

23 Φεβρουαρίου 2017

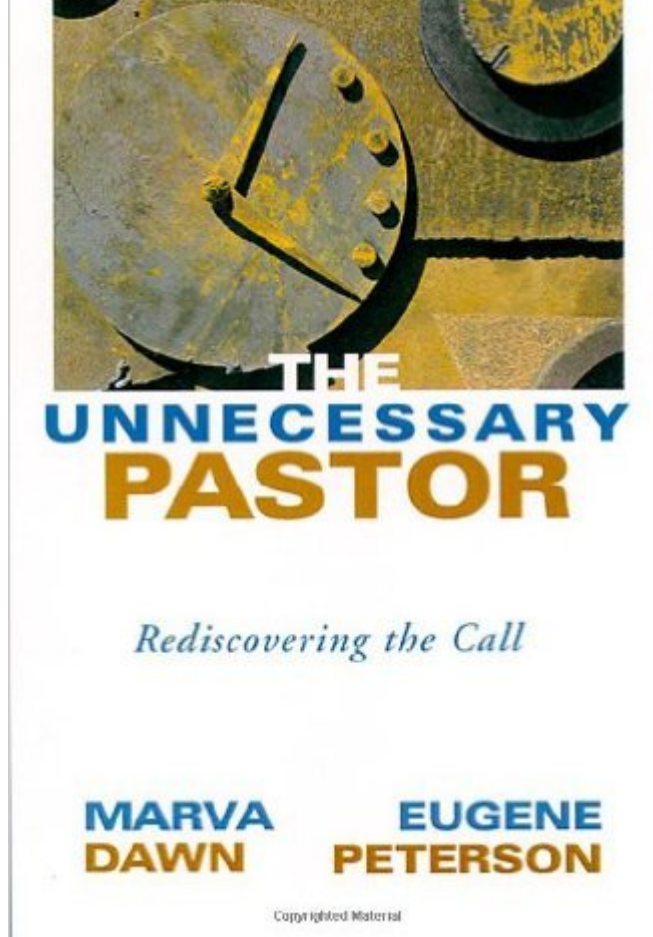
Review by John G. Panagiotou of The Unnecessary Pastor - Part II (John G. Panagiotou)

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English



[Previous post: <http://bit.ly/2lc5wCx>]

Of the several ministry-related issues which are raised in the book, I think that two have particular relevance to me in my ministry experience in light of the Pastoral Epistles and the Letter to the Ephesians.



The first issue that I see as relevant to my

ministry is the need for ministry to be rooted on the Apostolic model and to resist the secular mindset which is permeating local churches and denominational jurisdictions. The congregation should not set the tone, scope or nature of the pastor's ministry. By mere definition, it shouldn't because it can't. Ontologically, the pastor's call is of Apostolic origin. As the authors rightly observe, "Everybody and his dog has a job description for the pastor. Everybody knows what a pastor must do to be a real pastor. That's a problem, but what complicates and compounds it is that it's nice to be so needed, nice to have culture and congregation alike interested in defining our work and giving us instructions on how to go about it. It's nice to be so much in demand." [1] As a result, the focus becomes the pastor and his ministry instead of Jesus and His work. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy, "fan the flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands". [2] The nature of the work of the pastor is not to be defined by the culture, congregation or the pastor himself, but by the Lord.

The second issue that I see as relevant to my ministry is the need for the local church to proclaim the divinely revealed message of the Good News in an unashamed, uncompromised way to a world that not only is disinterested in it, but

is often hostile to it. When a congregation negates its evangelical mission-minded vocation, it gains a preoccupation with everything else of the world except for the preaching of the Gospel. Hence, by virtue of this situation, the pastor's "job description" changes.

The pastor is not really viewed as and expected to be a proclaimer of the Truth, but rather a socio-religious community caretaker and organizer. Paul would go on to advise Timothy to, "Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching".[3] The Church and its leadership today have willingly become subordinated to the influence and narrative of the secular culture. In Ephesians, it is precisely this mindset that the Apostle Paul rails against. He writes, 'Look carefully then how you walk not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil.'[4]

Both of the above mentioned aspects involve being Biblically-rooted in sound doctrine. Paul writes to Titus, "teach what accords with sound doctrine." [5] This is the overarching theme and emphasis that we find in the Pastoral Epistles. Without sound doctrine, one falls into heresy and/or apostasy. Thus, in the Pauline view of things, one's ministry is compromised and mutedly ineffectual. Dawn and Peterson explain this in the following way, "the early Christians did not try to translate their faith into something that was accessible to the world's darkened understanding. What they did instead was to engage in a way of life that was so different from the world that their neighbors wanted to be part of it." [6] It is this missiological expression of Christian witness which typifies the Biblical New Testament model of the local church and its outreach to the world.

I see this time and time again in church communities within my own Greek Orthodox faith tradition; yet, these problems are not relegated to one group but rather are inter-denominational. In a recent article in a Greek-American publication, I read the following where the writer accurately describes the lamentable state of today's Greek Orthodox clergy, "A priest is considered successful only when he manages to collect more and more money. Unfortunately, our priests today have become some kind of religious tax-collectors." [7]

The above situation is appalling, disturbing and scandalous on a variety of levels. Now contrast this with what Dawn and Peterson say about their ministry model, "We have to scrap most of what we are told today about leadership. Forget about charisma, go for character [8]...Whenever money pulls churches away from their God-given purposes, then it is functioning as Mammon." [9]

Very often, if one were to walk in off the street into a church social gathering, he would see no different behavior amongst its members than say a meeting of the Rotary, Lions Club, Elks or any other civic organization. The point is that the church is not living up to its true calling and potential when it seeks to fit in with the world instead of seeking to please God. This is in direct opposition to what the scriptural record of how the early ancient New Testament Church operated.

(to be continued)

[1] Dawn and Peterson, 184.

[2] II Timothy 1:6

[3] II Timothy 4:2

[4] Ephesians 5:15

[5] Titus 2:1

[6] Dawn and Peterson, 160.

[7] Theodore Kalmoukos, "Parish Council Elections and Indifference," The National Herald (December 13, 2016).

[8] Dawn and Peterson, 20.

[9] Dawn and Peterson, 110-11.