.

The book is arranged as a series of eighteen propositions, each discussed in separate, short chapters. It also comprises an introductory chapter as well as a summary and conclusions section followed by a list of frequently asked questions. The propositions can be grouped in two clusters: (a) the ancient Near Eastern worldview and how Genesis 1 should be interpreted according to this view (propositions 1–11); (b) its relationship to other interpretations, the origins debate and science education (propositions 12–18).

In proposition 1 Walton argues that Genesis 1 reflects ancient cosmology and therefore, that it cannot be literally interpreted according to our modern-day materialistic understanding. Various biblical imageries cannot be interpreted literally, e.g. the location of thought and emotions in the various organs of the human body (heart, kidneys, and bowels). He explains in proposition 2 that ancient cosmology is

focused on the functions of the created order rather than its material origins. The discussion turns back to the text of Genesis 1 and its interpretation in propositions 3–6. With regards to Genesis 1:1, the word “create” (Hebrew: *bārā’*) is used for defining and assigning functions rather than material creation (proposition 3). Without denying this important theological principle, Walton points out that “create” is not used in the Old Testament to introduce material *creatio ex nihilo*. Proposition 4 concerns the beginning state in Genesis 1:2 and the meaning of *tōhū* and *bōhū* (traditionally: “empty” and “formless”), which is better understood as a state of ontological non-existence without any defined functions. The main functions (time, weather, and food) were established on days one to three (proposition 5); these functions are of importance to human sustenance in the ancient worldview. The installment of the functionaries—those that carry out these functions or inhabit the various spaces—occurred on days four to six (proposition 6). In propositions 7–9 Walton elaborates on his view of Genesis 1 as a temple text by providing new insight that it is the Sabbath that actually highlights God’s sovereignty over all of creation. Therefore, the seventh day should not be regarded as an anti-climax in the creation account. God rests in his temple as a ruler rests on his throne (proposition 7). The divine temple then, is the entire cosmos (proposition 8); consequently, Genesis 1 can be read as the inauguration of the cosmos as God’s temple (proposition 9). Genesis 1 parallels ancient Near Eastern temple inauguration texts. Propositions 10 and 11 summarise the functional exegesis of Genesis 1 as a ‘face-value’ interpretation of the biblical account.

Walton compares his exegesis of Genesis 1 with other interpretations and discusses how it relates to science in the second section of the book. In proposition 12 he discusses the main ideas of, as well as the issues with, the various interpretations of Genesis 1 that assume a material creation, which in Walton’s eyes do justice to neither the biblical account nor science. He then distinguishes the physical scientific origins account from the metaphysical biblical one (proposition 13); science covers the physical level of nature, and Scripture focuses on the metaphysical level of divine purpose or teleology. This purpose, however, cannot be detected by the current scientific method. Teleology highlights the interrelationship between God’s roles as creator and sustainer (proposition 14), where God is neither just the instigator of an automated universe (deism) nor a constantly intervening micro-manager. The debates about Intelligent Design and scientific explanations of origins are ultimately about finding the purpose of creation (proposition 15); the scientific models can be understood in biblical terms of purpose (proposition 16). Walton argues that this viewpoint of Genesis 1 does justice to both Scripture and science (proposition 17). Lastly, he proposes that scientific models should be communicated in the education sector without any metaphysical or teleological inferences, thus criticising both creationists and materialists for trying to introduce their views in the science classes (proposition 18).

This work is a form of framework exegesis of Genesis 1; the literary assessment is weighed heavily in the interpretation. However, it offers more than literary ideas alone; it maintains the literal cosmology as presented in Genesis. Walton’s effort of reconstructing the worldview of the original author is commendable and provides us with renewed insight about the text’s original purpose and perspective. As such, Walton’s exegesis increases the pertinence of Genesis again for those appreciating modern scientific theories. Additionally, it may provide a tool for the Christian to reconcile scientific ideas with his faith.

There are a few theological issues with this book, however, of which the reader should be aware, and which, hopefully, the author will follow up. Although Walton explains the occurrence of “death” before the Fall, it still requires further theological elaboration. Furthermore, concerning the creation of humanity, he regards Adam and Eve solely as archetypes of humanity and does not touch on the historicity of the first human pair. The historical creation of Adam and Eve, however, is related to the important doctrines of humanity and sin. Man was created in the image of God; when did God imprint his image? Did God, then, imprint his image on an individual or an entire group belonging to one of the hominid species? What about the fall of Adam and the restoration under the second Adam, Christ? After all, there is only *one* Christ and He is more than an archetype.

Though the author tries to remain respectful towards the various interpretation models, his frustration with young earth creationists is evident as he treats them quite harshly for using the biblical text for overreaching scientific claims. If the purpose of this book is to reconcile conservative Evangelicals and scientists with one another, a milder attitude may be more profitable towards people who, regardless of their interpretation, nevertheless value Scripture as God’s word.

Overall, I think Walton is successful in communicating his message and arguments to his audience comprising the “educated layperson”, pastors, and science teachers without making it too simplistic for a more academic readership. He provides new insight into Genesis 1, creating a new opportunity to talk again about God as the Creator for a Church that has grown weary of the creation-versus-science debate. His engagement with the modern sciences provides an encouragement to Christian scientists; it also removes some of the biggest arguments of the radical New Atheism movement. Furthermore, the ancient Near Eastern worldview presented here may provide additional insights for the study of the Pentateuch as a whole. Therefore, I highly recommend this book as a resource for ministry; it can be used both as conceptual background reading for Genesis 1 and the Pentateuch, and as a tool to help people reconcile their faith with modern scientific insights.

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**Ward, K. R. (2014). *Losing Our Religion? Changing Patterns of Believing and Belonging in Secular Western Societies*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.**

Reviewed by Dr Jon K. Newton

When I was growing up in 1950s and 1960s Australia, almost everyone was a nominal Christian, even if most didn’t attend church regularly, and the answer to the question “What’s your religion?” was along the lines of “Catholic”, “Methodist” and especially, “C of E” (Anglican). Today the latest Australian census shows only 61% nominating as Christian and the figures for “No Religion” and non-Christian religions are booming. Church attendance is in decline as a percentage. It is not quite the confirmation of the secularization thesis, which forecasts the inevitable demise of religion in general, but it is disturbing nonetheless for all Christian believers.

Kevin Ward’s new book *Losing Our Religion?* is based largely on New Zealand research, and the two countries can be quite different in many ways, but it still contains a lot of intelligent and relevant analysis for the contemporary Australian church scene. It also provides a model for researching trends in church life in any country, drawing on

census statistics and interchurch surveys in several nations (pp. 2–11) as well as the author’s own research, especially focused on four different churches in Christchurch (New Zealand’s second largest city): two Baptist churches (one charismatic, one conservative), a liberal Presbyterian church and a “middle of the road” traditional Anglican church (pp. 35–52).

The book attempts quite an ambitious task of critically investigating a whole range of views about the progress and future of Christian churches, such as to what extent acceptance of the charismatic movement influenced the growth of “mainline” churches (Chapter 5), to what extent liberal theology weakens the health and growth of churches and generally how big a crisis the church in western countries like New Zealand is currently facing.

Ward honestly faces the fact that church affiliation and attendance in the English-speaking world has been steadily declining at least since the 1960s (pp. 3–5). For New Zealand, statistics “indicate some erosion of Christian profession and membership prior to the 1960s, but since then it has been much more marked” (p. 5), with the greatest decline being in the mainstream Protestant denominations (Chapter 4). Pentecostal and some conservative groups have grown or maintained their position (pp. 6–10), but largely at the expense of more traditional churches with people returning to a form of the faith they were instructed in as children, perhaps this time at a megachurch (pp. 96–99). Full-on conversions to Christian faith are rare, as demonstrated not only by Ward’s personal research but larger-scale surveys, including Australia’s NCLS (pp. 89–94). Church members are increasingly disproportionately older people, which also suggests future decline (pp. 10–11), and confirms that the problem is in “the generations that reached adulthood during and after the decade of the 1960s” (p. 11). Worldwide, while the number of Christians has increased steadily, as a percentage of population Christianity has declined (34% down to 32% from 1960 to 2010) (p. 6).

Among the interesting trends discussed by Ward, however, are the continuing interest in “spirituality” and adherence to religious beliefs even when Christian affiliations are declining (Chapter 2), though not necessarily in the form of orthodox Christian creeds or practices (pp. 114–124); the overall trend away from all kinds of institutional participation (affecting political party memberships and even sporting bodies) (pp. 112–113, 116); a range of recent experiments in new forms of church (Chapters 8–9); the effect of large-scale migration on Christianity in New Zealand (Chapter 10); and the increasing adherence to “replacements” for religion such as sport and ANZAC day (Chapters 11–12). We live in an era of much greater individualism, privatism, pluralism, relativism, anti-institutionalism, loss of local community ties, changing patterns in marriage and family life and greater emphasis on paid work especially for women (pp. 18–29).

Ward urges that we cannot just do Christianity the way we always did. The world is changing; society is changing. If even rugby, New Zealand’s main sporting code, is suffering loss of participant numbers (pp. 204–212), the issue is surely more than secularization. Rather we are seeing a massive shift in how our society functions (pp. 215–224). This will require a more profound reflection and adjustment by Christians, though without abandoning core beliefs and practices of the Faith—the liberal answer is a recipe for even worse decline. If Ward is right that the abandonment of church was not because of “disagreement over belief, but rather because of a disengagement from the way they were being asked to belong” (p. 100), then something more drastic may be

needed in terms of church structures since, “belonging needs to happen before believing can occur” (p. 101). As Ward argues, “[w]e need to create new forms of church that are not shaped by the values and forms of Christendom but by a genuine mission encounter between the gospel and culture of twenty-first century...” (p. 103), forms that abandon clerical control and an institutional church that demands loyalty instead of serving people (pp. 103–106). Perhaps even more importantly, Christianity needs to adapt to the much more mobile, individualistic, “networks of interest” that characterise relationships in a fragmented, pluralistic society built around telecommunication, the internet and the car (pp. 147–149). The result of such shifts may be a much less visible and demanding, much more diverse and pervasive, Christian presence.

However, as Ward rightly cautions, the church is not just a social entity. It needs to continue to express its identity as the Body of Christ and the people of God. Hence such radical moves as “Emerging Church” may not in fact be a genuine form of church if they reject the rest of the Body. Ward is critical of such developments, including ethnic churches, on theological grounds, even though they may in some ways express the new forms he calls for elsewhere (Chapter 9).

So what conclusions can we draw? Certainly churches that are theologically conservative but adaptable in terms of form and presentation will do better than others, as Ward’s own research illustrated (pp. 50–52). But overall the trend is still downward except for a rather vague spirituality expressed in the ANZAC myth and folk spirituality. The most disappointing thing in this book was the lack of any sure path for a fully Christian regeneration, but perhaps I am expecting too much. Certainly pastors and other Christians would do well to think seriously about the ideas here.

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**Woodward, J. R. (2012). *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP.**

Reviewed by Dr Darren Cronshaw

*Creating a Missional Culture* is a timely book on congregational culture and collaborative leadership. There is a growing dissatisfaction with hierarchical models of leadership that major on control, stunt the imagination, silence dissent and are slow to welcome new leaders. That is not just an unfair caricature. In my denominational tribe, the Baptist Union of Victoria, the National Church Life Survey shows us we are twice as slow as the national average to welcome newcomers into leadership who have been around less than five years, and we are less likely to appoint younger people as leaders! Moreover, for all our talk of teams, almost every church has a solo or senior pastor. Where is our experimentation with other models of leadership, or do we want to limit experimentation to worship styles? Polycentric leadership makes more sense than hierarchical leadership, especially in a networked digital age—let alone also postmodern and post-Christendom—when leaders function mutually through collaboration, maintain cohesion through relationship, and rotate leadership functions around a team. In my local context at AuburnLife, we are exploring how to cooperate with what God is doing in our neighbourhood and how to best reimagine our staffing and leadership. We have things to learn from this book.

J.R. Woodward is a church planter who cofounded Kairos Los Angeles and the Ecclesia Network, a relational network for missional churches to dream together and

share resources. Woodward's writing is far from mere theory—he has experimented with and trialled what he teaches.

The thesis of the book is that church culture is more important than strategies and plans. Edgar Schein suggests that leaders create culture while managers act within culture. Woodward explains that you can discern a church's "cultural web" through its language, rituals, institutions, ethics, and narratives. For example, he says a church's narrative is its guiding story that answers the question "What is God's calling for our church?"

The encouragement of the book is to identify and release a team of equippers in a church with different focal concerns. Woodward adds to the small but growing library of books (alongside Alan Hirsch's *Permanent Revolution* and Neil Cole's *Primal Fire*) that unpack the potential of the Ephesians 4:11-13 APEST leadership matrix. Woodward summarises the different roles as:

- Apostle (dream awakener), focusing us on living out our calling and cultivating a discipleship ethos.
- Prophet (heart awakener), focusing us on pursuing God's shalom and calling the church to a new social order and standing with the marginalised.
- Evangelist (storyteller), focusing us on incarnating the good news and connecting with people who ache for a better world.
- Pastor (soul healer), focusing us on seeking wholeness and holiness with life-giving spirituality and reconciliation.
- Teacher (light giver), focusing us on inhabiting and being mastered by the sacred text and living out God's story.

Woodward upholds a high view of the mission of the whole people of God, but also a high view of the need for equippers across this spectrum of APEST roles to cultivate a healthy missional culture; including its thriving environment, liberating environment, welcoming environment, healing environment, and learning environment.

Jesus embodied each of these aspects of fostering the kingdom of God—as an Apostolic sender, prophetic questioner, evangelistic bridge-builder, pastoral mercy-giver, and teacher who applied Scripture to help people love God and people more. I seek to reflect Jesus as a leader in my church, but I am not Jesus. I need others around me who can reflect the breadth of what Jesus wants to do in us. It's more like a jazz band than a solo performance, or geese who fly in a V but rotate the point position (see Woodward's interview <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/april/creating-missional-culture-interview-with-jr-woodward.html>).

Woodward has convinced me that we need different kinds of leaders, and a polycentric leadership. His argument is that a collaborative approach is healthier and less isolating; better reflects a Trinitarian God of community, consensus and mutual participation; leaves control with God where it belongs and relegates leaders as under-shepherds who work together:

If missional leadership is about joining God and helping people and communities to live up to their sacred potential—living lives of daily worship to God, bringing the reality of the kingdom to bear at home, at work, in the neighbourhood and within the congregation—then leading *in* community, in the round, with God at the centre might be a good way to approach leadership. (p. 79)

A critique of the book is that although it preaches against the heroic approach to leadership, some of the stories were of apostolic superstars. I would love to read more local and accessible stories of people functioning apostolically and prophetically, and love to read more about Woodward's application.

The book includes practical steps for exploring and implementing a polycentric model. Woodward suggests forming "equipper guilds" to gather different types of leaders together (e.g., gather the evangelists as a learning community). He suggests creating more co-pastors rather than senior pastors. His advice to leadership teams is to write the senior pastor's role and discuss how to share those responsibilities rather than presuming they need one person, or rotate them around. Working on some projects together as a team, such as worship and teaching rosters, might create a more balanced and creative liturgical year anyway. There are questionnaires and tables in the appendices that help people discern their best fit, reminding me that sharing leadership means sharing functions but does not mean that everyone has to preach. The important thing is to release people to do what they do well and to be open to the creativity that may foster. G K Chesterton's words were helpful: "The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it has established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild" (p. 197).

This is an excellent and practical handbook for church leaders and planters, and those responsible for training and consulting them, when they are ready to explore and implement more collaborative approaches to leadership around an APEST model, not just to tinker with organisational restructuring but with the intention of creating missional culture. (Supplementary resources are accessible at <http://jrwoodward.net>).