to and examination of relevant research and writings, makes the book valuable in the hands both of those studying and in active ministry. I work as a School Chaplain and will be recommending it to many colleagues in this ministry. However, I found the introduction too long and I felt that I almost need not read the rest of the book after finishing it. I also am not convinced that the book will be easy to read and accessible to the ordinary man in the pew, which was a hope of the authors. This is unfortunate as it has much to offer and challenge men to acknowledge, reflect and discover the roots of their spirituality out of their experiences of being a Loser, a Loner and/or a Rebel. I know that it was a valuable personal journey for me in my reading and I found that I could connect with and relate personally with many of the insights offered. I intend to draw from numerous ideas in the book and more especially the ideas of Jesus boyhood, the positive God portraits and an awareness of the religions of honor, hope and humor, to enhance my ministry to early adolescent boys as a School Chaplain.

Rev Kevin C. Robertson,
Hilton College, Hilton,
South Africa.

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Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of the Incarnation.
by Andrew Root, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007, 219 pages
ISBN: 978-0830834884

While there are hundreds of books on my shelves which claim to be revolutionary, offering a new approach to youth ministry, those books which truly chart new territory are rare. Far too many simply cloak old paradigms in new clothes or offer seemingly new visions for ministry which fail to take into account current developmental, theological, or contextual issues of adolescence. Occasionally, however, a book comes across my desk which radically reframes a ministry issue, not only calling into question existing patterns of practice, but seeking to create new and improved areas where praxis can occur. When discovered, these books are rare finds which should be treasured and devoured. Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry is just such a book.

In this book (the published form of his dissertation), Root, assistant professor of youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary (USA), explores the origins of the
dominant form of ministry in most evangelical youth ministries—that of relational ministry. But this is no mere historical survey. Rather, with the careful skill of a historian, Root examines the history of youth ministry in the 20th century with the intention of pointing out how it has been influenced heavily by Western, especially American, evangelical culture...often to its detriment.

The thrust of this survey, as Root demonstrates, is that relational ministry has become primarily about issues of influence, specifically how we tend to leverage relationships in order to get students committed and obedient to Christ. He argues that relational ministry, as it is commonly practiced, “is engendered almost solely from cultural changes rather than theological commitments...This deficiency has caused youth ministry to see relationships in a goal-oriented rather than a companionship-oriented fashion that is more faithful to a theology of the incarnation” (p. 23). Rather, for Root, the incarnation is not about influence but accompaniment.

The twentieth century, particularly in light of “modernization/globalization theory and its impact on American religious consciousness” (p. 22). Root paints in broad strokes, but his analysis of the historical, sociological, political and religious landscape is amazingly clear. He reveals the impact that evangelicalism, arisen in opposition to the dominant fundamentalist camp, came to have on the way the church understood and practiced relational ministry. This understanding of relational ministry was heavily individualistic, focusing on the singular goal of helping students develop an individual relationship with Jesus Christ. The goal became for an adult youth worker to develop a relationship with a student, earning their trust, and in so doing, lead them into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, relational ministry, as Root explains, became primarily about influence rather than true incarnation.

As parachurch groups like Youth for Christ and Young Life came on the scene, this approach to ministry took root and expanded in exponential ways. In fact, the whole ministry of Young Life was built around a relational model that while supposedly patterned after the incarnation, tended to use it “as ministerial justification (rather than theological explication)” for their approach to ministry.

In Chapter 3, Root makes the argument that evangelical culture (not something he sees as entirely positive) has radically influenced the way we practice incarnational ministry for the worse. Using a sociological examination of several evangelical youth pastors and youth groups in the United States, he demonstrates how these youth pastors have adopted a strategy of incarnational ministry that is focused on who’s in and out and seeing culture as hostile to one’s faith. Because of this, they have formed their own