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Review: Out of Their Faces and Into Their Shoes

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Out of Their Faces and into Their Shoes, by John Kramp. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995. Pp. 185.

John Kramp presents the thesis that today most Christians do not understand how lost people live and think. This ignorance results in ineffective evangelism and creates a “let them find us” mentality in the church. A basic presupposition of his thesis is that the contemporary environment is similar to the first-century church. In presenting his thesis, Kramp uses a standard pattern in the twenty-five chapters of the text. Kramp presents a law of “lostology” followed by anecdotal accounts illustrating the law. He then discusses the principles involved. He ends each chapter with “The Lostology Lab,” posing questions to the reader to stimulate further inquiry.

Kramp’s journey into “lostology” clarifies the basis for some of his suppositions. In his introduction Kramp describes himself as a “cradle-roll-to-pastor church insider. . . . In reality, I have been *in* so long I struggle to relate to those who are *out*” (4). Several years ago Kramp was involved in a telemarketing church-planting effort in Portland, Oregon. It was at this point in his life that he began encountering lost people outside the church. This reviewer was involved in a similar effort in the same convention a few months after the start of Kramp’s Portland church, making this book of special interest.

The reviewer can not fault the basic thesis of this work. However, Kramp has accepted some errors of ecclesiology commonly found in books of this genre. In part 3, “The Cost of Being Lost,” Kramp states, “When a search is necessary, that search becomes the consuming priority. Everything in Jesus’ life and teaching affirms this foundational truth of lostology. . . . As a church, we did not exist for ourselves. We came together as Christians to search for those who were not there yet” (118). Jesus did not focus only on the lost. He spent much of His time teaching His disciples about God. Jesus’ discipleship program was more than equipping soul winners. In the epistles, Paul deals with proper doctrine and proper lifestyles in almost equal amounts. Verses that deal with soul winning are in the minority. Kramp’s approach lacks the balance that a healthy church requires.

Kramp states, “That priority was costly for us. Some Christians [*sic*] felt they could not get their spiritual needs met if we continued to focus on the lost” (119). Perhaps if Kramp’s church, Westside, had a holistic ministry, it would have grown larger during his tenure. He does rightly say, “We never say, ‘Evangelism is unimportant.’ We simply raise the priority of other things, secular and spiritual, until there is no time left to share our faith” (119). In the same vein, one would not say, “Corporate worship is unimportant.” We just simply raise the priority of being “seeker-oriented” so that worship becomes a rarity. First Corinthians 14:23-26 deals with a service that is focused on the edification of the saints and worship. The “unbelievers” or the “uninformed” are not the driving force of the gathering.

This reviewer does not believe that Kramp’s church actually existed just for the lost. Much of a church’s effort in developing the *koinonia* of the body cannot be considered strictly evangelistic. In chapter 19, “Search Control Center,” Kramp describes group activities that are not directly “search” related. “These small groups, drawn to each other through affinity and shared interests, joined together to *grow in faith* and reach others for Christ” (143, emphasis mine). Yet, Kramp’s work largely bypasses those critical activities. This unbalanced presentation of a sound thesis compromises the effectiveness of implementation. It is problematic when the search becomes “the consuming priority” of the church. His goal of evangelism is commendable, but not to the point of abasing the relational aspects of Christianity.

Kramp’s work is an account of an awakening. For many years he lived in a Christian environment and practiced a Christian vocation. He never took the time to realize there were lost people even in Texas, living in another world just next door. He writes, “For the first time, I decided to join secular people on their social turf. . . . In those social settings, I met and talked with more lost people than I had encountered in all my previous years of church visitation” (125). Kramp, along with the pundits of the “post-Christian era,” acts as though the first-century church encountered the same problem. It did not.

The first-century church gathered for worship and took opportunities to proclaim Christ but did not assume that others were Christian. The church knew that once it dispersed from worship it was going back into a lost world. Edification of the saints was foundational. The apostles were involved in “prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). Individual members knew they were always under scrutiny. They knew how the lost thought because they had recently been converted. They were used to being in the minority. To use Jesus and the disciples or the New Testament church as a pattern of evangelism for today has inherent flaws unless we also recognize that evangelism is more of an individual act than a ministry of the church. In today’s professional ministry culture, texts are best received that identify a problem in microcosm and provide a narrowly defined solution. This review would benefit greatly from a work that combined the information contained in Kramp’s text and an evangelistic ecclesiology.

This reviewer submits that *Out of Their Faces and into Their Shoes* has merit for someone who shares Kramp’s background. A more effective tool of empowering ministers for reaching the lost would be a change in our present pattern of minister training. As long as individuals can go from high school through terminal ministry degrees without ever entering the real world of punching a time clock and experiencing sweat, churches will not communicate with many of the lost. Several years of working in an unrelated occupation would strengthen the pastoral skills of most ministers.

Out of Their Faces and into Their Shoes does an excellent job of differentiating between “lost-centered” and “searcher-centered” ministry programs. One

could easily add "seeker-centered" to the discussion. In spite of the music, format, and messages, "seeker-centered" services are truly at best a middle-ground position. The seeker must still find his way into the service. The setting may be comfortable, but the seeker has initiated the contact. Kramp's lost-centered approach requires a more active involvement on the part of a church. He emphasizes the active going out of the church. This is philosophically different from the idea that if the services are appealing enough, the lost will come. One wonders how many people in a "seeker-centered" service believes that their church has met its obligations under the Great Commission.

John Kramp's thesis is sound. Most Christians, especially ministers, do not understand life beyond the church walls. Kramp does adequately, and with amusing illustrations, present his ideas. His writing style is solid. This review hopes that Kramp will expand his work to present a more complete picture of the philosophy of ministry and evangelism he implemented in Lake Oswego, Oregon. Other ministers could benefit from the insights gained when planting a church in a tough setting.

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Rethinking the Church, by James Emery White. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997. Pp. 142.

With cover "blurb recommendations" from David Dockery, Thom Rainer, Rick Warren, and Bill Hybels, one might wonder what the content of this book might be that they would all agree to recommend. White is the founder and pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. His research shows that only a small percentage of non-churchgoers make that choice because of theology. Most say it is uninteresting to come to church, that churches have too many problems, or they simply find no "value" in attending in terms of their lifestyle.

How then did White achieve an 80-percent growth at Mecklenburg from among the unchurched population? He "rethought" evangelism, discipleship, ministry, worship, structure, and community. His reflections and new approaches are outlined in these brief, readable, and to-the-point chapters.

Not everyone will agree. Not all personalities can lead in this way. Not every geographical setting will be equally conducive to these suggestions. Not every community will respond in the same ways. Nevertheless, we must take a

new look at the church and at our opportunities to reach the people God has sent us to reach.

This book will certainly help any minister trying to build a new ministry or trying to revive an existing ministry. Read it critically but with an open mind. This is a practical handbook that suggests ideas that have proven themselves in the biblical ministry of White's Mecklenburg church. The change called for here is not cosmetic only. Tinkering is likely to fix only what "ain't broke." True reform is not compromise, but it may require substantive change. Make membership matter. Develop a compelling vision. Make committees into ministries. Be sensitive to the people (worship should be relevant to the unsaved as well as to believers). These are only a sample of White's ideas. Some will work for you; others will not. The church must let the Bible refocus everything for the cause of the gospel.

L. Russ Bush

The Complete Guide to Church Play Production, by John Lewis, Laura Andrews, and Flip Kobler, Nashville: Convention Press, 1997. Pp. 350.

This enjoyable paperback lives up to its title by being the one guide for organizers of church drama that includes all issues involved in putting on a large or small play in church, from the very first prayer, through meetings, advertising, rehearsals, performances, and the strike party, to the very last prayer thanking God for His blessing.

The word "complete" in the title is ambitious, and a few additional issues may be addressed by those who want to broadcast or record their drama. The issues involved in making video tapes and sound recordings are not addressed in this book. What the book lacks is more than made up for by the logical inclusion of chapters on personnel, music, and choreography (yes, dancing!), the set, props, lighting, sound, costumes, makeup, special effects, publicity, budget, safety, and security. In addition, there are forms included in the back of the book that can be used as templates for your own audition sign-up sheets, property lists, rented equipment, and safety information. The items that the authors would like us to avoid include "bathrobes, flip-flop sandals, animal droppings, ear-piercing feedback, muffled sound effects, falling flats, exploding budgets, lawsuits, empty seats," and failing to give the Lord our very best.

Specific information about suppliers of theatrical equipment is appropriately not included, but you should be able to find that in the yellow pages of your nearest big-city phone book under Theatrical Equipment and Supplies. Some of the homemade lighting and overhead mounting equipment mentioned