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Alan Roxburgh, *The Missionary Church, Leadership, & Liminality*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997

Alan Roxburgh is a friend who reads widely, considers deeply, and practices reflectively as a pastor, teacher, writer, and consultant (www.alanroxburgh.com). The focus of these activities is the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. The seeds of much that he has written and facilitated in the last 23 years can be found in this marvellous little volume. I went back and read it again recently. It is most worthy of a book note. Alan is working on a new book about his theology of leadership. I look forward to that coming out in the fall of 2020 and will be sure to review it here as well.

The crisis of church marginalization in the culture of modernity has only deepened since the late 1990s, when this book was written. How deeply the churches have acknowledged and addressed that new position in society is still a matter of concern. With Roxburgh, I think it is crucial for the church to awaken to this new reality and find gospel guidance in composing its response. Creating space for experiments in connecting with our culture with compassion is central to the work of Brentwood. There is much that enriches our with-ness and witness in this little book.

There are strong hints in this book of a theme that Roxburgh has explored in much great depth in subsequent years. It's the dominance of the rationality of method and technique in efforts to renew the church. This is the modern church's cultural captivity. We think we can renew the church with our methods and our techniques, often borrowed from the secular gurus of organizational and leadership development. With a few more programs, supported by a few more personality assessments, applied with expertise, we can revive and renew our congregations. It wasn't working when Roxburgh wrote this book and it still isn't. But its advocates are making a lot of money convincing frightened and despairing church leaders that it will, especially if they buy their prescriptions and programs. Instead, Roxburgh suggests, the church needs to awaken to the beauty of the complexity of its cultural environment and provide artistic provocations to reform that culture through poetry, prophesy, and apostolicity.

In its new minority situation, Roxburgh urges the church to consider the ideas of "liminality" and "liminoid," introduced and explored in the work of anthropologist Victor Turner. They provide experiential maps for framing a response to marginality. The position of the church in society has radically changed. In this liminal phase of this change, everything that was considered normative has been negated, opening up potential for transformation and new formulations of identity. Therefore, new patterns of being in and engaging with the surrounding society can be imagined and implemented, if the church chooses to be open to the wisdom and courage of its

Lord. The liminoid, for Roxburgh, is a better descriptor for our present condition. In the transition underway, there is no sense of an overarching whole into which various parts can fit. Things seem to be flying apart. The centre is no longer evident. Whatever it is, it does not seem to be holding. The dynamics are simply too complex to be understood and controlled.

But that is precisely where the opportunity for the church becomes the most promising, as Roxburgh sees it. The liminoid has subverted the old frameworks and structures, creating space for new metaphors and models.

The new centre that can emerge from this traumatic turmoil, in Roxburgh's view, drawing again on some ideas in Turner's work, is *communitas*. This is a new peoplehood. It is not based on status or function, but on identity and belonging rooted in an experience of dignity and worth that only God can give in all its transformative depth. In this new social reality, inaugurated in Jesus the Christ, a people is being formed to bless the creation with justice and kindness in humility. This new social reality is embodied in missionary congregations.

The leadership best suited to the missional vision of this new people is formed from deep within the imagination of the Judeo-Christian tradition that preserves the stories of the Creator's intent for the creation and the actions that have been taken to realize that intent. Roxburgh posits three seminal roles for pastoral leadership in liminoid congregations – the poetic, the prophetic, and the apostolic.

Poetic leadership articulates experience and remembers tradition. They listen and observe with all the elements of soul – instinct, emotion, and intellect. They consider at many levels. Then they bring to voice what they have learned, forming and reforming the *communitas* that is called to bless the creation.

Prophetic leadership gives voice to God's purposes for the *communitas* in the complex realities of their specific location in God's beloved world. This gives God's people a new vision of their role as ambassadors of God's forgiving and reconciling love in Jesus Christ, a new sense of the alternative way of being that the Spirit is fomenting, formulating, and reformulating among them as they live into faithfulness in their context.

Apostolic leadership accepts the commission of Jesus Christ to be in the world, not simply in the church. This is not about "enculturated professional hired by congregations to provide religious services." This is about a leadership corps that leads the people to encounter and engage the world outside the congregation with blessing. It pays close attention to the ways in which the people can be nourished for this mission when gathered, but all of that equipping is done for the sake of mission in the world.

In short, the church needs leadership that is imaginative and creative in its resilient resistance to the traumas and tangles of modern culture. I look forward to seeing how these insights have grown into Roxburgh's theology of leadership when that book comes out in 2020.

As I read this book again, I was grateful for Roxburgh's seasoned and sage wisdom. I was encouraged to realize that much of his advice is being heeded by the fellowship of the friends of Jesus at Brentwood as we live into our missional musicking. And I was reminded of the value of taking as seriously as he does the deep dynamics of with-ness and witness.