

Canoeing the Mountains

By Tod Bolsinger

(book review)

When Lewis and Clark were commissioned to explore the Louisiana Purchase, they had no idea what they would find. Their initial plans were to travel by water, always going upstream on the mighty Missouri to see where it took them. Little did they know, there was an enormous barrier ahead of them that we now call the Rocky Mountains. Instead of traveling in their canoes, they face the possibility of carrying them great distances. It amounted to a matter of adaptation in the midst of unpredictable circumstances.

Written by a Presbyterian minister and faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary, this book addresses so many of the issues that churches face in the midst of our rapidly changing culture. We started off in canoes and now we face mountains. One question that it poses, among many, is this: "If western societies have become post-Christian mission fields, how can traditional churches become missionary churches?"

The author suggests that church leaders must learn to lead all over again and put away the old paradigm of leadership. He openly admits that seminary does not prepare pastors for the challenges we face today. It's not a matter of just doing better what we have been doing all along. If that were the case, why are so many churches declining?

There must be a spirit of adventure and willingness to try new things with no guarantee of success. It requires "adaptive capacity." The solution will be adaptation of core values by seeing ourselves as we really are. It requires the courage to stand up and say, "I don't know."

So, how do you canoe over mountains? You don't. To keep going, you change, you adapt. You ditch the canoes, make new tools, build new boats when you need them.

There is no map of the road leading to the needed changes for churches. It is a divine moment when we go back to the basics of what God has sent us out to do.

This book (250 pages) is well written and should be on the desk of every pastor and church leader. It is required reading for transitional ministry training (interim pastors) at Montreat. It is available in hard cover from Amazon for \$12.69. Enjoy good reading.

Mike Slayter