

Book Review

Network Church: A Pentecostal Ecclesiology Shaped by Mission

Andy Lord

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The ancient Bishop Irenaeus wrote, “Our faith having been received from the church, we do preserve, and which always, by the Spirit of God, renewing its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel, causes the vessel itself containing it to renew its youth also.”¹ Irenaeus understood the church as being continually renewed by the Spirit. Andy Lord, an Anglican priest serving in Nottingham, England, has written an interesting and helpful book on Pentecostal ecclesiology that is in the spirit of Irenaeus’ church being renewed.

The thesis of his book is that “networks contribute a new structure to Pentecostal ecclesiology, one that enables a fresh approach to contextualization” (p. 4). Lord presents a systematic and ecumenical Pentecostal ecclesiology. The ecumenical *ethos* is informed by W. J. Seymour’s statement that the movement “stood for Christian unity everywhere” (p. 7). The methodology he employs is informed by Aimee Semple McPherson’s metaphor of early Pentecostalism as “a pot of stew boiling away over the cookfire of the Spirit.” The pot of stew represents the five constituent elements of early

Pentecostalism: (1) experienced prophetic encounters with the Holy Spirit; (2) a Christological and eschatological focus on doctrine; (3) the Scriptures, particularly a narrative approach to Luke-Acts; (4) a spirituality of gratitude, compassion, and courage; and (5) an inbuilt fire for mission. Lord seeks to address the missionary heart of Pentecostalism, as he rightly points out: “All ecclesiology should be mission-inspired and all mission should be ecclesial” (p. 13). The missional model that he presents is more holistic than Evangelical; more correlational and contextual, than confessional.

Lord utilizes the methodology of Amos Yong in developing his thesis—specifically the triadic “moments” of Spirit, Word, and Community. Yong’s concept of the “pneumatological imagination,” which informs proclaimed truth and drives missional engagement with the world, is significant to Lord’s thesis (p. 42). Yong’s emphasis on the community of voices offers Pentecostals an opportunity to engage with the wider Christian tradition. Lord offers a review of Pentecostal ecclesiology that appreciates early developments, but focuses primarily on contemporary scholarly proposals. He sees the essence of early Pentecostal ecclesiology in terms of experiences of Spirit baptism that have social, ecumenical, and missiological implications. Contemporary developments

¹ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 458.

to Pentecostal ecclesiology “focus on the local church as a fellowship lived in the Spirit” and complimented by interests in mission, ecumenism, and worship (p. 66).

The heart of Lord’s work is discerning network structures in the mission of early Pentecostalism and then offering a Pentecostal Trinitarian model for ecclesiology that is expressed in mission. A discerning look at the Luke-Acts narrative and the history of Pentecostal churches in mission reveals an ecclesiology that is less institutional and more relational. The sociological network that Lord presents does not focus on charismatic *leaders*, but upon the *movements* of leaders as they are led by the Spirit with an “essential impulse to link and connect” (p. 105). Even so, Lord sees a vital role for structures within the network of movements, as evidenced in the Jerusalem Council.

Lord insists that an ecclesiology shaped by mission requires a Trinitarian approach that spans the division between Latin Trinitarianism and Social Trinitarianism. His vision “does not equate with some modern liberal ‘secular’ understanding of the Spirit that subsumes the Spirit beneath a secular understanding of humanity ... [Rather, the Spirit] can be discerned as part of the perichoretic Trinity in growing and bringing in the kingdom of God through the whole of creation with the formation of Christ-linked communities” as vital (p. 123).

The catholicity of the network church must be “rooted in the undivided work of God in the church and world” and must allow for the perichoretic distinctions and relationships with the Trinity (p. 134). This is not an ecclesiology of triumphalism, but one that allows that even as God is working

in and through the church, the church remains imperfect and “there is no guaranteed progress or ways to success” (p. 136). As the Spirit-baptized body of Christ, the catholicity of the church is expressed in “sacramental events” that reflect the narrative of the Gospels and Acts: water baptism, foot washing, healing, the Lord’s Supper, preaching, and worship. The catholicity of the network church is not tied to hierarchical, denominational, or local structures, but must reflect the outward missionary movement of Father, Son, and Spirit. The structures of the network church are flexible, “being perpetually re-created by God” and will be “born, grow, shrink or die in response to the Spirit at work in the world and church” (p. 149).

The key for a Pentecostal missional ecclesiology is *network partnerships* “which enable a dynamic catholic movement in mission” that is relational beyond local congregations (p. 161). Network partnership should serve the wider purpose of mission, yet be expressed in the specific tasks and contexts of certain church centers. These partnerships will involve relationships within Pentecostal churches, but also reaching throughout the church and will involve links between the church and the world for the sake of the mission of God.

Lord’s *Network Church* is rich in Pentecostal scholarship and offers a missional ecclesiology that is true to the heritage of the movement. His emphasis on discerning network partnerships that are ecumenical and relational should offer a paradigm for Pentecostal denominations, congregations, and para-church organizations to engage the world in the mission of Jesus Christ. I found this book to be enlightening and challenging.