

**Lisa R. Withrow, *Claiming New Life: Process-Church for the Future* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008), 299 pp.**

In this short but beautifully written work, Lisa Withrow provides an important and timely resource for mainline churches and those of us who love them. Withrow's voice resonates with those whose belief in the local church's transformative power has not wavered even though we acknowledge the church has lost its footing over the past forty years. Her fresh approach begins when she opens the reader to see the mission of the church as a theological movement emulating how God is at work in the world using theologian John Cobb's insight that God is a "creative-responsive love" (p. 64). This is very different from the view that the mission of the church is eternally captured in a value statement. What remains absolute is God's love for creation and the church's response to God's call to love in the same far-reaching, risk-taking fashion. Building on the Great Commandment, Withrow releases the mainline church from archaic formulas into the freedom of co-creating in response to God's infinite love. She calls it "Process-Church."

This book offers a remarkably helpful description and analysis of how the emerging church movement is changing the landscape of Christianity within our society. This analysis offers the mainline church a clear mirror from which to begin the task of self-critique using an ethic of inquiry that includes theological reflection amidst socio-cultural and economic contextual analysis.

"Process Church" cannot come into being or sustain itself without an ongoing, self-critical eye toward itself. Withrow aptly notes the mainline church will be unable to reclaim itself as a movement that responds to God's creative-response love without ongoing conversations for self-critique and theological reflection. Withrow offers churches a useful methodology without becoming just another 'how-to' formula. She builds upon the important work of sociologists of religion, theologians, and organizational theorists to offer several signposts that illuminate a path by which churches can recover and reclaim their identity as transformative communities within our culture. In addition to creating an ethic of inquiry that includes both theological reflection and global and local contextual analysis, Withrow adds the importance of imagination (spiritual work) and the Great Commandment as a theological corrective to insular and isolating theology. She cautions that the church must develop the spiritual stamina required for a time of chaos or 'wilderness living,' during which it must continue the conversation about how it will reclaim its place as an essential movement and prophetic force within our world.

Church-going Christians, pastors, seminarians, and Christian leadership faculty will find the challenge of this new book helpful as long as they are prepared for 'the long view' and not a quick fix. This long view includes rigorous theological thinking and global contextual analysis, redefining success and power in terms of being a disciple rather than making disciples, and engaging in ongoing self-critique guided by how well they are living the Great Commandment.

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