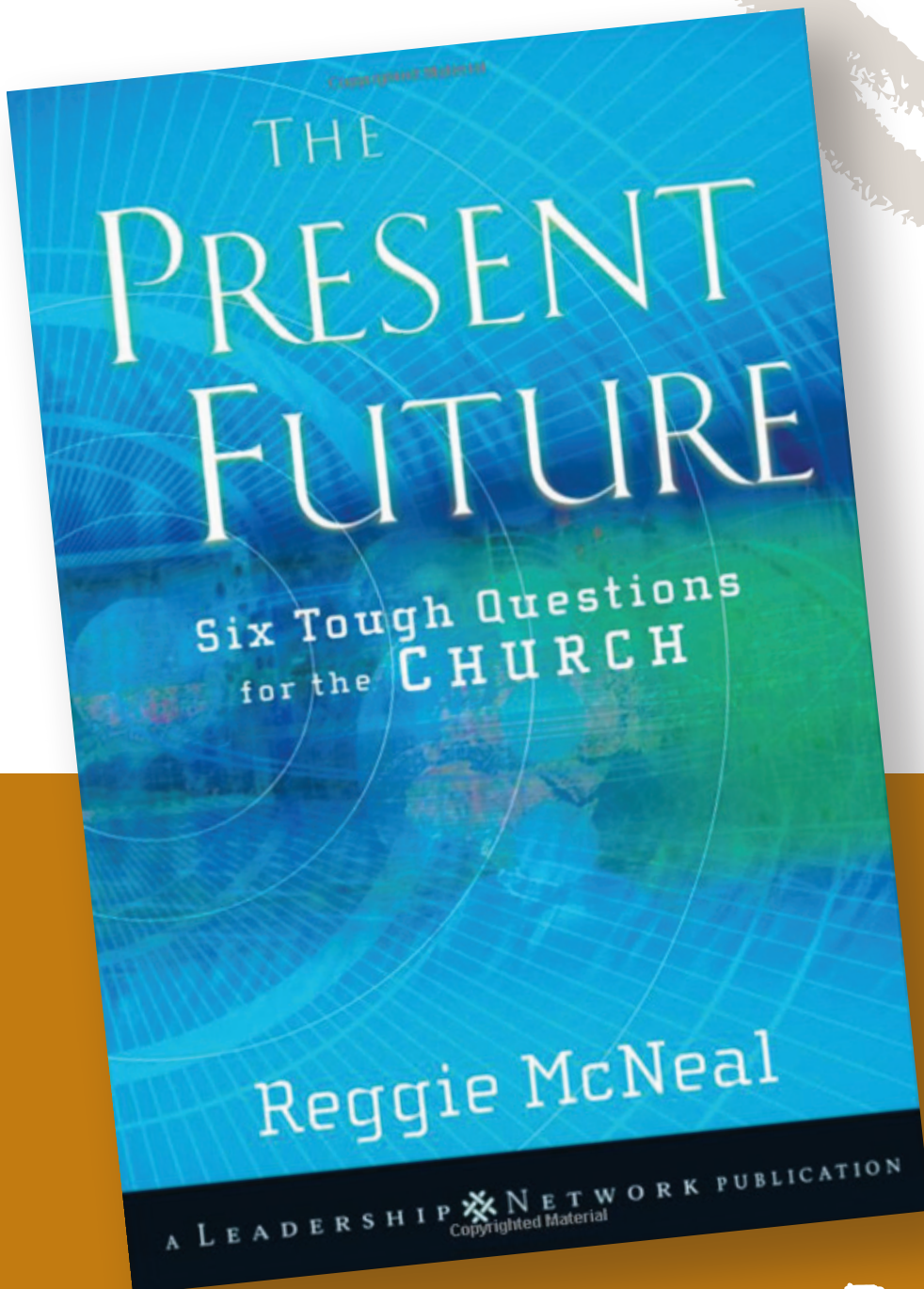


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Rediscover Mission

The Present Future | Reggie McNeal

The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2003. 151 pages.

Synopsis

The Present Future is written for congregation leaders, pastors, and church staffs as “polemical volume” aimed to provoke “conversations that lead to action, to risk, to rediscovery of mission” (XVII-XVIII). McNeal argues the prevalent North American church model has “largely forsaken its missional covenant with God to be a part of kingdom expansion” (XV). He sees and explores six new realities he hopes can reshape the North American Christian movement.

1

Reality Number One is the Collapse of the Church Culture

For McNeal, the current church culture “is living off the work, money, and energy of a previous generation from a previous world order” (1) and yet it is quickly fading. The shift from modern to post-modern worldviews has left the church largely outmoded. Consequently, the number of “post-congregational” Christians is growing (4). People are leaving the institutional church in order to “preserve their faith” (4) and because they find church-based activities “poor substitutes for genuine spiritual vitality” (7).

McNeal believes the ultimate cause of these trends is the church’s loss of mission. The “appropriate response to the emerging world is a rebooting of the mission, and radical obedience to an ancient command, a loss of self rather than self-preoccupation, concern about service and sacrifice rather than concern about style” (18).

McNeal asserts the mission of the church “is to join God in his redemptive efforts to save the world” (19).

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2

New Reality Number Two: The Shift from Church Growth to Kingdom Growth

McNeal asserts the modernist Church Growth Movement unintentionally led leaders to take responsibility from the Holy Spirit for the growth of the church. Church leaders who spend energy on Church Growth marketing make the Christians and the church itself the focus of its ministry. Instead of marketing to Christians, churches should be focusing on the mission of the kingdom.

“We need to go where people are already hanging out and be prepared to have conversations with them about the great love of our lives...they’re not coming to us. We’ve got to go to them” (42).

3

New Reality Number Three: A New Reformation: Releasing God’s People

“The first Reformation was about freeing the church. The new Reformation is about freeing God’s people from the church” (43). Lay ministry programs that empower the congregation to do ministry either in the church or for the church coopt their ministry and resources. The church must release the laity for ministry outside of the church by identifying the individual believer’s values and calling “out their true potential as God’s priests in the world” (48).

The Present Future | *Reggie McNeal (cont'd)*

4

New Reality Number Four: The Return to Spiritual Formation

The modern church teaches people about God in order to train them to be good church members who build the church. Instead, the church should help people become disciples of Jesus through spiritual formation by life coaches instead of classrooms.

The learner and their life situations should set the agenda for a spiritual formation. The role of the community of faith is to “be an environment where the number one pursuit is the development of human beings created in the image of God and redeemed into his family through Jesus” (91).

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5

New Reality Number Five: The Shift from Planning to Preparation

Today’s discontinuous reality favors strategic preparation in place of strategic planning. There are five elements of strategic preparation architecture: vision, values, results, strengths, and learning.

First, vision flows from the mind of God for the church and informs decisions, engenders commitment, and creates meaning. Second, for vision to flourish, values must be aligned and practiced. Third, desired results should be informed by vision and values and should be clearly stated, sought after, and celebrated. Fourth, identifying, building, and celebrating strengths for both the leader and the congregation is “your best shot at making your best contribution” (111). Finally, learning must be valued and invested in. “Just because you don’t know how to do something doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try to do it. (116).”

6

New Reality Number Six: The Rise of Apostolic Leadership

A new kind of apostolic leader and a new leadership development process are needed “to help the church find a new expression in the emerging world” (125). The new apostolic leaders that McNeal has in mind are gifted in “working outside the church in the world that is not part of the church culture” (127).

Modern leadership development processes develop administrative skills and focus on program development. In contrast, the new apostolic leadership development process teaches leaders how to think about being the church in the world. It develops microskills based upon strengths and it offers training in how to develop resources. It emphasizes personal growth. “The goal of a congregation’s leadership development process is to create a core of leaders who are capable of strategizing, launching, and conducting a mission for expanding the kingdom of God” (136).

The Present Future | *Reggie McNeal (cont'd)*

Conclusion

McNeal is not saying the church is dead or that the church needs to become Postmodern. He intends on avoiding doctrinal statements about salvation, scripture, or arguing for any specific worship style. Instead, he seeks to “help leaders...sort through the implication of an emerging world in terms of how we are church...I believe the central doctrine for missional renewal is the biblical teaching on the priesthood of all believers, the people of God called out and empowered to join him in his redemptive mission in the world” (147).

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Recommended Resources

1. Clarity Evangelist Will Mancini puts “missional” in perspective of how we think about church in a post [here](#).
2. For a baseline understanding of “missional” and what it means for culture shaping and vision casting today, download Chapter 3 of Church Unique [here](#).
3. Reggie McNeal continued this line of thinking in his next book “Missional Renaissance.” It will be a future SUMS, but for now, read Will Mancini’s quick overview [here](#).

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Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Tony Bowick

Vision Clarity Connection

The Present Future illustrates the church's need to revive the concept of active mission based communities, as opposed to over-structured spiritual organizations. Has your church uncovered God's missional calling? Can you express it within your unique local context. Is your church's mission a rallying call to action that each of your members participate in? The mission should act as a focal agent to channel all of the church's activity into a catalytic movement of redemptive passion.

The Mission should naturally transfer ownership of the church's ministry to the people of the body as agents of God's Kingdom expansion, transforming them from observers and consumers. The catalytic nature of the Mission helps leadership shift from a planning mindset, to preparing the body for action.

How to Go Ahead

Begin asking questions of your leadership team such as:

- Does our mission move people to action in specific ways? How? In your next staff meeting make a list of how your mission moves people to specific action.
- Is our structure and staff designed to do ministry or to equip and support our people to do ministry? Have each staff person draw a pie chart of their time. How much time do they spend working in the ministry verse working on the ministry by equipping others. Compare charts.

Reggie talks about many clarity components just like we do at Auxano; But one thing that we don't use on our vision frame is "learnings." Reggie suggests that churches make a list of their most important learnings. In your next staff meeting brainstorm a list of your top ten learnings as a church. Consider dividing this up among leaders. Ask them to create a one-page story of the learning to share with future leaders.



More About Tony Bowick

After serving in the Executive Pastor role at several dynamic, growing churches, Tony transitioned to Auxano, with a calling to serve the church through the God-ward, collaborative process of helping leaders navigate through growth challenges with Vision Clarity. Tony's expertise, honed in both corporate and ministry settings, lies in developing alignment and strategic ministry planning based upon clarified vision. This provides churches with the framework they need to go ahead with ever-increasing momentum.

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Auxano is the only vision clarity consulting group that will guide your team through a God-ward and collaborative process called the Vision Pathway. To learn more, visit auxano.com or check us out on [Twitter](#) and our [Auxano](#) and [VisionRoom](#) Facebook pages.

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