

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Elliott, Stephen D. *By Signs and Wonders: How the Holy Spirit Grows the Church*. Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2014. 178 pp. \$16.95.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, PhD, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Christian Ministry at Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, IN. He is an ordained pastor in The Wesleyan Church and has served as a pastor near Binghamton, NY, and Brockville, Ontario, Canada.

Church planter, pastor, and current professor and program director of pastoral ministries and church planting at Kingswood University in New Brunswick, Canada, Stephen D. Elliott has written a book to spur a new form of evangelism in the contemporary Western church. Elliott writes from his doctoral research (DMin, Asbury Theological Seminary) and professional experience as a church planter and pastor where he utilized and critically observed various evangelism strategies, including a pursuit of the Holy Spirit for miraculous signs in the conversion of unbelievers. *By Signs and Wonders: How the Holy Spirit Grows the Church* is a popular, reasoned, and passionate presentation of the case for the role of miraculous deeds and supernatural events in conversion.

Elliott begins and sustains a sharp and pointed critique of what often passes for friendship evangelism, the evangelism strategy that a holy, positive, helpful, sacrificial life will lead unbelievers to understand the source of this lifestyle and become followers of Jesus (xi). Frankly, argues Elliott, the approach is not working. While Elliott repeats that friendship evangelism is

not bad, misguided, or to be discarded, the reader will not question Elliott's desire to persuade the reader that it is ineffective. Elliott's version of friendship evangelism is best described as a friendship evangelism in use, rather than the approach in its full form. This in-use form of friendship evangelism is an evangelism that really is not evangelistic (and hardly that concerned with friendships!). It is, at best, a wish in fairly surface-level friendships that never gets at sharing the gospel. As such, it is better understood as "pre-evangelism" (71). Elliott will not let the reader away from his belief and argued point that friendship evangelism, as it is typically practiced, will not have any significant influence in converting unbelievers.

In its place, Elliott presents the miraculous role of the Holy Spirit combined with proclamation and/or testimony as a more effective model for attracting, persuading, and converting unbelievers. Evidence is drawn from Scripture (both Old and New Testaments), early church history, revival accounts, the Wesleyan tradition, spirituality authors (such as A.W. Tozer), contemporary documentaries (the "Transformation Videos"), recent evangelism programs (e.g., Alpha), the experience of the non-Western world churches, and personal experience to present this case. The Spirit's presence and miraculous work are presented as being normative for the church and a means of conversion that the contemporary Western church should seek. The Holy Spirit, through healings, words of knowledge, prophecies, and other actions, must be sought and expected in today's church for there to be meaningful, widespread conversions.

*By Signs and Wonders* does a fine job of presenting a readable, organized case of the author's experience and conviction of evidence for the Spirit's role in evangelism. Elliott offers a plethora of stories, quotes, and statistics for the miraculous presence of the Spirit in conversion and the failure of contemporary Western churches to evangelize the lost. Those readers who have become disillusioned with friendship evangelism or who have failed to see it bear much (if any) fruit, as was the case with Elliott, will find the book convincing. Further, Elliott's case is grounded in the lordship of Jesus, with consistent critiques and warnings of unbiblical signs. The Spirit is not sought for entertainment, and the Christian's allegiance is to Jesus, not to the signs themselves (p. 141). Others who are naturally skeptical of the approach will argue that a more critical assessment of statistics, online materials, and Elliott's plain read of Scripture and history is needed. While these maneuvers would certainly strengthen Elliott's case, they would also change the nature of the book.

Elliott intentionally writes for a lay audience in addition to pastoral leaders. Each chapter comes equipped with small group discussion questions, and Elliott provides helpful teaching points and repeatable models in the appendices. Elliott's own experience is used to help interested pastors begin to introduce an openness to the Holy Spirit to church leadership, staff, and the whole church so as to help people incorporate what might be awkward

and foreign into their corporate worship and small group practice. Readers, both lay and clergy, predisposed to Elliott's argument will find the work a helpful resource for encouragement, small groups, and practical insights, while those open to the argument will be presented with new evidence and avenues of thought.

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Payne, J.D. *Apostolic Church Planting: Birthing New Churches from New Believers*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015. 128 pp. \$15.00.

Reviewed by Joey Chen. Joey has a passion for what God is doing in cities and is currently lead pastor at Sunset Church in San Francisco, California. He is also currently working on a DMin at Talbot School of Theology. He earned his MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a BA from Cedarville University.

At a recent church planting conference, I listened to speakers stress the importance of cultural relevance and discuss how to handle setup and teardown challenges for multisite locations. There were talks about staffing challenges and what kind of staff positions to fill when starting a new church. While I appreciated the content and practical guidance, I felt that something was missing. J.D. Payne's book, *Apostolic Church Planting*, addresses a talking point that is often neglected or assumed in the present church planting conversation. Payne was pressed to write this book when he discovered that church planters were unfamiliar with basic biblical foundations at church planting conferences! The urgency is great because "when the church is shocked at a biblical model, it reveals just how far away from the Scriptures we have moved in our missionary practices" (14). Payne's work seeks to provide biblical paradigms and practices of church planting.

The heart of Payne's church planting paradigm is that it should be "evangelism that results in new churches" (13). Throughout the book, Payne gives definitions, biblical foundations, and best practices that help the church planter to stay grounded in Scripture. In the first chapter, Payne deals with the question, "what is church planting," and why assuming the answer to this question is not wise. He points out that "nowhere in the Bible is the church commanded to plant churches" (17). We have a commission to go make disciples, and he notes that "we read the birth of churches—*after* disciples are made" (17). He is concerned that much of modern church planting focuses on the secondary, not the primary, matters.

Important to the discussion of church planting is ecclesiology. Payne criticizes the common desire of planters to focus on the secondary matters of the church, such as trendy people, locations, and aesthetics. By focusing on these matters first, he believes that church planting starts off on the wrong foot because this leads church plants to prioritize existing Christians.