BOOK SUMMARY: THY KINGDOM CONNECTED (PART 1)
by Rebecca Walker


Thy Kingdom Connected presents a relationally connective paradigm of God’s networked kingdom that will better enable you and me to see God, humanity, and all of creation as being interconnected. And when this relational paradigm, this hermeneutic, is applied to the study and praxis of ecclesiology, the people of God will be better prepared to live into the image of God, thus incarnating the mission of God” (p20).

About Dwight J. Friesen: “(DMin, George Fox University) is assistant professor of practical theology at Mars Hill Graduate School in Seattle. He was the founding pastor of Quest: A Christ-Commons in Bellevue, Washington, and lives in Seattle, Washington, with his family.”

Friesen’s core contention is that the way we view life is often too modularised and non-relational. Our vision is in conflict with God’s “vision in which everything belongs, in whom the reconciliation of all things is possible, and where the re-creation of all is already underway...Failure to see the interconnections of the world created by God can only result in ‘di-vision.’ We need a fresh vision of God’s networked kingdom” (p19). Friesen encourages a new perspective that sees division as an opportunity for reconciliation, disconnection as an opportunity for missional linking (p19-20).

The Christian narrative begins with the Triune God creating heaven and earth, and giving life and breath to all creation. Everything that exists exists because of its connection to God. The aim of the gospel is not only to bring personal salvation but to reconcile to God “all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Col 1:20). The good news of Christ is unifying, inviting “us to wholeness, uniting body and soul, sacred and secular, male and female, Jew and Gentile, even God and humanity: one God, one creation. It even unites church and world in such a way that releases the gospel from the control of the church. Oneness, peace, shalom, wholeness, flourishing life; this is what the gospel has always been about; this is God’s dream for creation” (p28).

A network is made up of a number of interconnected nodes. “Scale-free networks” are made up, not of random connections, but rather “many highly connected nodes, hubs of connectivity that shape the way the network operates” (p42). To make a comprehensive network map of God’s kingdom, we would need nodes to represent “the past, present, and future...not just...the living humans with whom we regularly interact but would also...the saints of old, families of origin, geographical shapers, political influences, books, ideas, movements, organisations, weather patterns, mountain ranges, automobiles, roads, blogs, all manner of events, and so on” (p43). All these things have a shaping effect on God’s networked kingdom. As new nodes enter and leave the network, the kingdom grows and changes. “The kingdom we experience today is different from the one experienced by Jesus two thousand years ago. It is still God who reigns relationally over all; but the all does not remain the same” (p43).

Links within a network represent a connection between two nodes. There are two primary types of relationship, “I & It’ relationships... [and] ‘I & You’ relationships” (p49). An I & It relationship “sees the other person as an idea, or a conceptualisation, and treats that person as an object. An
obvious example might be when a person views pornography; they see an image of a person but the person is lost to them. The viewer fails to encounter the hopes, dreams, and story of the other person, and their shared humanity” (p50). In comparison, “I & You relationships stress the mutual, holistic existence of two persons linking together. It is a genuine (contrasted to ‘objectified’) encounter, because the persons meet one another in their authentic existence, without any qualification or objectification of one another” (p52).

In Christ, God has moved towards humanity to engage us in an I & You connection, and through us to the whole of creation. In Christ we also are freed up to relate to one another in I & You connections, rather than utilitarian I & It relationships (p53). In our sharing of the I & You relationship with God, we also experience a shared sense of We, “this We identity is not an exclusionary ‘us versus them,’ but is a differentiated We for the blessing of all” (p54). The core of God’s mission is the formation of a people who participate with God in the reconciliation and re-creation of the world. “This is the already-present and yet-to-be reality of God’s networked kingdom. We-ing is the big picture that mobilises and gives purpose and shared identity to every church, and every person seeking to walk in the Way of Jesus.” (p54-5).

LEADING THAT CONNECTS

Leadership within a network is different from hierarchical models. In a network, all nodes are connected with other nodes, however some nodes have more connections than others. These “super connected nodes are called hubs” (p86). Connective leaders recognise their own networked status, and live relationally in their communities. They do not stand above or apart from those who they are leading, rather they actively participate in their network, building connections between others (p86-7).

God demonstrates this kind of leadership in Christ. His power was in his powerlessness, and his influence came from being in relationship within “Godself, missionally moving toward all creation in a spirit of reconciliation and recreation. A God who cares not for the power of God but joyfully empties such divine rights and privileges to connect and reconnect with those God loved and led. And this emptying is not just some kind of humble gesture; it is in fact essential to what it means for God to be love” (p88).

Frisen sees the role of the connective leader as holding together the experience of the glorious with the tragic; chaos with order. All life is made up of the dance of unpredictability and order, leadership is therefore about encouraging life in that context (p95). This provides hope, as those things that take us by surprise can be the very thing we needed in order to grow. “A proverb for life-giving connective leading might be, ‘In the face of chaos connective leaders participate in the bringing of chaos’” (p99).

To be continued... Next Week!

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about Thy Kingdom Connected can be found at the following websites:
Dwight J. Friesen’s Website: http://dwrightfriesen.com/
Excerpt (first 30 pages): http://www.bakerbooks.com/Media/Manager/Excerpt_9780801071638.pdf