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BOOK REVIEWS

Richard J. Gehman

*Learning to Lead:
The Making of a Christian Leader in Africa*

Geneva IL: Oasis International, 2008

335 = xiii pp, pb. ISBN 978-1-59452-090-7 \$10.00 US

Reviewed by Titus M. Kivunzi

Africa International University, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya

The author served in theological education in Kenya for 36 years, including several years as Principal of Scott Theological College. He has provided an exceptional handbook on Christian leadership in Africa based partly on extensive interviews with African pastors and partly on his own personal observations and involvements. In preparation for writing the book, Gehman visited church leaders in their working areas and listened to them with notebook and pen in hand. By engaging with mature, experienced African leaders, ones who responded honestly about the ups and downs of their ministry, their successes and failures, he has made a unique contribution to the church in Africa.

Among other things, the book is very honest about the challenges of leadership, the “sweet and sour elements”. In order to explore this idea the author carefully addresses numerous aspects that are necessary for leadership. Each of these qualities is explained in practical detail in terms of pros and cons, pointing out what happens when leaders lose track of their own spiritual journey and end up failing while “succeeding”. Had the book existed early in the last century, many Christian leaders would be in better situations than the ones we see today.

Gehman advises that if we do not learn continuous self-discipline we will fail. While leadership is a noble appointment from God, on earth where it is practiced there are many trials and temptations. Because of this, leadership gifts and skills must be integrated with good character traits. No one is really a leader who only possesses gifts and skills, but is void of the fruit of the Spirit in which Christian character is epitomized. The book is articulate in discussing the personal spiritual discipline required for church leadership. It cautions

church leaders that “the servant of the Lord who fails to discipline himself continually, ‘for the purpose of godliness’ will fail” (p.45). This is to say that discipline should not be taken as a one-time victory but rather as a continuous exercise. This caution reminds me of a story I heard about a young Bible school graduate who attended his first church leaders’ meeting. Instead of taking time to listen to the deliberations, he frequently interjected points about how things were badly conducted. He was advised to be patiently listening to others so as to be able to offer wise counsel. In response to that advice he rose up and said, “Don’t you know that I have a BA degree from a good Bible college?” Hearing this remark, one elder said to the young graduate, “Young man, sit down and we will teach you the rest of the alphabet.”

Another positive point I find in this book is the way Gehman describes the church. He says that when he asked people what they meant by church, he had various answers. For example, some referred to “the church” as the places where they assemble for worship, that is, buildings constructed to look different from ordinary homes or public schools. But this book gives biblical definitions of the church as “the Body of Christ”, “the Temple of the Holy Spirit”, and as both a spiritual organism (the invisible church) and an institutional organisation (pp. 37-38). These definitions help leaders to grasp the true meaning of the church with whose leadership they have been entrusted. The author points out that Christ is the sole owner of the people He saves, not a co-owner. This church is maintained by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Because of this, all believers in Jesus Christ must without reservation pledge total allegiance to their Lord and Saviour. He goes on to clarify some Biblical terms used for leaders because these terms so often get confused with egotistic human desires. Such terms include elder, bishop and overseer. He corrects a mistaken notion that some of these titles are lesser in dignity than others. He points out that all of them “serve under the chief shepherd” to whom all leaders are responsible and to whom they will give an account of their service.

Gehman says that his book is not a multipurpose book on leadership; rather it aims to single out leadership that is distinctively Christian. Gehman reminds readers that Christian leaders need to understand that they are neither self-appointed nor appointed by other people, but appointed by God. Thus His servants are to give service to the church of Jesus Christ.

The author discusses in detail the need for agape love. In particular I was impressed with the way he presented the subject of forgiveness as one of the most difficult things for God’s people to practice in handling the difficulties experienced almost continually in day to day leadership.

The book highlights the process through which leadership abilities should be developed in order to avoid the stagnation in leadership so evident in many circles today. Gehman emphasizes that preparation for ministry does not end with graduation from a theological college. Such learning is a process and

must continue. There is no one gift, skill or character trait that is enough for effective service without other gifts, skills and character traits working alongside it. Rather than thinking that gaining one strength or ability is sufficient for good leadership, we must be continually growing in order to improve our leadership capacities.

The author says that he is seeking to place in the hands of his readers the answers to two questions: “What kind of Christian leader do we need according to the Scriptures?” and “How do we prepare this kind of Christian leader?” The result is a rare and deep well of information, definition and clarification for Christian leaders in Africa. Pastors everywhere should read it, and theological colleges should use it in preparing their students for the realities of pastoral ministry in Africa.

Guy Brandon

Just Sex: Is It Ever Just Sex?

Nottingham: IVP, 2009

224 pp, ISBN: 978-1-84474371-1 £9.99

Reviewed by Elias Ng'etich, Scott Theological College

From Guy Brandon's ministry perspective, many people today are very confused about sex. *Just Sex* encourages readers to consider the impact of sexual relationships on others. This book explains the strength and integrity of the Christian worldview regarding sex. Sex is an issue among Christians because many Christians live in a sexually permissive environment. The author suggests practical and compassionate solutions. *Just Sex* uses both a social and a theological approach to present its truth.

Though written in a British context, *Just Sex* deserves to be studied and discussed in Africa. It is packed with startling facts and figures, effective quotes and lively personal stories. "The book does not seek to provide a systematic interpretation of the biblical texts dealing with sexual ethics, but an explanation of why God's ideal is good" [page 50]. Brandon discerns the reasons behind the biblical teaching on sex. The starting point is that God intended sex to take place only within marriage. It provides clear social, psychological and financial reasons why the Bible has a better vision for human sexuality than that found in the confusion of contemporary culture. Church leaders are divided over key sexual issues such as divorce, homosexuality and sex before marriage. Why? A few fear being accused of intolerance and prejudice. Such fears can obscure the need to uphold the biblical standard.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of 'relational order'; that relational order is dependent on right relationships, both sexual and non-sexual. It is an idea that reflects the quality of the relationship within the trinity, in whose image our humanity is cast. The author's concept goes a long way in helping the reader understand biblical sexual ethics. Our well being is affected by our relationships. If anything has been lost in our culture, then it is a relational perspective. This is the case when success and happiness are defined in terms of finances and material prosperity. The author asserts that healthy relationships provide a positive vision for a society. Christianity is a relational religion. "Throughout the Bible, strong relationships are the currency of well

being and a barometer of social health” [page 24]. Peace as he defines it, “is an active enjoyment of relationships, health and prosperity”. Intimacy and relational wholeness are dependant on psychological health. Psychosocially, all development is an interpersonal and relational process, and it is only with reference to others that we understand ourselves. And sex is an integral part of this. Sex with no context makes possible “nakedness of the soul”. Sex is neither a condition of intimacy nor a guaranteed route to it. “There is no such thing as the isolated individual...all real life is meeting” quoting J.H. Oldham. It is through response to other persons that we become persons. It is others who challenge, enlighten and enrich us.

Just Sex considers briefly the pattern of marriage set out in Genesis 1 and 2. To be human is to be relational because God is relational. The argument is that “marriage, with its promises of permanence, stability and faithfulness, reinforces and promotes qualities that are intrinsically good for relational order”. [page 103]. The theme is that sexual relationships affect a much wider group of people than just those immediately involved in them. *Just Sex* shows through the case study approach that what consenting adults do in private affects others. Life cannot be compartmentalized into a private realm of ‘consenting adults’. Sex shapes society in a real sense. This is because our individual sexual choices are each a small part of the overall mosaic of the culture we live in.

Therefore consent alone is inadequate for meaningful and fulfilling sex, the author insists. This goes against the grain of prevailing conventional wisdom. The book not only delineates an orthodox view on sexual ethics, but also provides a persuasive apologetic for the watching world. The relevance of the book lies with its ability to point to the transforming power of the Christian worldview. The book does this by providing the reader with categories, approaches and evidence that speak persuasively and prophetically to contemporary culture. It tackles the psychological and cultural conditions required for mature, healing sex. The sexual chaos that we see today is a symptom of a deeper disease: “I can live my life on my own terms, without reference to other people” [page 19]. The thrust of the book is that sex without responsibility causes the decay and disintegration of the social fabric. The clear message to the contemporary society is that it is wrong about sex.

The world has distorted God’s concept of sexuality. Sex is not for fun; there is more to it. It is not ‘just sex’. Men and women are made in the image of God and their sexual behaviour in some manner participates in the divine likeness. An improper approach to sex leads to a lifetime of emotional scars.

Though the examples cited are from the U.K., similar situations are found here in Kenya and in Africa as a whole. I recommend this book to lay Christians, pastors and youth workers.