



Marketplace Moments

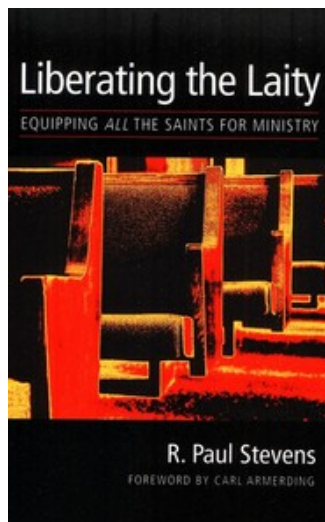
Bibliophoria

Liberating the Laity By R. Paul Stevens

The priesthood of all believers has been a fundamental doctrine of protestant churches since the reformation but is little practiced today. There was someone who previously said to me that we have "moved from the tyranny of the pope to the dictatorship of the pulpit." Though that may not be entirely true, it does reflect the dominance of the clergy in churches today. The deeply ingrained sacred-secular divide and the lack of affirmation for everyday believers in their calling and ministry at the marketplace is deafeningly silent.

One of the biggest problem is the lack of our lack of ability as churches to visualize or imagine what a church is like where ALL her members are involved in ministry (serving God both in the church and in the world). I like the tagline of the book: 'equipping ALL the saints for ministry'. Even if there is an agreement that we need to empower believers to ministry in everyday life, even if we see every believer as a missionary to their workplace and community, most pastors and church leaders have no idea how to go about the endeavor.

The book is honest about the process and resistance to change. Stevens share his own experience and the ups and down of the process. Stevens does lays out a framework which is simple but requires a radical look at how we are 'doing' or 'organizing' church. This may require some



adaptation in different ecclesiastical structures or denominations but it does clearly provide a way forward.

Being a theologian, the book not only provides the practical side on how we can liberate the laity within the church, but he provides sound biblical references and justifications for why those actions are necessary.

One of the radical chapters in the book that may ruffle more than a few is the call for the abolition of the laity. I concur that the clergy-laity separation is one major barrier, unnecessary and unhealthy distinction that hampers the effectiveness and growth of the global church. This does not negate the roles of the five-fold gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the church as equippers of the people of God.

This book requires a slow read like sipping on fine coffee or vintage wine to fully appreciate many of the biblical paradigms that are different of what is currently practiced.

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Of the Heart and Mind

Challenge of Prosperity

In a recent survey done by the Institute of South East Asian Studies reported in the MyPaper writes, 'Church going protestants from mega-churches to view money or wealth as an indication of God's blessing, a survey found. About two in three, or 67 percent, of respondents from megachurches felt that God will bless them with tangible rewards, such as money and material goods, if they give to their church.'

Personally, I have found the reporting from the Zaobao (早报) more balanced and objective. Also, I am not in anyway saying that local megachurches are all promoting the prosperity gospel but only seek to bring awareness to the dangers of prosperity Gospel and the need for a balanced and biblical approach.

The Capetown Commitment writes, '*The widespread preaching and teaching of 'prosperity gospel' around the world raises significant concerns. We define prosperity gospel as the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds' through financial or material gifts. Prosperity teaching is a phenomenon that cuts across many denominations in all continents.'*

This is not an isolated phenomenon of well-to-do Singapore but also among the poor populations in South America, Africa and

Asia. However, it is utterly wrong to believe that we can manipulate God through a set of method or practices to extract tangible rewards.

Further in the Capetown Commitment, '*We affirm the miraculous grace and power of God, and we welcome the growth of churches and ministries that lead people to exercise expectant faith in the living God and his supernatural power. We believe in the power of the Holy spirit. However, we deny that God's miraculous power can be treated as automatic, or at the disposal of human techniques, or manipulated by human words, actions, gifts, objects, or rituals.'*

'We affirm that there is a biblical vision of human prospering, and that the Bible includes material welfare (both health and wealth) within its teaching about the blessings of God. However, we deny unbiblical teaching that spiritual welfare can be measured in terms of material welfare, or that wealth is always a sign of God's blessing. The Bible shows that wealth can often be obtained by oppression, deceit or corruption. We also deny that poverty, illness or early death are always a sign of God's curse, or evidence of lack of faith, or the results of human curses, since the Bible rejects such simplistic explanations.'

'We accept that it is good to exalt the power and victory of God. But we believe that the teachings of many who vigorously



promote the prosperity gospel seriously distort the Bible; that their practices and lifestyle are often unethical and un-Christ-like; that they commonly replace genuine evangelism with miracle-seeking, and replace the call to repentance with the call to give money to the preacher's organization. We grieve that the impact of this teaching on many churches is pastorally damaging and spiritually unhealthy. We gladly and strongly affirm every initiative in Christ's name that seeks to bring healing to the sick, and lasting deliverance from poverty and suffering. The prosperity gospel offers no lasting solution to poverty, and can deflect people from the true message and means of eternal salvation. For these reasons it can be soberly described as a false gospel. We therefore reject the excesses of prosperity teaching as incompatible with balanced biblical Christianity.'

In the account of Jesus' temptation, our Lord categorically rejected the avenues in which the Gospel is to be advanced.

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Eyes in a Darkened Room

Bucket List

Two of my favorite actors and heavy weights join hands in this 2007 drama-comedy which popularized the use of the phrase 'Bucket List' as thins to do before one passes on in life or before one 'kick the bucket'.

Blue-collar mechanic Carter Chambers (Morgan Freeman) and billionaire hospital magnate Edward Cole (Jack Nicholson) meet for the first time in the hospital after both have been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Although Edward is reluctant to share a room with Carter, complaining that he "looks half-dead already", they become friends as they undergo their respective treatments. Carter is a gifted amateur historian and family man who had wanted to become a history professor in his youth, had been "black, broke, [and with a] baby on the way" and, thus, never rose above his status as a mechanic at the McCreath body shop. Carter loves showing off his knowledge and

his favorite show is *Jeopardy!*. Edward is a four-time divorced health-care tycoon and cultured loner who enjoys nothing more than tormenting his personal valet/servant, Thomas (Sean Hayes), who later reveals his name is actually Matthew. Edward prefers to call him Thomas because he finds the name Matthew "too biblical". Edward enjoys drinking Kopi Luwak, one of the most expensive coffees in the world. (From Wikipedia)

They became friends and drew up a 'bucket list' of things to do before their deaths. It was also a journey of discovering themselves, their own regrets and longings.

The script writers also brings together a sharp contrast of the two main characters, not only in their personality, but philosophy and view of life. Thought the plot can be somewhat predictable, it is the process of the story, the performance of Free-



man and Nicholson that make the movie both funny and thought provoking at the same time.

Many of us are perhaps at jobs or life situation that are less than ideal. There is a sense of being trapped like Carter in the movie. Others like Edward is enjoying the 'rolling good times' but in fact yearning for a deeper connection. I believe, at the end of the movie, we need to ask of ourselves the question, "What is important to us in this life that we now live?"

Perhaps many of us has been told about many things that are suppose to be important. Some of us may know it but may not have felt it. It is my hope the we do not become terminally ill before we answer this question. Perhaps we really need to ask of ourselves, what do we truly believe about "What gives us meaning and satisfaction to this life?" (Timothy Liu)



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By rejecting to turn stones in to bread, He rejected the way to bring the Gospel through materialism and consumerism, for people will never be filled with enough money, food or other material wants.

By rejecting to jump off the top of the temple, He rejected the way to bring the Gospel through miraculous signs and wonders, for people are always yearning to seek thrill of the next new thing.

By rejecting to worship Satan by receiving the powers of the world, He rejected the way to bring the Gospel through political institution and coercions, for people will be corrupted by power.

Jesus chose the way of love and sacrifice, the path which brings no wealth, health but shame and suffering. But at the same time, Jesus uses the five loaves and two fishes to feed the five thousands, turned water into wine. He healed the sick, the lame to walk, the blind to see. He spoke publically against the abuses of authority by the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin and spoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and taught us

to pray, 'thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'.

We are not in the situation of either or but rather what takes precedence. The message of Jesus who so loved the world that he died on the Cross for our sins is so that His people are to repent and live a witness of humility, integrity and simplicity. Health and wealth are to be received as graces from above with a responsibility of being stewards of that which is entrusted to us. 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.' (Luke 12:48). A warning to those of us who teaches from the bible, 'Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly' (James 3:1).

We must resist being reactive to the situation and avoid the pendulum swing to the other extreme. May we be wise in our dealings and promote solid biblical teaching throughout our churches in Singapore.

Timothy Liu