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Transforming Pastoral Leadership: Reimagining Congregational Relationships for Changing Contexts

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TRANSFORMING PASTORAL LEADERSHIP: REIMAGINING CONGREGATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS FOR CHANGING CONTEXTS

*By Quentin P. Kinnison
Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick
Publications (2016)
Kindle edition, 4825 pages*

Reviewed by Evadne Williams-Henry

The author has made a significant contribution to pastors and leaders by discussing “congregational leadership, cultural captivity, and how pastoral leaders and congregations can adapt practices and roles for engaging God and His mission in a changing world” (loc. 152-158). He addresses some of the issues that are causing conflict within the church and offers solutions to the problems. “Pastoral leaders often are perceived as a threat to the status quo. These men and women have spent years of training to consider carefully what and how the church should best represent God’s mission in the world” (loc. 500). The author feels that collective leadership would be the best for the church’s community since pastors must work together with the laity for a better outcome.

“In the hiring process as in the educational processes, pastoral leaders are often expected to demonstrate certain skill sets that promote leadership as visionary and driven by expertise. Yet so often, these technical skills and preparation leaves such women and men ill-prepared to address the deepest kinds of change most churches are in need of experiencing, as well as the conflict which

results from resistance to adaptation” (loc. 503-508). “Sometimes pastors will make changes through technical leadership application but the results can be disastrous. These results include diminished congregational vitality through loss of mission, disempowered laity, personal burnout and exhaustion” (loc. 503-508). When this happens, members have a difficult time trusting the pastor. Some members believe pastors are responsible for their spiritual well-being and yet, at times, the members themselves do not spend time with the Lord in prayer or Bible study. Some members come to church expecting the sermon to give them the quick fix that they are expecting. They do not come prepared spiritually to meet the Lord in His temple. This is one of the biggest areas in the church that needs to be addressed. Members then leave the church because they “feel the pastor is not meeting their expectations” (loc. 954-957).

One of the reasons for this is “the system has eliminated the laity from the equation. Because the system funnels expertise into the ‘expert’ by training the pastor to be the leader of the church; this creates lay dependency upon the pastor for vision, initiative, and preparation in order to perceive and pursue the church’s mission; this mission is conceived through the expert system’s design” (loc. 945-947). Members don’t realize they—and not just the pastor—are called by God to do mission work. He is called to educate and train the laity according to the Word of the Lord that says, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11, 12 KJV). “As the church ceases its witness to Christ’s activity,

it attempts to replace Christ and establishes itself as the source and place of salvation. Hence, the current status of the church as a 'vendor of religious services' becomes apparent. The critical issue may be that the institutional church in the West ceased living for Christ's sake and began living for its own self-preservation" (loc. 995-999).

"One critique is that this form of leadership actually 'deskills' the church. This lay deskilling is largely the result of an expert system designed by professionals to be operated only by persons with specialized training in the language and processes of the system" (loc. 1000-1008). This deskilling has led to members going to pastors for answers to their questions facing the church and to also fix the problems the church is facing. When pastors don't have the answers, the members get frustrated and the work of the Lord suffers (loc. 1008). Kinnison proposed to leaders to use Jesus Christ as the shepherd who will give them the insight they need to be a congregational leader, as they continue to seek His direction and guidance in their ministry.

Pastors should know that elders are also called to work with them to oversee the flock's well-being (loc. 1756-1760). Some pastors do not like to work with their elders and when this happens, it causes problems in the church. It causes lack of trust for both parties. The author highlights the fact that "there is no easy answer for overcoming negative effects of modernity and its expert systems approach to life. But everyone should get involved, the two-tier system of personal value in the church should be eliminated; since God speaks through the Holy Spirit to all His people and is often best heard in modes of corporate discernment" (loc. 2866-2878).

"Collective leadership does not necessarily escape the effects of conflict. This sense of systemic awareness should cause church leaders to be aware of the conflicts occurring within congregations. By avoiding direct conflict about secondary issues, pastoral leadership can help the congregation to lessen anxiety and create ways of helping the system to become a healthier system" (loc. 3219-3225). While this true, sometimes the pastor will need to address direct conflict within the congregation to promote respect and unity. "Conflict reminds us of the need to seek God's initiatives and it restores a need for one another in the community. The leadership triad helps congregational leaders understand how conflict occurs in congregational systems and demonstrates one way to help conflict to be positive and transforming" (loc. 3228-3232).

"This book is a bridge between the current state of the church as a culturally captivated entity and a future church where shared leadership guides us into life as a significant aspect of our witness to God's ability to discover and engage God's mission in the world" (loc. 3672- 3681). As we go through changes, we must remember that God is in control of His Church and we must always seek Him for guidance and direction. This is an excellent book to help pastors who are seeking to honor God in a society that is ever changing. It helps pastors to recognize that our ultimate Leader is Jesus Christ, and we should follow the example that He has set for us. I strongly recommend this book to all pastors.

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