

**The Faith of Leap:
Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure & Courage**

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch
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Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch have once again taken the task to challenge the church to move beyond safety and to engage the world. In their book *The Faith of Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure and Courage* they set out to create a theology of risk. In this regard they did not create a theological text, but a work that does take seriously their claim: "All disciples of Jesus (not just a select few) are called to an ongoing, risky, actional, extravagant way of life – a life resonant with that distinctly wild – and yes, *Christlike* – faithfulness of their Lord and Master." (17).

Frost and Hirsch cannot be overlooked in regards to the praxis and theology of mission in post-modernity. As pastors and missiologists, they first published their book *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Hendrickson Publishers), which quickly became a seminal text for the missional church. They collaborated in a second book, *ReJesus*, and have come together yet again for *The Faith of Leap*. Between each effort both authors have published books challenging the church to embrace its mission follow Jesus and engage culture with the Gospel.

Hirsch writes in the preface of *Faith of Leap*, “There is painfully little exploration on the associated subject of risk, liminality, and *communitas*, and its implications in the life of faith and in leadership.” (13) Yet the authors believe that it is in the wildness, and in the liminal moments that one truly experiences God. It is in *communitas* that one experiences the church. Christianity needs a renewal of vigor because it serves a dynamic and adventurous God.

Liminality in relationship with Christ is essential for true missional ministry. “Liminality is the term [Frost and Hirsch] use to describe a threshold experience...a transitional stage between what was and what is to come.” (19)

A leader who embraces the risk of liminality:

- creates emotionally compelling experiences involving people spiritually not just intellectually.
- models an urgency in their behavior on an ongoing basis.
- looks for the possibilities in crisis.
- confronts naysayers effectively.
- keeps urgency urgent by providing leadership for smart change. (41f)

Liminality is dangerous, marginal and disorienting. It is the product of change and response to change. Missional churches that do not ride the change – the space of liminality, become obsolete or irrelevant. Those who are willing to embrace risk in the journey between what was and what will be, those who create a “missional urgency,” are those who will help form the church of the twenty-first century.

The authors rehash their previous works by noting that historical church growth came as the result of dynamic, outward-facing communities. These communities embrace the liminality of their situation, producing what the authors adopt from Victor Turner, *communitas*. *Communitas* is more than what is defined as community; rather it communicates a fellowship or deep comradeship, like that of those who have undergone trial together. Draw from Turner, they state that where normal society might be considered structure, *communitas* is anti-structure. (57)

Hirsch and Frost are not proponents of *communitas* without community. They do not promote solely the chaos necessary to form *communitas*, but rather a true society cannot exist without the dialectic of the two. A Christian community without rituals and history would not really be a church, but a church that clings solely to rituals or history ceases to be a church when never engaging its ever-changing mission. Frost and Hirsch go so far as to say, “Building community for its own sake is like attending a cancer support group without having cancer...it’s like a church demanding allegiance and weekly attendance without linking its attenders with a cause to which they can give their lives.” (117)

One of the most important chapters of the book is titled “Getting Over Risk Aversion.” In the chapter Frost and Hirsch discuss loss aversion, the removal of risk within society, and leadership with the risk-averse. “People resist mission because they are under-disciplined, but they are also under-disciplined because of the absence of any missional challenge.” (139) Lest a leader fears that spending too much time on mission takes people away from biblical preparation, “take people into mission,

confront them with the risk of godly service, and we guarantee they will be desperate for a biblical perspective on life.” (139)

The authors’ theology of risk is a practical theology, utilizing the marks of the church. These marks, with a Trinitarian center, are: mission, community, discipleship, and worship. They stress the importance of placing mission as the catalytic mark of the church. They do not wish that mission takes priority over the other three, but that mission serves as the best catalyst for all. With mission as the catalyst for worship, they claim that worship becomes a “world-redeeming missional affair;” when missions is the catalyst for discipleship, it is not piety, but God working in and through the disciple’s life; and when missions is the catalyst for community, the community recognizes not its own self-importance but that it exists for the world. (172)

Ultimately this book motivates congregations to move from comfort to liminality, to come together in a posture of confidence, and to build communality. This book can be especially helpful for ministry and mission internship programs providing students a primer for the life that interns will come to live. It is also the answer that some adventurous, restless youth crave as they begin in ministry and discipleship.

Frost and Hirsh are passionate about the mission of the church and see that without being willing to take risks, without embracing the liveliness of God and the adventure of the Christian life, the church exists outside of mission and is therefore not the church. Frost and Hirsch are dramatic; embracing their risky understanding of church and mission means living a congregational life of adventure.

What is most appropriate about their work is that the authors do not espouse a cookie-cutter methodology. Mission is contextual. Risk is contextual. Adventure is contextual. In their chapter about neighborliness, they suggest exegeting local culture. Each neighborhood, each community is different. No one package will work even among similar demographics. Their lack of prescription for the missional church is exactly what places each congregation in the chaotic margins of their locale. Pre-packaged programs are not adventurous. The old adage “missionary go home” comes out of the idea of engaging culture without exegesis – without truly engaging and learning from the context. Frost and Hirsch rather suggest that the missionary “grow home;” (193) one can only do so by being present and embracing the context of the local.

As mentioned above, this book would be valuable for ministerial interns and domestic missionaries. It would also be valuable for training international missionaries. International missions is often equated with risk and adventure, especially in some parts of the world. Yet international missionaries are accused of bringing in their external package, mitigating risk and dampening chaos. Where predecessors once hiked in jungles without trails to deliver God’s message of the Kingdom – truly an adventure – missionaries today have it much easier. A Latin colleague commented to me (and convicted me) that missionaries can easily watch their favorite sports from home, drink their favorite drinks, eat their favorite foods and utterly ignore their local contexts, living in a virtual world of home and safety. Frost and Hirsch remind

domestic and international missionaries that the Kingdom is not a virtual world, but a global-local reality. God's message is only heard in engagement.

A community living mission is a community entering into chaos with a message that God is Emmanuel – God with us. The church is charged with living mission. In chaos there is risk. In chaos there is liminality. In liminality there is *communitas*. In *communitas* there is adventure. Frost and Hirsch's missional vision of the church is to engage risk, enter into the local and live the adventure.