

Book Review

Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, (San Francisco, Calif.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003). 149 pages.

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I do not recall reading another book whose introduction cautions the reader to proceed at his/her own risk. However, this is exactly what Reggie McNeal does in *The Present Future*. Noting that the contents of the book are highly volatile and not for the faint of heart, he launches into a well-conceived and thorough presentation, focused on awakening church leaders to the grim reality of the institutional church in the United States.

Present Future moves beyond its early doomsday message to demonstrate a new method for thinking about the way we do ministry in today's culture. Posing six "tough" questions, McNeal challenges the reader to:

- convert from "churchianity" to Christianity (11);
- pursue kingdom growth instead of church growth (20);
- embrace a new reformation that releases God's people from an inwardly-minded church into missionally oriented ministry (43);
- reinvent our spiritual formation processes by focusing on whole life development versus curriculum driven programs (85);
- shift from humanly produced and people-oriented strategic planning to divinely inspired and Spirit-driven preparation (93);

- empower apostolic leaders who will discern a new way to express God's mission in the emerging world and guide the institutional church in incarnating this mission (125).

As these challenges suggest, this is no simplistic "how-to" book. It is, rather, an impassioned appeal for the church (and its leaders) to wake up and start acting as though they care that the United States is near the top of the list of the least evangelized English-speaking nations.

Present Future is a well-written, timely challenge to the institutional church. On my scale of one to ten, McNeal scores an eleven with this book. Every church leader who does not read this book will be worse off for failing to do so.