

*Becoming a Blessed Church: Forming a Church of Spiritual Purpose, Presence, and Power.* N. Graham Standish. Foreword by E. Stanley Ott. Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2005. ISBN# 1-56699-312-1; 242 pp.

“What is a blessed church?” Standish, a PCUSA pastor, argues that “It is a . . . glimpse of a healthy church uniquely grounded in a relationship with God that allows blessings to flow through it” (11). Standish contends that the malaise experienced by so many mainline congregations derives from “a functional style of church” in which “there is little expectation that members will experience and encounter God, or connect what they do to God’s purpose, presence, and power” (7). This deficit, he claims, is ultimately a theological issue that directly affects leadership.

Though careful to avoid partisanship within his denomination, Standish suggests that the path to renewal is an operational Trinitarian theology in which congregational life is shaped by the life of God. This takes the form of God’s “purpose, presence, and power;” a paradigm that affords practical resources and direction for leadership. Parts one and two of the book seek to make the case for this approach then offer a thoughtful, readable, and inspiring vision of Trinitarian theology as a powerful resource for congregational life. Part three offers suggestions for leadership based on this model. Along with suggestions for nurturing this congregational ethos, Standish provides illustrations, process samples, and realistic (not airbrushed) anecdotes of this journey within the congregation he serves.

~ Don J. Payne