

# Stewardship: A Biblical

Consider with me two situations. The first involves a young man, recently married, who is a member of a large, financially stable congregation. As we talked one afternoon, the course of our conversation turned to stewardship at his church. "However," he quickly added, "the church is 'well off' anyway and does not need my support."

The second situation involves a pastor of a church which is not "well off". As he related some of his frustrations in trying to finance his church, he almost pleaded for someone to suggest some creative way to get his people to give.

In recounting these incidents, it is not my intent to render judgment on the individual situations and decisions of these two persons. However, these examples illustrate that both laity and clergy lack understanding and appreciation of the biblical practice of stewardship. In a day of sky rocketing inflation and the rapid multiplication of fiscal responsibilities, it is easy for us to call into question a method as "archaic" as that of the Bible. Yet, I am convinced that to do so is to do serious harm to the church.

A study of the biblical teaching on stewardship has reassured me, once again, that it is the divinely approved method of supporting His church. The primary indication of this is the redemptive role this method can play in the lives of the individual Christian--a role that no other method can fill.

In a real sense, from the standpoint of the individual Christian to give money for the wrong reason or for a poorly understood reason can be worse than not to give at all. If this is true, it should sound a warning to pastor and congregation alike as they plan the finances of their church. They should have an adequate understanding of the biblical teaching on stewardship. In line with this I present three points as indicative of that biblical understanding.

First, it must be seen that stewardship is not simply a subsidiary part of the Christian life but rather an expression of the essence of that life. To see this we must first recall the essence of sin. In Genesis 3:5 we find that the temptation offered Eve was that she might be "like God." In many ways this little phrase expresses exactly what did happen. The essence of sin is the desire on the part of man to be Creator rather than

creature; Savior rather than the recipient of salvation; self-sufficient rather than dependent upon God for everything. As Christ suggests, it expresses itself in the "worrying about tomorrow" rather than relying on God.

In contrast, the Bible calls man to return to a relationship with God where he is willing to allow God to be God and Christ to be Lord. Man must accept his place as creature. Stewardship of finances plays its most significant role at this point. The biblical reason for giving of one's resources (a tenth is the biblically suggested guideline) is in recognition that everything one has comes from God. Truly man is creature not Creator. It is not then a case of man giving a tithe on his possessions, but rather giving a tithe on God's possessions which have been entrusted to him. The remaining nine-tenths are to be used to the glory and service of God as well (cf. Gen. 28:22, I Cor. 8:9, Matt. 25:14f).

Second, not only is stewardship an expression of the rulership of God, it also demonstrates the thanksgiving and love of His people for His redemptive activity. In Exodus 19:3-4 we have an important passage where God reminds Israel of all that He has done for them. He then details the response He desires from them and the blessing He will bestow if they do respond. Among the responses mentioned are the dedication of the first-fruits to the Lord, or as Leviticus 27:30 puts it, "the tithe of the land is the Lord's." It is His, not just because He is God, but because of what He has done for us.

If this be true in the Old Testament, how much more in the New Testament, where God's supreme activity in our behalf is portrayed. As I John 4:9-10 reminds us, our response to His love is to love both Him and our brothers. Paul suggests in II Corinthians 8:8, the giving of our financial means is one way of proving the earnestness of our love. Thus stewardship should be a joyful expression of our thankfulness for our salvation in Christ. There is no room here for the begrudging giving because "your pastor says so" or "everybody else does it." I would again suggest that if the tithe is not given for the right reason it may as well not be given. Its importance is not merely to bring money into the Church, but also to help in the development of the mature Christian character of the person bringing it.

Third, one must notice not only the reason



# Understanding

for giving of the tithe, but also its use. In the Old Testament we find two main uses made of the tithes and offerings. The first was the support of the Levitical tribe--the branch of the Jewish people devoted to full-time service of the Lord. This freed them from normal duties enabling them to fulfill their cultic functions (Deut.18). The other use was for the care and feeding of the orphans, widows, and poor in the nation (Deut. 26:12f). In the New Testament this scope is not decreased but rather increased, as an expression of the essential difference between the cultic continuity of Judaism and the missionary endeavors of the Christian church. As Paul shows, it is still the Lord's will that His specially selected workers be supported by His people so that they may give their full attention to His work (I Cor.9:13-14). Examples throughout the New Testament show us that the Church should continue to minister to the physical needs of the poor among its number from the tithes and offerings of its members (cf. Acts 6).

In conclusion, it can be seen that the glory of this divine plan of stewardship is that it not only ministers to the needs of others, but it also ministers to the person who gives. When this is adequately understood, stewardship can play a significant and constructive role in the life of the individual Christian and of the Church as a whole.

--Randy Maddox

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# CHURCH GROWTH...

church growth remains a study (a "science" for Wagner) it will remain vital. Any kind of Church Growth credo that demands allegiance stifles the dialogue on which the movement is founded.

McGavran's principle of "homogeneous units" has engendered a good deal of criticism. (One is reminded of the knee-jerk reaction to President Carter's campaign statement about "ethnic purity.") Some say that McGavran is bowing the knee to segregation and social oppression. What he is saying is that churches should be planted within recognizable social units. This, he asserts, allows the church to grow while encountering as few social barriers as possible. The priority is to plant churches. Social action can be carried on by the various congregations after they have become established.

The Christian mission need not be that single minded. Homogeneous units make sense as long as they are used as a bridge and not a barrier. The back door is left flapping in the critics wind. The missionary, as McGavran would agree, must not only plant churches but model the church in the society he or she serves. This may, on occasion, lead to confrontation. The tension must be maintained.

Wagner writes that the growing churches are those with strong pastors. This strength is founded in love, the pastor for his people and they for him. Such a pastor is a catalyst for church growth. This demands that the pastor be an authority figure. He says the pastor must be to the church what the father is to the family in a "biblical" view (Your Church Can Grow, p.61). He writes, "to some it might appear as dictatorship or totalitarianism, but it is not" (p.62). The love relationship is supposed to make all the difference--enlightened despotism!

Why should we presume our apocalyptic vision for the church to be the only one? The dynamic urgency of the Gospel does not give us right-of-way over the integrity of others. Real authority is founded in respect for others that refuses to say, "I will choose." We come to tomorrow's possibilities with valuable gifts (the Gospel, the Spirit, and the Church). The Church does not grow to flatter our egos, but to honor and glorify Christ. Church Growth hands us valuable insight. May we use it with wisdom and humility.

--Duane Brush





# An Assessment of Church Growth

Janie did it!

Church Growth is a movement named for a principle. From Syrian Orthodox to Black Pentecostal everyone wants church growth. The movement initiated by Donald McGavran and promoted through the Institute of Church Growth at Fuller Seminary, however, is something much more specific. Church Growth is not monolithic. What binds the various writers together is an approach and not an ideology.

Dr. McGavran was a missionary to India for some thirty years. Early in his service he became distressed over the large expenditures needed to support the elaborate mission stations. Such spending could only be justified, he felt, if large numbers were being added to the Church. Unfortunately, they were not. At the same time he observed indigenous revivals among the lower castes. These "people movements to Christ" swept in great numbers of converts who, for a variety of social and ecclesiastical reasons, would be lost to the Church. McGavran sought a way to harness the "people movement" to increase the harvest. In 1955 he published his observations in the landmark book, Bridges of God.

McGavran developed several ideas which have become identified with the movement. His central thesis is that the missionary should find ways in which people can make a commitment to Jesus Christ with as little cultural stress as possible. They should not only hear the Gospel proclaimed in their own tongue but come to realize it as a viable choice. The identification and application of these cultural principles help the Church fulfill its mission of making disciples. The diversity of cultural expression is acknowledged without sacrificing the Gospel message.

At the beginning Church Growth was primarily concerned with foreign missions. The 1970's have seen an increasing interest in the application of Church Growth analysis domestically. C. Peter Wagner's book, Your Church Can Grow, is an excellent introduction.

The Church of the Nazarene is becoming increasingly involved in the Church Growth movement. This year Dr. Paul Orjala's book, Get Ready to Grow, is the text for the denomination-wide CST course. Proponents of Church Growth within the Church of the Nazarene believe it may prod the domestic church out of its static condition.

One area of great concern is the declining number of Nazarene congregations. Church Growth emphasizes church planting as a primary function in the discipling process. Congregations can be planted in a variety of manners but certain principles dealing with leadership, community, vision and priorities must be recognized. The church must have strong pastoral leadership, an identified community, a vision of mission to that community, and established priorities that emphasize the mission. In the Church of the Nazarene this means a refocus on the church planter rather than on properties and buildings.

Church Growth has the potential to become a significant and positive influence on the contemporary church. But the proponents must maintain dialogue with the critics. Most Church movements tend to ossify over the years. There seems to be a natural tendency to define territory and choose up sides. As long as

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