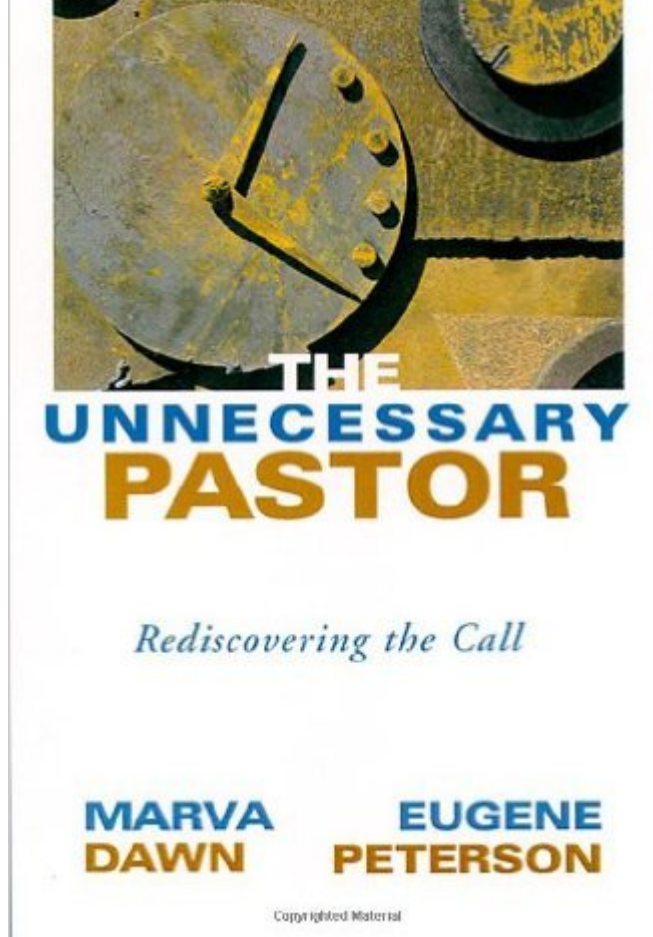


## **Review by John G. Panagiotou of The Unnecessary Pastor - Part I (John G. Panagiotou)**

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



In Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson's book *The Unnecessary Pastor*, we are given an insight into the plight of contemporary pastoral leadership. Originally, the title of this book was taken from a Regent College church leaders' conference which was led by the authors. The authors provide us with the following stunning thesis: the clergy and churches are in crisis today in large part due to an identity crisis in how the culture, congregations, and the clergy themselves view and regard their respective call, role and function.



In the book, the focus is on the Pastoral

Epistles (I & II Timothy, Titus) of what pastoral ministry ought to be through the lens of the larger framework of the Letter to the Ephesians. Petersen recreates for the reader the Greco-Roman world and historical context of Paul, Timothy and Titus in a vivid manner. It is within this context that we see how truly counter-cultural the Gospel (Good News) message was in the first century and is in today's world. It is a message that proclaims and calls all people to belief in the literal Resurrection of Jesus through a radical life change of repentance and baptism. Thus, this new life in Christ was a challenge and a threat in the Apostolic age to the societal status quo and remains a challenge and a threat to the societal status quo in our modern times. Dawn and Peterson note that, "The Christian community is an alternative society." [1]

With this understanding, Petersen and Dawn assert that what is needed in today's Church, is to rediscover and reclaim the ancient Apostolic perspective, form and practice of ministry as expressed in the New Testament. Petersen states emphatically that the inner communion of the Three Persons of the Trinity should be the image for the ministry model that the clergy should seek to emulate and not to conform to the standards set by the worldly culture. The end result of the former

is for the pastor to become a faithful and effective Christ-centered servant leader. Hence, the pastor becomes “unnecessary” to the success of the local church. Whereas, the end result of the latter is for the pastor to fall into the secular worldly-based model of ministry by becoming a manager, marketer, entertainer and therapist.[2] Thus, the pastor becomes “necessary” to the success of the local church by subscribing to a pastor-centric focus. It is this goal of making clergy unnecessary to which the book has as its primary aim. This is a move which necessitates a transition from a form of culturally-determined managerial professionalism to a Biblically-determined pastoral leadership.

This problem is created by three components which when succumbed to derail the primary focus and function of the pastoral ministry. These are: yielding to what the culture defines as important; yielding to what the pastor defines as important; and yielding to what the congregation defines as important.[3] When these criteria and their attending mindset are present, a ‘corporate business model’ of the Church manifests itself. As the authors note, “with hardly an exception they don’t want pastors at all – they want managers of their religious company.”[4]

This is problematic in many ways, but particularly in light of the fact of the increasing acceptance in the Church of the pastor as a sort of “CEO”. This secular notion diminishes the pastor’s apostolic calling. The ways of the world displace the scriptural worldview. It flies in the face of sound doctrine by making the pastor into a hireling who can be dismissed at will based upon human personal whim and not with an understanding of the pastor as the custodian of the truth of the Gospel. This work provides a clarion call to renew, retrain, and refocus the mindset of pastors to be the counter-cultural servant-leaders of Christ they were intended to be.

*(to be continued)*

**[1] Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Petersen, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 215.**

**[2] Dawn and Petersen, 61.**

**[3] Dawn and Petersen, 4.**

**[4] Ibid.**