

The book seems to be neutral to modern hermeneutical approaches to Revelation (preterist, futurist, historicist, and idealist). Only once it warns against hasty interpretations which the historicist and the futurist schools had at times (21). Consequently, a few statements favoring the preterist and the idealist views were mentioned by the contributors (120–121). In general, the chosen methodology safeguards against reckless interpretations by aiming to establish John's intentions in communicating his visions. The book masterfully evaluates the Apocalypse through the prism of the Second Temple Jewish literature allowing readers to see firsthand how it is similar to and yet different from its contemporaneous writings. The editors are to be commended for compiling a nontechnical introductory resource on the connections between John's Apocalypse and other Jewish writings. Readers not familiar with the larger Jewish corpus of Second Temple literature will certainly be intrigued by the similarities with the Bible and hopefully will be interested in studying these ancient texts.

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Cartledge, Mark J., Sarah L. B. Dunlop, Heather Buckingham, and Sophie Bremner. *Megachurches and Social Engagement: Public Theology in Practice*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xiv + 391 pp. Paperback. USD 80.00.

The British Arts and Humanities Research Council funded this research project that later became a book. Mark J. Cartledge was the principal investigator (practical theology and Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies) and later book project leader. All empirical data was collected by Sophie Bremner (anthropology) and Sarah L. B. Dunlop (practical theology) joined by Heather Buckingham (sociology and social policy) to work on the impact side of the project. Cartledge and his associates have developed this project using empirical data gathered by Bremner, and Dunlop. The sociological impact of the theme is contributed by Buckingham. It should be noted that some of the content of this book has been published in theological journals. Even though there is an increase of megachurch material being published, this is the first book on megachurches from the United Kingdom and it is particularly interesting in its explanation of their contribution to wider society and social engagement.

The first part presents a theoretical context for the study of the megachurch phenomenon in different parts of the world and then in Europe and the United Kingdom, focusing on Evangelicalism and Charismatic Renewal in the Church of England, and African Pentecostalism in Britain. This is followed by an introduction to public theology, social theory, and megachurch practice of social engagement, which undergirds this work methodologically. The second part of the book also has two chapters presenting two empirical case studies.

The first case study is on the Church of England, more specifically Holy Trinity Church from Brompton and All Souls Church in Langham Place. The authors describe how its history, theology, evangelism strategies, and social engagement impacted the communities of these churches. The second case study describes the influence of African diaspora Pentecostalism through Kingsway International Christian Centre, Jesus House of All Nations, and New Wine Church. In this section, the authors present a brief history of these congregations, their most important ministries, and how they have impacted the city of London.

In part three of the book, containing three chapters and a separate conclusion, the authors “reflect on the empirical data in the light of the earlier theoretical literature, providing insights into how these megachurches function in terms of social engagement and what kind of significance their practices have for public theology today” (36). It also describes a series of explanations regarding theological motivations, globalization, social engagements, and the implications for church and society. The conclusion presents a summary of the study findings, answers key questions presented at the beginning of the research, and informs an ecclesiology of social engagement; as well as the significance of the study for future research.

This book is important as the first book-length study on megachurches in the United Kingdom with a particular interest in how these “large churches contribute to wider society by means of their social engagement” (1). The basis to study the megachurch phenomenon in the United Kingdom comprises five congregations in London, two from the Church of England tradition, and three from the African-led Pentecostal Churches. The standard definition of megachurch used by them is a Protestant church “where more than 2000 people attend for the purposes of worship per week” (43). There are some commonalities among these megachurches. The book mentions Stephen Ellingson research (“New Research on Megachurches Non-denominationalism and Sectarianism,” in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Bryan S. Turner [Oxford, NY: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 247–266) stating that usually they are non-denominational, and mostly “theologically conservative, largely Evangelical, use media technology, offer multiple worship services and other types of services, such as consumer goods, thus employing ‘consumer logic’ and tend to be located in urban and suburban contexts” (44). Architecturally, they use very large and functional facilities to accommodate the members with lots of space for parking and other activities. Their evangelistic efforts focus on conversion using little Christian symbolism to be relevant to the unchurched. Another ministry commonly used in megachurches is the use of small groups, which some think has been a major factor for the “the growth and health of megachurches” (46).

The profile of these congregations is as follows: one Conservative Evangelical, one Charismatic Evangelical, and three African diaspora Pentecostal

churches (4). These churches have been more successful among immigrants, especially African descendants, providing places of worship and community for non-native people, “helping them to overcome their alienation and even hostility in the workplace” (17). Many of them were “established by migrants who have initiated the church and then attracted a crowd, or in this case a very large crowd” (306). The attraction of these churches could be attributed to the lack of vitality and power, as seen by Pentecostal Christians, in many traditional churches in the United Kingdom.

The research process was mostly qualitative using the case-study approach, but also included a limited amount of counting. The methodology was primarily participant-observation, noting the number and demographics of the congregants; and identifying social engagement activities the Christian community was involved in. The selected churches provide several examples of socially engaged ministries including counseling and support for youth, elderly, homeless, and those struggling with poverty or mental health. The authors present a relevant description of megachurches and a detailed narrative of these very large churches in London. They present appropriate information about their ministries and how they are impacting urban London with resources to support and finance projects. The churches participating in the study saw most of their growth among immigrants and minorities. It is worth noting also the importance of how Pentecostalism affected the process of bringing a missionary ideology (reverse mission). Differently than the Pentecostal communities, the more conservative Evangelical church of the Holy Trinity focuses its effort “on process evangelism and the development of an existing discipleship course into an evangelistic one” (12). Not much affected by charismatic ideologies, its approach to mission “is much more rooted in its own British tradition of Evangelical spirituality, seeking to be faithful to its understanding of the gospel message and how to proclaim it afresh in the global city of London” (14).

Seeing both demonstrations of significant growth is unsurprising in a global city like London. However, it is remarkable to see the success of Pentecostals among African descendants, especially Caribbeans. The main reason for the large numbers and adherents among these immigrants was the feeling of alienation from the white denominations and British society. These churches offered ethnic community-enhancing solidarity and create a retreat from wider British society. The churches in the United Kingdom, in the perspective of these Christians, appeared to lack energy and power, so important for the Caribbean and African spirituality. In addition to that, cultural differences such as English individualism and a sort of racism could also have played a role in the formation of these communities. Interestingly, Caribbean Pentecostals can be seen as exclusive and schismatic, since they import their preachers in an attempt to protect the congregation from the influence of “cold” English culture (16–17).

No doubt that these large churches have generated resources playing an important role in society, and the social engagement and impact might be the most important contribution. The resources generated and the utilization of these resources might be their most important contribution. These large congregations have many valuable lessons to teach smaller churches and even benefit them by offering an option for those who are not attracted to the megachurch style. “However, for congregations that are very similar to the megachurch in ethos and tradition, then their similarity is a disadvantage because of the economy of scale compare to the megachurch” (52).

This book explains some unique opportunities megachurches can offer by “generating human capital (leadership, volunteering), social capital (networks of trust), physical capital (buildings for community use) and funds to finance projects.” (2) According to the authors, megachurches are a growing religious phenomenon increasing their influence locally and globally. On the other hand, there is a trend of megachurches moving into multisite facilities, which facilitates outreach and fosters new growth. In North America, the number of multisite churches has almost doubled in recent years (Warren Bird, “Big News- Multisite Churches Now Number More Than 5,000,” *Leadership Network*, accessed in <https://leadnet.org/big-news-multisite-churches-more-than-5000/>). There is a large number of megachurches in Africa, and it may be no wonder the London megachurches selected by the authors are composed of its majority of African descendants or African-led congregations. Besides using multiple locations, they are also hosting an increasing number of online worships, which is indispensable during a pandemic. This trend will most probably bring a permanent change in the way the church exists and does ministry. Will megachurches benefit from it? We will have to wait and see.

Besides all these positive characteristics, it is somewhat debatable how much of an impact megachurches have on the expansion of Christianity. Talking about absolute numbers, Thumma and Travis (Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths* [San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007].) present extensive research questioning the assumption of many that megachurches bring absolute overall growth while highlighting the diversity within the megachurch phenomenon. Another assumption they questioned is the idea that megachurches extinguish small communities as Wal-Mart does with smaller competitors. Thumma and Travis suggest that Christianity comes in many packages of different sizes or forms and that the market for religion can and should offer appeal through a variety of outlets.

It is interesting to take note that despite the growth of megachurches, the overall population growth rate has surpassed church growth rates (David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008]). In the case of the United Kingdom, the area of focus in *Megachurches and Social Engagement*, the Census data of 2001–2011 indicates the growth

of those self-identified as ‘no religion’ (from 15 to 25 percent), while during the same period, people self-identified as Christians dropped from 72 to 59 percent (93). So it seems to me that the megachurch movement is creating a false impression that Christianity is growing, with the appearance of large congregations, while small congregations are struggling and the actual percentage of the population attending church is declining.

Possibly one of the most important contributions of this research is to highlight the significance of spiritual growth and the social activism of this type of congregation. The five congregations represented in this study see community work as an integral part of their mission. Regarding the high level of social engagement of these large communities of believers, the authors suggest “the main motivating factor from a theological perspective is that individuals and churches engage in social ministry because they are motivated out of love and compassion for their neighbors” (332). This is a good sign of the health of its members, one can say. However, the percentage of volunteers in relation to its total membership is low. Despite how one feels about the positive influence of megachurches in Christianity, this study contributes to our understanding of how effectively some large congregations in a major city of the globe can thrive and benefit their locality through social engagement. In this context, size does matter, for a large congregation has more human capital than a smaller one. This study also provides examples of leadership development and volunteer mobilization that are admirable.

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

GERSON SANTOS

Chou, Abner. *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018. 251 pp. Softcover. USD 23.99.

Dr. Abner Chou (ThD, The Master’s University) serves as the John F. MacArthur Endowed Fellow at The Master’s University in Santa Clarita, California, where he teaches biblical studies. Besides authoring numerous articles, his works include a commentary on Lamentations and *I Saw the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Vision* (Wipf and Stock, 2013). In the present volume, Chou begins from the premise that God requires an accurate interpretation of His Word (Acts 17:11; 1 Tim 4:13–15; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:2). To achieve this Chou proposes we study the intertextual hermeneutics of the biblical authors themselves. The readers’ job then is to align their thoughts after them (the authors) to properly discern and apply their method of knowing the truth.

The book is divided into seven chapters and a final two-page conclusion. Chapter one begins by establishing the literal-historical-grammatical method as the one used by the authors of Scripture. Chou also posits Scripture’s dual authorship—God and human author (2 Pet 1:20–21)—a concept requiring