

Stephen Judd, John Swinton, and Kara Martin, *Keeping Faith: How Christian Organisations Can Stay True to the Way of Jesus* (Sydney: Acorn Press, 2023). 140 pp. RRP \$24.99 Paperback.

It is the exception, rather than the rule, that organisations that began with firm roots in the Christian faith stay true to their mission and core identity over a longer period of time. Judd, Swinton and Martin, address this uncomfortable truth squarely in their forthright book, *Keeping Faith: How Christian Organisations Can Stay True to the Way of Jesus*. Citing numerous examples, they point out well-known institutions that began with a strong Christian ethos, seeking to partner with God's mission, but over time, have drifted from their mission. Rather than capitulate to this all-too-often reality, the authors seek to combat that slide. It is not inevitable they argue; things can be done to redress the slip even if it has begun, and some concrete actions can be put into place to protect it from happening in the first place.

Judd, Swinton, and Martin firstly examine whether an organisation can be "Christian." After addressing that question with a nuanced answer, they then argue for what they call, Organisational Faithfulness. The most pressing imperative for an organisation that seeks to stay true to the mission for which it was called into being, is to remain faithful and true to the Christian life as expressed in the Bible and modelled by Jesus. How is that to occur? How can an organisation be intentional and not drift from its mission? One common response is to ensure that those who are on the board and in executive positions are people of faith. The obstacle with that, they point out, is that simply signing a statement of faith, or agreeing with a set of core values, or requiring them to go to church, does not mean that the person orients their whole life towards Jesus. Therefore, one potential way forward is to think through and create a "vibrant, living, well-articulated organisational theology" (p.36).

This statement wrestles with the key themes of the Christian story and contextualises it to the specific environment or field that the organisation inhabits. If it is not relegated to a paper filed away in a folder somewhere and promptly forgotten but is actively engaged with in the boardroom and used to guide decisions about strategic direction and operations, it can act like a compass that points the direction towards true north—organisational faithfulness to Christ. The themes explored cover judgment; grace; faith, hope and trust; forgiveness; redemption; risk; stewardship; and hospitality.

It was very refreshing to read about the rigors of organisational life but through the lens of discipleship and faithfulness. Often, organisational realities—such as meeting budgets, managing risk, or the pursuit of growth, seem to (understandably) take centre stage. However, that is precisely why it was so heartening to read of approaching important issues like risk, or stewardship, through the lens of faithfulness to Christ first. For example, here is a pointed question asked around the idea of stewardship, "How often do those of us within Christian

organisations appear to be more afraid of losing money or failing financially than doing something that so obviously advances God’s kingdom?” (p.87).

Exploring how each of these themes could operate in the organisation will take hard work—not only to produce the statement of organisational theology, but also to ensure it is used well to guide key decisions and help maintain faithfulness to Christ. Whilst they believe this work must be carried out by “a small group of committed and theologically literate Christians, men and women who have demonstrated the mind of Christ in their decision-making and who clearly seek to mirror and follow Jesus” (p.109), I couldn’t help but appreciate their urging to seek out experienced professionals who are theologically trained to help. Organisations will often engage external people experienced in developing policies and manuals, so, “...it is somewhat confounding to us that when boards or executives come to things like a theological statement or set of statements, the board, or chief executive suddenly become DIY...like so many DIY jobs around the house—at least around our houses—the result is pretty ordinary, or even potentially dangerous!” (pp. 110–111).

Keeping Faith has numerous, very practical examples of Organisational Faithfulness and what a contextual Organisational Theological Statement could look like. Furthermore, the final chapter has a checklist for areas to watch out for that could indicate that the organisation is slipping from its faithfulness to Christ and partnership with God’s mission in the world.

I think one area that could have been addressed is the actual implementation of the Organisational theological statement by leaders and staff of the organisation. Once the statement is complete, how does one actively ensure that it is being weaved throughout the organisation? Today’s organisational leadership has so many challenges and complexities to face that this could easily be under-prioritised and fail to be rooted in its culture. Perhaps having an illustration or two of how senior leadership and middle management have practically embedded it into the ethos of the organisation—taken it from paper to having it operationalised by people in every department—would, in my opinion, strengthen the book.

I would heartily recommend this book for anyone concerned about the practice of leadership or governance in the way of Christ. More specifically, I would encourage boards and executive teams (whether in the marketplace or the church) to read it together, to wrestle with its implications, and to act on the results. If it is true that faithfulness to Christ is really the measure of our success—and I believe that it is—it requires our utmost efforts. As 2 Peter 1:10 states, “...make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble.” What is true of the individual, is also true of the organisation that seeks to remain faithful to Jesus.

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