

tality. This principle is for the monks to invite the world into the monastery, where they are strong in Christ, in prayer, and in community, and to share their peace and hope with the strangers (72–73). They are called to invite people alongside them in their withdrawal (living incarnationally) and to share Christ. The idea is that while the cultural majority raves around us, we stand strong in Christ and locally share who he is and what he does for us. Our lives ordered to God will attract the lost and reveal the futility of their lifestyles. Then they will come to Christ and possibly start new communities (and churches?) in their places of life.

The Benedict Option is not an outdated rehashing of an ancient monastic system, nor is it a doomsday crier book about the end times signaled by cultural collapse. Instead, this Option is a means of engaging the world with Christ by living out a consistent lifestyle centered on prayer and the Scriptures. Dreher hopes that when Christians know who they are and where they have come from, and live out this information every day, slowly culture will be affected for the better, and more people will come to know Christ.

Paas, Stefan. *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 316 pp. \$34.00.

Reviewed by John P. Thompson, D.S.L., Assistant Professor of Missiology & Leadership and Director of the DMin Program at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He planted a church in Tulsa before joining the faculty at ORU. He also leads Global Equip, a ministry training leaders overseas.

In an attempt to bolster Christianity in the West, most denominations have placed great emphasis on church planting. Stefan Paas brings a powerful, critical evaluation of our contemporary, popular beliefs about and motives for church planting. His context and focus is on the secular regions of Europe, especially in the northwest and historically Protestant quadrant of the continent. However, his analysis has relevant application throughout the Western world that is marked by a Christian heritage. Paas is a self-described “skeptical advocate” of church planting. He believes in the enterprise but confronts the theological underpinnings, proof-texting, and current statistics in much of the current rhetoric used to advance the cause. This book is a healthy counterweight to the plethora of church planting literature.

Stefan Paas writes as a church planting insider and scholar immersed in both the experience of church planting and in the academic study of evangelism and church planting. He participated in two church plants in The Netherlands, leads church planter assessments, supervises students desiring to church plant, serves in several church planting networks, and consults with denominations. He is the J.H. Bavinck Professor of Church Planting and Church Renewal at VU University Amsterdam. Furthermore, he has been an integral member of an ecumenical dialogue on evangelism in

Europe sponsored by the World Council of Churches and helped publish *Sharing Good News: A Handbook on Evangelism in Europe* this year as one of three editors and author of several chapters. His books, articles, and courses center on missiology, church planting and renewal, Christian mission in Europe, and political theology. This depth of academic prowess, along with personal, practical engagement in European church planting initiatives, is evident throughout *Church Planting in the Secular West*.

The book consists of five lengthy chapters that provide a simple structure overall; yet, each chapter is complex and content-rich. The first chapter lays an insightful foundation exploring the concept of church planting and the way it has morphed over the last two thousand years. Chapters two through four address the three primary motivations for church planting. Chapter two examines the rise of confessionalism in Europe and its belief that better churches are needed. Chapter three assesses the drive for more churches that has arisen out of church growth theory. Chapter four addresses the argument for new, innovative churches to reach a changing world. Finally, chapter five concludes the book, offering a more nuanced defense of the need for church planting in Europe.

Paas provides a historical sketch of the meaning of “church planting” that expands the reader’s understanding and illuminates current assumptions. In the New Testament, Jesus talked about sowing the gospel or the kingdom, and Paul referred to the church as a field, a temple, or a building. However, the New Testament does not speak directly of church planting. The term was first used in the second century by Irenaeus who meant the institution of the universal church, not local congregations. Many centuries later, Protestants began to think of church planting in terms of multiplying local congregations in contrast to the Catholic concept of extending the Catholic Church. Although their concept of what was planted differed, both Protestants and Catholics held a classic church planting model until the last century, a model that included “a three-stage process of evangelism (conversion), gathering (baptism and community formation), and planting (constitution).” A century ago, however, Rolland Allen’s passion to avoid paternalism and speed up evangelism on the mission field led to collapsing the second and third stage together. Planting indigenous churches instead of mission stations would enable the church to multiply faster. Donald McGavran and his Church Growth Movement then added the final step of compressing the first two stages of evangelism and gathering. Consequently, the church became an instrument of evangelism instead of a result of evangelism, given McGavran’s insistence that (local) church growth is the best measure of evangelism. Evangelicals fully embraced this paradigm and the church growth mantra that planting churches is the most effective way to do evangelism. Paas believes compressing the classical three-step model of evangelism, gathering, and constitution/planting into a single movement of evangelism-as-planting weakens and relativizes ecclesiology as well as

truncates our approach to evangelism. Paas raises serious questions with his analysis of this reductionism in the church planting process with which all church planters in the West should wrestle. I, personally, was a former church planter who planted a church out of a deep passion for evangelism and the belief that church planting is the most effective way to do evangelism. I found this book to be both sobering and helpful in shedding light on some residual concerns from my own past church planting experience. Other readers involved in church planting will benefit as well from the thoughts of Paas.

Paas also discusses the church planting assumption that better churches are needed, which has its root in the Protestant quest for confessional purity. Protestantism gave rise to confessionalism, where churches define themselves by their core convictions (confessions). Paas describes how four revival movements (Anabaptists, Baptists, Moravians, and Methodists) spawned confessional church planting in Europe. These movements held a critical view of existing European churches and sought to re-evangelize the continent. Positively, these early church planters mobilized the laity for mission, which was actually an early form of a missional understanding of the congregation. Paas, however, points out that these revival movements succeeded in a Christian culture, which is not the current reality in the secular regions of Europe. Consequently, we must shift from a revival approach to a truly missionary approach. Paas rightly warns that fighting with other Christian traditions could be detrimental to the whole Christian enterprise in a post-Christian culture and calls church planters to work in unity with existing churches. He suggests first seeking to do mission work in association with existing churches instead of having a preconceived goal to plant a new church. Furthermore, he observes that church planting is usually concentrated in areas with nominal Christian populations instead of finding bridges to truly secular Europeans. The classic model of planting churches recognized the need for laying a cultural frame of reference to even have a religious conversation with people. Just focusing on church planting ignores this important cultural work as part of the process and ends up steering church planting toward Bible belt regions in Europe.

Paas offers a strong dose of realism for those engaged in church planting in the West. He examines the limitations and errors in studies often touted as proof that new churches grow faster than older ones and that small churches grow faster than large churches. He points out that the church is not growing in many places in the world, and we should not naively believe that church planting is the cure-all. In Western Europe, the external supports that encourage participation in church have been stripped away, and consequently, Paas says we must not expect to draw multitudes like in the revivals of the past. He challenges church planters to go to difficult places and to not have unrealistic expectations. Paas is self aware, telling the reader that he may seem too critical for some. The book does not have the opti-

mistic tone of most (or perhaps all) church planting books. The author naturally displays a more European approach of caution and realism. His systematic dismantling of studies and their statistics, for example, may feel discouraging to an American reader, but it is honest, brutal, and realistic in representing a European postmodern perspective.

Paas, however, does offer hope. He suggests that one of the greatest values of church planting is its potential for innovation. Finding innovative ways to bring the gospel into a secular culture is a strong rationale for church planting. It is not the replication of church models too often the mainstay of church planting today, but actual innovative experimentation that could offer potential hope for the future. Based on innovation theory, he suggests the need to create free havens, laboratories, and incubators for experimentation. Here the three-stage model of church planting can again provide an important framework. Haste to call everything a church, as in the one-stage model of evangelism equals planting, does not allow free space on the margins to truly experiment, to innovate, and even to fail.

Church Planting in the Secular West unpacks the motives today that underlie most church planting in the West, revealing the historical roots and unexamined assumptions. Such a treatise is extremely beneficial for all those connected to church planting initiatives, enabling the reader to examine his/her own assumptions and to develop greater self awareness. This book will likely challenge and consequently strengthen the reader's ecclesiology and missiology. Truly, we can learn much from Stefan Paas and from the European experience, as the subtitle of the book suggests.