Book Reviews

Mary Sue Dehmlow Dreier, ed.


Mary Sue Dehmlow Dreier’s edited volume on planting missional churches by the Spirit is the latest installment in The Missional Church Series on Eerdmans Publishing. Dreier is an ordained Lutheran minister who has gathered an august body of writers to converse on this important topic. She is an associate professor of congregational mission and leadership at Luther Seminary in St. Paul Minnesota. The majority of the contributors to this text hold degrees from Luther Seminary and/or credentials from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Daniel Anderson, Leith Anderson, Paul Chung, Todd Hobart, Harvey KwiyanI, Lois Malcom, Susan Tjornehoj and Miroslav Volf advance the conversation on missional churches in North America, exploring the pneumatological implications of church planting, with a unique perspective on the nature, mission, and the organization of the church.

This text contributes much to the growing understanding of what it means to be missional in North America. Building on the work of Ed Stetzer, Aubrey Malphurs, and Leslie Newbigin, et al., Dreier expands the conversation of church planting into missional identity. In nine chapters divided into three sections the authors provide a theological framework, a pneumatological perspective, and a contemporary expression of the missional church movement.

Dreier, Volf and Malcolm penned the three chapters in section one. Dreier lays the groundwork for this study using the imagery of midwifery. She also appeals to the Apostle’s Creed as a framework for the synergy between church planters and the Holy Spirit in the vivification of the church. Volf discusses hope and human satisfaction as interrelated concerns for missional church planting. Malcolm completes this section drawing on two biblical traditions, one from the Gospel of John and the other from the book of Acts. She then retrieves
Paul’s missionary theology as a paradigm for missional church planting as a communal movement.

Leith Anderson and Susan Tjornehoj share their church planting experiences in section two. Leith Anderson begins narrating the story of the Spirit’s involvement in planting missional churches. His account comes from thirty-five years of teaching and pastoral ministry. Leith Anderson sets forth strategies for planting missional churches chronicling his experience with theological educational institutions and pastors engaged in church planting. He suggests that church planting is the most effective way to evangelize new communities. Anderson posits that the first century church provides the paradigm for church planting and that “Churches starting Churches is the most effective method to church planting.” Susan Tjornehoj follows by offering a biblically grounded Lutheran theological lens through which one can view church planting. Using case studies, Tjornehoj describes five culturally diverse churches in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. She further describes rites of initiation and liturgical practices that situate the churches that she examined squarely within the Lutheran tradition. She draws upon her experience as an academic and church planter to construct a theology of church planting that considers the foreigner, the stranger, the poor, and the marginalized.

Daniel Anderson, Harvey Kwiyani, and Todd Hobart contribute new scholarship that advances the discussion on multi-culturalism, emerging churches, and post-modern organizational possibilities. By way of anecdotal narratives, in this third section each of the authors describes the activity of the Holy Spirit in the modern church planting enterprise. Daniel Anderson focuses on what he perceives to be the activity of the Spirit in the life of the congregation. The Spirit’s activity is couched in the context of worship and expands the Augustinian notion of \textit{lex orandi, lex credendi}, to \textit{lex movendi}. Harvey Kwiyani contributes from his African heritage what he calls “a strangers voice” to the western conversation on church planting and mission. His principal concern is contextualization of the gospel. Todd Hobart evaluates church planting organizational structures in light of modern and post-modern sensibilities. His socio-pneumatological approach reveals a new missional ecclesiology that accommodates church planting by the Spirit.

I commend the contributors to this work for how they highlighted the intersections between Lutheranism and the Spirit’s role in missional church planting. I was particularly impacted by the work of Susan Tjornehoj who demonstrated an understanding of the Spirit’s work in liturgical practices. According to Tjornehoj, the liturgical practices provide the crucible within which the Spirit facilitates the unity of the missional community. It seems that the lenses of the foreigner and the stranger in the context of liturgy are what