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STRUCTURED FOR MISSION

By Alan J. Roxburgh

Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press
(2015)

Paperback, 181 pages

Reviewed by MARSHALL RANDALL

Much has been written on the subject of church structure and how this impacts leadership. Lately it has been negative—not just through the eyes of a generation searching for answers but also to those who wonder why the church is appearing to crumble. *Structured for Mission* challenges the current structure of leadership but does not recommend that we completely abandon what is already in place. The author, Alan Roxburgh, establishes that the structure of leadership represents something deeper: “Behind structures lie these deeper cultural values” (p. 21). The author starts by breaking down the meaning behind these structures that have established the current leadership attitudes and practices. He makes it clear that the disconnect between leadership style and culture make the church ripe for disintegration.

The structures of leadership that stand today no longer represent the culture of today. This has happened because “denominations are losing their capacity to provide meaning in our culture” p. 35. According to Roxburgh, structures are a concretization of the ways a society or community gives material form to its underlying narratives. These narratives no longer connect to how people live life. Because these narratives no longer connect with the culture, leadership is losing its validity.

After the author describes the meaning behind structures and how leadership is formed, he then focuses on the model of structural leadership set forth in the Bible. He highlights that “church-

es, at national, regional and local levels, face challenges that can’t be addressed within frameworks” (p. 99), and then uses two biblical accounts of how God used leadership to work outside the framework the people were used to. Ultimately the author reveals the solution to the problem of our existing structural decline: regain our biblical imagination, allow room for experimentation, and allow the Spirit to lead outside our comfort zone. He relates these factors to leadership by explaining how leaders allow this process to take place when a problem arises.

The only drawback to this book is the use of the adjective “Eurotribal.” In today’s world it can be offensive to those who feel that other parts of the world have contributed to faith. Though he is correct in describing the people who started the culture in America, it does not properly represent the culture that he is trying to achieve. I believe that the use of this adjective detracts from his argument because Eurotribal leadership structure is the structure that brought us to this point and is a something that should be reevaluated.

Nevertheless, I recommend this book for every person who is seeking to understand how a Christian leader can meet the challenges of the current crisis of church leadership. Even though he speaks of other denominations, it seems that every denomination fits right into each of his examples at some point in time. I definitely believe in the experimental approach as part of the solution. He makes the point clear that denominations started off with innovative leadership that now has become obsolete. We must understand the spirit that undergirds the foundations of leadership—not just the structure.

MARSHALL RANDALL, a student of divinity at Andrews University, previously made a career as an instructor of mathematics and science. He currently serves as a progressive leader at The Grace Place, a Seventh-day Adventist church in South Bend, IN.