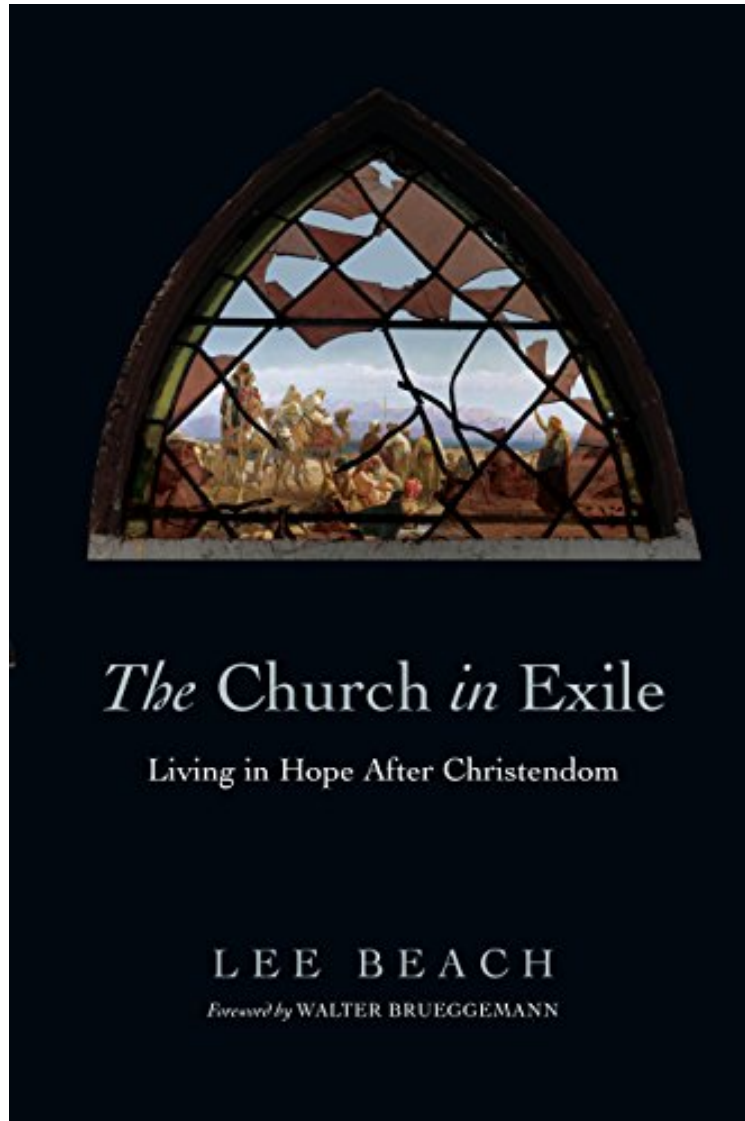


(Free download) The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom

The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom

Lee Beach

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Lee Beach : The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is an important study of God's work in and ...By ScottThis is an important study of God's work in and through His people who find themselves in exilic type experiences.5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A word of hope for an exiled churchBy Robert CornwallThe image of the church in exile is taken up by Lee Beach, an assistant professor of Christian Ministry at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, as an image of hope for the church. Even as God was with the exiles in the biblical story,

God is with us as well as we enter this new post-Christendom era. While Beach uses the image of exile to stir our prophetic imagination, Walter Brueggemann points out that the texts he chooses actually emerge out of the Diaspora. The difference between exile and Diaspora, is that with exile there is an expectation of a return to normalcy. With the Diaspora, there is a new normalcy of living and practicing ones faith far from home. Brueggemann writes that Exile might be a hope of recovery for the way the church used to be, whereas Diaspora is a recognition that there will not be any return home and there will not be a recovery of any old normalcy (p. 12). Thus, while the term exile is used here, there is clearly a sense in this book that we will never return to the former normalcy. With Brueggemann's helpful caveat in mind we are ushered into Beach's provocative exploration of the biblical story of exile and diasporas, old and new, which is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the development of a theology of exile, with special attention given to Esther, Daniel, Jonah, the ministry of Jesus, and the wisdom of 1 Peter. One of the key points in expositing the idea of exile is that God is to be seen as present on foreign soil. The earlier symbols of divine presence the land, the Davidic monarchy, and the Temple were gone. These markers of their identity as a people had been stripped away from them. But in the midst of their despair came assuring words of hope from the prophets who declared that God had not abandoned them. If this is true, then they must attend to holiness and mission. The biblical stories that emerged, including those of Esther and Daniel demonstrated that Jewish men and women could thrive in their displaced context and even rise to places of significant influence (p. 66). It is important to note that even though Beach is an evangelical he understands that stories such as Esther and Daniel may be fictional in nature, but are designed to give advice/wisdom to people living in foreign lands, but seeking to be faithful. Thus, they are much like parables. Jonah represents a somewhat different focus, as in this story the prophet seems unwilling to give a hated enemy the opportunity to repent and receive the mercy God desired to show to the Ninevites. Christians, Beach suggests, have the opportunity to learn from these advice tales about who we are as well as who God is in the context of our situation in the modern Western world. One of the primary lessons we learn from the three Old Testament stories that emerge out of the Diaspora, is that at least for Esther and Daniel, it is possible to adapt and assimilate into a culture without compromising ones faith. By doing so, they offer a witness of faithfulness to God (even if the name of God is never mentioned in Esther). While the books of Nehemiah and Ezra, addressed to returned exiles, condemns intermarriage, Esther uses her marriage to the Persian king to benefit her people. Beach interprets the story of Jesus in light of Second Temple messianic expectations, including stories found in Enoch. Jesus becomes the image of restoration, so that exile concludes in his life and ministry. The messianic hope has arrived. This is picked up in 1 Peter, which pictures the church as being the new Israel. The church is a spiritual house, and a kingdom of priests. With this new identity the Christian is to embrace holiness and mission in the world, which is expressed primarily in the context of social relationships characterized by mutual submission (p. 131). While many read the household codes in a hierarchical manner, he sees them as a call to subvert the normal ways of living by balancing calls for submission on both sides husband/wife, master/slave, parent/child. Thus, 1 Peter serves as an advice tale for the church. Having laid the theological foundations by examining the witness of Diasporic advice tales and the New Testament witness, Beach begins to lay out the practical implications of this theology. He speaks of the call to leadership and the importance of leaders to engage in prophetic imagination. In this new context leaders need to define reality being honest about where we find ourselves. It does the church no good to continue reassuring the people that given time well get back to the age of Christendom. With this the imagination can be unleashed to create new ways of living and doing mission. This will require a responsive theology, one that addresses new realities as Peter discovered in his encounter with Cornelius. Our theological work involves accommodation without compromise (as is seen in the story of Daniel). Orthopraxy becomes central, rather than orthodoxy. This effort requires attention to holiness. By holiness he means keeping track of the difference between accommodation and compromise. It means living in the world, but not letting the world define our values and practices. This leads to mission that is defined by relationships. As an evangelical, he reminds us that part of mission is evangelism. The book moves toward its primary point and that is this the hope we take hold of is one of restoration. While we will never return to the old normalcy, there is an eschatological vision that is rooted in Gods vision of a new heaven and a new earth. It is a vision of a better world that is to come, but which God is already seeding in the present. We get to participate in this work! This is a call to embrace our new reality, one of displacement and marginalization. That sounds like bad news, but in reality it is good news because we can put our trust and find our identity in God and not our place Christendom, which is really a false hope.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Helpful Next Step in the Missional Journey By Noel Walker In *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom*, Lee Beach brings exile to light as a powerful paradigm for ministry in the Post-modern West. I have plenty of books on my shelf that explain that Christendom is over (well duh!) and a couple that argue that it isn't done yet (?) but Beach's book is one of the first (and one of the best) that explores the conversation of "what now?" In the introduction, Brueggemann helps to make it clear that the church in the West is in exile, it is now located far from the seat of power, but unlike the example of Israel in Babylon, we're not going home any time soon. Beach develops a rich theology of exile by looking at exilic texts from the OT (Esther, Daniel and Jonah) and the NT (1 Peter) and then explores practices of exile that the church can lean into. Beach identifies helpful themes (Thinking like Exiles, Holiness as an Exilic Identity, and Engaging Culture as Exiles) and

develops them in the context of a hope filled, missional imagination. This is the beginning of missional 2.0, a welcome contribution to the conversation that goes beyond the flannel shirts and hip coffee shops and helps the church "honestly name its true cultural circumstances." (p. 233)

The people of God throughout history have been a people of exile and diaspora. Whether under the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks or Romans, the people chosen by God have had to learn how to be a holy people in alien lands and under foreign rule. For much of its history, however, the Christian church lived with the sense of being at home in the world, with considerable influence and power. That age of Christendom is now over, and as Lee Beach demonstrates, this is something for which the church should be grateful. The "peace" of Christendom was a false one, and there is no comfortable normalcy to which we can or should return. Drawing on a close engagement with Old Testament and New Testament texts, *The Church in Exile* offers a biblical and practical theology for the church in a post-Christian age. Beach helps the people of God today to develop a hopeful and prophetic imagination, a theology responsive to its context, and an exilic identity marked by faithfulness to God's mission in the world.

"Bravo! An excellent and highly readable introduction to the metaphor of exile to describe the church's place in contemporary Western culture. Lee Beach challenges us to come to terms with the church's identity as exiles in post-Christianity, to embrace the challenge for creative theological reflection funded by a prophetic missional imagination, to drastically break with traditional models of church life and to bravely launch ourselves as the people of God into this new world." (Michael Frost, author of *Exiles, The Road to Missional and Incarnate*) "In this outstanding book, Lee Beach invites us to discover Scripture's rich theology of exile, forged in the experience of Israel and the early church. But he also challenges an increasingly marginalized church in the West to come to terms with its own situation of exile. Lee Beach argues persuasively that the biblical motif of exile can help Christian communities to reimagine their identity and mission. For Beach, exile is a place of reorientation and hope, which demands an adventuresome faith. Academically sound, but with a strong practical orientation, this timely book has the potential to revitalize how we live out God's mission in a new cultural landscape. Christian leaders and local congregations alike need to hear and heed its challenge." (Dean Flemming, MidAmerica Nazarene University, author, *Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling*) "With great care and serious scholarship, Lee Beach writes about the demise of Christendom and what Christians should do about it. Read this book and weep . . . or see the church with new hope like you've never seen it before. For me, I ended up with the latter and am extremely grateful for having read it." (David Fitch, Northern Seminary, author of *Prodigal Christianity*) "This is a realistic yet profoundly hope-filled account of contemporary, post-Christian, fragmented society and the nature and role of the church in its exilic state. Grounded in thorough biblical exposition, Beach normalizes this state, and in fact suggests that the church is most healthy and most true to its missional identity when it 'digs the ground' it is on! Lee Beach has made a significant contribution to the 'church in exile' literature by fleshing out what it means for said church to live into its true identity. All church leaders should have this book in their arsenal!" (Ross Hastings, Regent College, author of *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West*) "Beach's assessment is surely correct. His book invites church leaders to recognize where God has now put the church. The work of new leadership in terms of hope, imagination and missional vision is to be about the business of 'defining reality' in ways that violate, subvert and transgress all old definitions of reality. Specifically this means to contradict the dominant definitions of reality that oppose gospel truth. Such leaders will anticipate that such new definitions of reality will be vigorously contested, outside the congregation and within it. Anything less than that work will end in irrelevance and despair. This book is a rich exercise in hope!" (From the foreword by Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary) "While Beach writes from the context of the Western Church, he highlights the heritage of the Historic Church's exilic experiences such that they apply to any Christian community feeling culturally marginalized. Therefore, both the theology and practices of exile this book outlines will serve any Christian community seeking to live well in exile." (Zach Howard, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 2016) "The heart of the book, an eloquently written tour through motifs of exile in the Old and New Testaments, is well worth reading. . . . his reading of the Bible itself is persuasive and valuable." (Graham Christian, *Library Journal*, March 1, 2015) "Instead of pining for a lost Christendom, Lee Beach offers the North American church a deeply biblical model for ecclesial identity and mission that is addressed to our contemporary situation of 'exile.' His nuanced exegesis of Old Testament diaspora tales, his exploration of the mission of Jesus in the context of Second Temple Judaism and his profound analysis of 1 Peter speak powerfully to the church in a post-Christian context. We have much to learn from Beach's insights about holy, missional and hopeful Christian living from the margins." (J. Richard Middleton, Northeastern Seminary, Roberts Wesleyan College) "Moving from the center to the margins is an increasing reality for the church in the West. Beach develops a thoughtful theology and praxis of what it means to live as the people of God in exile. If you desire to be a community that is 'intrinsically missional,' then apply the wisdom Beach gives us in developing a prophetic imagination, a responsive theology and an exilic identity as we engage our context in light of God's future." (JR Woodward, national director, V3 Church Planting Movement, author, *Creating a Missional Culture*) "With profound biblical scope and theological depth, Lee Beach provides wise counsel

for a church in exile. Rooted in a serious re-engagement of the biblical motif of exile, Beach engenders an exilic imagination that suggests creative ways for the church to find its identity anew. Here we find a biblical scholarship in service of the church and a church in service of the creation-wide renewal of the world. Exile is both a deep threat and an opportunity for the most creative theological reflection and communal praxis. Beach helps us to navigate these treacherous waters with a compelling pastoral sensibility." (Brian Walsh, Christian Reformed Church campus minister, University of Toronto)

About the Author Lee Beach (PhD, McMaster Divinity College) is assistant professor of Christian ministry, director of ministry formation and Garbutt F. Smith Chair of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, where he teaches courses on pastoral ministry, mission, the church in culture and spirituality. Lee has pastored for over twenty years with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada and has written articles for publications such as *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, *Religions Journal* and *Cultural Encounters: A Journal for the Theology of Culture*.