The Church after Innovation: Questioning Our Obsession with Work, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship

Andrew Root

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Innovation certainly defines the spirit of our present age, with pressure to innovate infiltrating nearly every aspect of life. In this fifth and latest book in his Ministry in a Secular Age series, *The Church after Innovation: Questioning Our Obsession with Work, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship*, practical theologian Andrew Root discusses this cultural and social phenomenon of "innovation" within the context of the Christian Church. Root presents the historical interplay between the church and innovation and seeks to offer a truly creative and healthier way for churches and ministry leaders to think about their identity and their mission.

Root contends that late modernity, the development of free market capitalistic economies, and the onset of the aesthetic economy of the digital age have all been drivers of singularity and the need to differentiate and innovate. Recent years have been filled with conferences, webinars and podcasts, coaching, and new books focused on the need for churches to become hubs of innovation with the never-ending pursuit of numeric growth and creative programmatic change. Churches and ministry leaders have innovation fever. However, this innovation mania has not produced the results within the church that were promised, and in many cases has led to decreasing spiritual formation, ministerial scandal, and ministry burnout.

Throughout this book Root regularly references the writings of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor and relies heavily upon Andreas Reckwitz's books *The Invention of Creativity* and *The Society of Singularities.* Root also relies heavily on the work and stories of numerous historical thinkers such as Augustine of Hippo, Meister Ekhart, Martin Luther, and Hegel, among others, to trace the development of creativity and innovation within the historical church, and in society and culture more generally. While historically grounded, Root also contextualizes his analysis by introducing the reader to three real-life ministry leaders in innovation. These three leaders, he affectionately calls "Applebee's Boy," "Synod Executive Guy," and "Bearded Brown Turtleneck," who all wrestle with innovation in the church.

Root skillfully demonstrates how innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship are understood in contemporary culture. The arrival of the Enlightenment, the Protestant Reformation, and capitalism all contributed to the surge of innovation. Root traces the historical development of innovation as a cultural, economic, and social phenomenon, utilizing Max Weber's determination to link innovation to the Protestant work ethic and worldview Modernity and economic competition drove the need for constant innovation with Protestant and capitalistic societies, and consequently devalued the cultic aesthetic in favor of work and free markets. Late modernity has perhaps

ironically set market conditions which demand aesthetic creativity and innovation that is no longer animated by divine, mystical, and epiphanic sources as in previous ages. Instead, Root believes that what drives contemporary innovation is no longer religious or transcendent, but primarily economic—greed and fear over market share.

While focusing on the practical and contemporary realities of the church's wrestling with innovation, Root historically orients the reader to explain the current climate surrounding innovation. He asserts that historically, prior to modernity, creativity was considered a divine trait, allotted to a divine epiphany, and rarely attributed to singular human beings. Whatever creativity was demonstrated by individuals was linked to the mystical or the divine. Modernity divested God as the source of creativity, placing the innovative pressure and burden on created beings. Consequently, creativity was severed from the natural world, beauty, and theology (or religion), and rooted in capturing market share and raising capital. Therefore, this book provides a necessary rebalancing and perspective shift on the innovation phenomenon, revealing a hollowness behind the continual pursuit of novelty and innovation.

Specifically pertaining to the church, Root seeks to decouple mission and innovation that he contends have been incorrectly intermingled. Both mission and innovation appear to produce *more*—identity, members, direction, market share, and growth—and both promise something other than just future returns. Mission and innovation both seem to focus on the future and produce present excitement and the impression of advancement. However, this mistaken blending of mission and innovation is not harmless. Focus on innovation has led to the persistent disunity of the Church, due in large part to innovation's inherent obsession with self and required divergence from the "norms" of traditional structure and community. Innovation necessitates that one person's or church's originality and singularity outstrip another's, which inherently causes comparison, competition, and division. When churches become overly focused on authenticity and uniqueness, they lose a sense of community, unity, and mission, and innovation becomes divisive.

This book is a must read for ministry leaders, entrepreneurs, and anyone engaged in what Root refers to as the aesthetic economy that focuses on creative work and provides a healthy reset of expectations surrounding innovation. The book is both academic and highly readable; it weaves together a multiplicity of disciplines including economics, history, psychology, and practical theology. The book also presents practical and usable tools that meet the reader in a present cultural moment, and which highlights the dangers of an overemphasis on creativity and innovation.

Andrew Root's *The Church after Innovation* offers a liberating hope to churches and ministry leaders that are beset by innovation overload. It provides a sobering evaluation of what has gone wrong with the push for endless innovation and provides the reader with a counter message that what will help save the church from the damage of an endless search for innovation and singularity. This book will serve as a salve to those burned out from the endless pursuit of excellence and uniqueness, by pointing

the reader to something better. Like Mary the mother of Jesus who is not drawn inward to herself in her epiphany in Luke 1 but drawn to another outside herself, creativity is found in epiphanic encounters with existential truth outside of oneself. Therefore, Root contends that what the Church needs are less innovators and more "poets," and suggests that a return to mysticism, beauty, tradition, and spiritual formation provides a healthier alternative than following the latest entrepreneurial models and trending innovations. Root reminds his reader that the Church already has a model for innovation burnout. He points the Church in particular, to the truly innovative One, whose most creative act of salvation and redemption that created the Church itself, began not from an individual, singular human source, but from a divine one.

—Blake Campbell
Independent Scholar

Research Handbook on Corporate Governance and Ethics
Till Talaulicar, ed.
Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023 (450 pages)

The *Research Handbook on Corporate Governance and Ethics* purports to bring together experts from across different nations and disciplines in order to "illuminate the multiple angles of the interrelationships between corporate governance and ethics" (1). It presents itself as offering cutting-edge analysis by thinkers representative of "iconic viewpoints" so that its readers could be apprised of the latest scholarship in the field from a variety of standpoints (3). The *Handbook* succeeds, for the most part, but not without some shortcomings.

With regard to its strengths, the *Handbook* delivers on its promise to showcase genuine scholarship from serious scholars. The various contributions contained within its pages are uniformly well-researched and do indeed reflect much of the most current thinking within the relevant fields. A reader would be brought ably up to speed with regard to the subject matters covered and armed with a fairly deep (rather than a merely superficial) understanding thereof.

Of perhaps particular interest to the readers of this journal would be the fascinating contribution of Alejo Jose G. Sison and Dulce M. Redin who examine corporate governance from an Aristotelian / MacIntyrean lens. Also of special note is Santiago Mejia's analysis of how the moral duties of shareholders (and individuals generally) should be discharged via corporate management (an argument I have advanced previously, see Ronald J. Colombo, "Ownership, Limited, Reconciling Traditional and Progressive Corporate Law Via an Aristotelian Understanding of Ownership," *Journal of Corporation Law* 34, no. 1 (2008): 248–92, along with Michael S. Ablander's