

Finally, the Jewish group “Stand Up” teaches Muslim Sudanese women in a Uniting Church in my home city of Melbourne. Participants say the multi-faith context adds to the sense of equality and richness of the program.

Religious places often house, as well as provide a religious imperative for, educational, disaster relief, environmental awareness, and gender equality programs. It is helpful to understand the value places of worship bring to development, as well as more broadly how religious schools, yoga studios, permaculture gardens, or virtual spaces can enhance locally appropriate development and advocacy for justice. *Religion and Development in the Asia-Pacific* is valuable reading for development scholars and practitioners to help enhance understanding of the importance of religion and religious places in development, especially for a multi-faith world.

ELAINE A. HEATH AND LARRY DUGGINS. *MISSIONAL, MONASTIC, MAINLINE: A GUIDE TO STARTING MISSIONAL MICRO-COMMUNITIES IN HISTORICALLY MAINLINE TRADITIONS*. EUGENE: WIPF & STOCK, 2014. 135 PP. [ISBN: 13:978-1-62032-624-4]

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The title of this book is intriguing. “Missional” and, in this connection, “Monastic” are terms associated with innovation, experiment, and radical change in the church’s life and engagement with wider society. “Mainline” on the other hand denotes churches, particularly in North America, known both for their adherence to traditional styles and practices and for theologically liberal stances that sit uncomfortably with more overtly evangelical expressions of mission. It is the premise of this book, however, that those Mainline churches could indeed be at the forefront of courageous and exciting new initiatives in the church’s mission in contemporary western contexts, and furthermore that they have in their historic traditions rich resources to inspire and sustain missionally-oriented life in intentional community. The authors, a professor at Perkins School of Theology (Heath) and a United Methodist executive pastor (Duggins), have set out to offer a practical pathway for the development of such missional micro-communities within historic, traditional churches and denominations.

Before their target audience might be willing to enter upon this pathway, there are obstacles to be cleared out of the way. This is the function of Part I of the book, entitled, “Why we need missional and monastic communities in the historically mainline church.” After describing their own personal journeys in relation to missional community (ch. 1), they tackle head-on the challenge, “Can progressive Christians be missional?” (ch. 2) Heath attempts to reclaim the term “evangelism” from association with, in their North American context, the Evangelical Right, and articulate a “healthy evangelism” that resonates with “the inclusive, nonviolent, peacemaking commitments of progressive Christianity” (18). Heath’s working definition of evangelism is worth quoting and reflecting on: “Christian evangelism is the holistic process of

initiation of persons into the reign of God revealed in Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and anchored in the church for the transformation and healing of the world” (25).

Engaging now at the other end of the ecclesial spectrum, the next chapter introduces the new monasticism, showing how ancient traditions could be appropriated for the contemporary life and mission of Jesus followers (ch. 3). Churches that are self-consciously traditional might be suspicious of attempts to introduce change. The authors address the concern that what they are suggesting might amount to a “hostile takeover of the church” or indeed a dismantling of church as it has traditionally been experienced (ch. 4). They argue that the attractional model of church that is often assumed to be “traditional” is in fact quite recent and owes more to market capitalism with its focus on the consumer rather than to the impetus of the Holy Spirit to partner with God in the world. They plead for the cultivation of a missional imagination, alongside the pragmatic recognition that there may be some churches for whom the cost seems too high, and they remain stuck where they are. In such cases the authors’ advice is not to dig in and fight, but simply, and peacefully, to move on. Some churches, however, will embrace the new possibilities to the extent that, even though only a minority of members might themselves become participants in micro-communities, the church as a whole will be able to fulfil the role of an “anchor church” releasing and supporting such communities as part of their mission.

If churches are to move in more radically missional directions then, the authors argue, there must be ministers who grasp and have the skills to operate in this new paradigm. This brings into view the need for new forms of theological education and leadership development for emerging communities (ch. 5). Help will also be needed for “judicatory leaders,” the decision makers and executive leaders of denominations, so that they can come to understand and use their influence and power to protect the new initiatives.

Part II supplies “A Field Guide to Starting Missional and New Monastic Communities in Historically Mainline Traditions.” This is an invaluable resource for pioneers, churches and denominations who are motivated to begin a journey of exploration of the new paradigm that the book has set out, but want a clear pathway as well as an aspirational vision. Starting by affirming the role of failure in all experiment, the authors move to offer clear, step-by-step processes for introducing the concept to churches, recruiting a lead team, working to bring a traditional congregation on board as supporters, and actually beginning. Guidance is given for ordering community life, and for the important role of an “abbot” in providing care, spiritual direction and formative guidance to missional micro-communities.

This book will be of value to theological educators concerned to form pastors and leaders for new contexts, mission practitioners who want clear ideas and pathways, leaders of churches who aspire to be more missionally engaged in their neighbourhoods, regional and denominational leaders who sense that something new is needed and are prepared to get behind worthwhile initiatives, and followers of Jesus who are open to a call to more radical life, community and mission. Along the way the book will also reward its readers with concise descriptions and explanations of some of the contemporary developments in missional thinking and experiment, and rich gleanings from streams of spirituality and tradition that do indeed promise to nurture and sustain new life and vigour in God’s missional people.