

THE CHURCH AFTER INNOVATION: QUESTIONING OUR OBSESSION WITH WORK, CREATIVITY, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP by Andrew Root, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022. 256 pages. \$27.99.

If you, like me, have ever wondered where a word comes from you will enjoy *The Church After Innovation*. Two thirds of the book are a deep etymological dive into innovation and the history of capitalism. That dive seeks, successfully, to explain how it is that “innovation” and “entrepreneurship” have become entrenched in the psyche of Protestant churches in the modern west.

As Root points out with examples from his own experience, innovation is lauded by some in the church sphere, and by others it is spoken of with disdain. Rather than prejudging the question, Root seeks to break down how culture, society, history, and economy have led to the use of innovation as a strategy in our churches.

Throughout his book, Root displays a skepticism towards innovation and entrepreneurship, especially in the context of church work. However, by breaking down the origin of those strategies he provides the reader with the tools to responsibly engage in innovation. These tools can help prepare church leaders to utilize practices rooted in the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship while simultaneously being aware of the issues that arise when using a capitalist derived tool in the church. Root wants the reader to take what they have learned and apply it in the life of the church at every level, and he does a thorough job of preparing the reader to do so.

The Church After Innovation is an engaging read throughout. Root continues to hone his already practiced skill of breaking down an idea and guiding the reader page after page, chapter after chapter, to see the greater picture of what is going on within our culture and practices. Though he attempts, rather well, to make the philosophy he is describing

understandable, occasionally he does use some philosophical and insider speech. This should not discourage the reader, especially one with limited experience in philosophical thought, from reading the book; rather it should be taken as an invitation for lay leaders and pastors to engage in philosophical thinking.

In contrast to his philosophy, Root uses similes and metaphors with more limited success. His use of imagery, such as streams and rivers or a Viennese Worm can make his arguments muddled and confusing. He also admits, early in the book, that he never remembers names and uses Netflix docuseries to engage with others. He uses what he sees as humorous descriptive names for people like “Applebee’s Boy and “Synod Executive Guy,” which can come off as demeaning. His self-proclaimed desire to avoid deeper individual conversations about the topics he speaks or writes about, makes him seem aloof and out of touch. Yet, those quirks belie a philosophical brilliance and a deep understanding of the church and the people that make up the world around us.

The first seven chapters of the book concentrate on studying the history and practice of innovation and entrepreneurship, but the book adopts a different focus in the last four chapters, where Root delves into medieval mysticism and poetry. Root expresses a passion for mysticism and an interest in understanding how we, in this age of authenticity, understand the “self.” His passion leads the reader down a rabbit hole and he hardly mentions innovation in the last chapters. This creates a conclusion that leaves the reader wondering whether Root sees any potential in innovation?

There is no doubt that Root knows his stuff, and his ability to weave in different philosophical thoughts and perspectives is laudable. For a book oriented towards church leaders, however, the minimal engagement with Scripture was puzzling. Root’s theological and historical arguments begin, primarily, in the medieval period and I found myself wishing for Scripture to play a larger role in the conversation.

In any case, Root builds an interesting and engaging argument around innovation and entrepreneurship, yet the turn to mysticism leaves the reader wondering if innovation or mysticism, both or neither, is the answer?

Alexander G. Ohman
Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church
Pelican Rapids, MN