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A Response to Eddie Gibbs

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A Response to Eddie Gibbs

Dr. Sung-Bae Chang

I would like to appreciate Dr. Eddie Gibbs' opening presentation. For me, it was comprehensively a well designed one. In spite of limitations on data, I believe that he raised important issues on lay equipping leadership in relation to the church growth.

The task of my presentation is to respond to Dr. Gibbs' presentation. I want to start off my presentation by pointing important issues of his article.

Dr. Gibbs splits his presentation into seven parts.

1. Caring for New Believers: the reason for requesting lay leadership in the Yoido Full Gospel Church

2. Solving the Leadership Bottleneck: the background of establishing lay, especially lay women leadership

3. Context in which New Leaders Emerge and Develop: cell groups

Dr. Gibbs says, "In many ways the cell groups provides an ideal environment in which each person can discover their particular gifts and in which new leaders can emerge naturally."

4. Quality Control: the way to control the quality of lay leaders

1) By screening spiritual maturity, gifts, and call of God for this ministry

2) By distributing weekly newspapers which ensures a uniform teaching

3) By providing well designed education programs for laypersons

4) and other various ways

5) Pastor Cho's clear vision and outstanding leadership in culture of hierarchical structure

5. Support and Supervision: the Jethro model

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Here, Dr. Gibbs points that the YFGC is “truly a church of small groups rather than a church with small groups.”

6. Evangelistic Significance: cell groups and lay leaders as points of contact as well as frontiers in evangelism

Although cell groups and lay leadership were not the only cause of the church growth of YFGC, those factors did play an important role. I believe that Dr. Gibbs’ expression, “correlation of many factors rather than causation” is rightly said.

From 1 to 6, Dr. Gibbs focuses his concern on lay leadership in the context of cell group. I positively agree that this point is very important in dealing with lay leadership and church growth. I believe that the church should recognize the many gifts of the lay people in their ministries. The discovery of the role of lay people enables the church leaders to have a new understanding of the church. The church is a community called to worship, to Christian nurture, and to witness God’s work. The reason that the church is called out of the world is to be sent into the world again. From that understanding comes a new concept of ministry. First, discovering the centrality of lay people makes it possible to change the ministry from a *safeguard ministry* to a *training ministry*. Second, it enables the organic relationship of the Church’s ministry because every Christian in the Church works as a branch of the body of Christ. Third, it gives a new possibility to a change from pastor-centered structure to lay people-centered structure. Fourth, the change makes it possible to have lay leaders develop their latent forces in shared ministries by laity and clergy. Finally, it gives hope for continual growth.

7. Current Challenges: six issues has been raised

1) *Avoiding the peril accompanying success*

Korean society is rapidly entering into the post-capitalistic society, which has brought abrupt change to the political, economic, social, and moral landscape of the world. The two older social classes of capitalists and workers are being transformed into knowledge workers and service workers. In the future, the central wealth-creating activities will neither be capital nor labor but productivity and innovation.

In this rapidly changing society, especially in urban contexts, churches should find new forms of leadership, church structure, lay training methods, and evangelism.

In his article, Dr. Gibbs suggests five aspects of challenges from inside and outside of the Korean church.

2) Responding to a situation of non-growth

During 1970s throughout 1980s, individualism, growth first mentality, tendency toward exclusiveness, division of churches and denominations, and emphasis on offerings brought enormous growth of churches in Korea. However, when the society became diverse, this kind of church growth began to slow down and faced prospects of decline.

The main factors of church growth in Korea such as home visitation, early prayer meetings, and all-night prayer meetings are losing their effectiveness in this diverse society.

In this situation, Korean churches must develop ecumenical spirit while reclaiming enthusiastic evangelism. The change of the Korean society in which large corporations and social units are divided into small units of specific groups with networking are going to push the Korean churches into various types of cooperation. Also, the Korean society formerly divided into pieces is seeking harmony and reconciliation requesting for the Korean churches to suggest some good models. Furthermore, the current theological development calls for reconciliation of divided churches and renewal of the devastated world by the work of the Holy Spirit. As a partner in God's mission, the churches should cooperate with one another to spread the kingdom of God.

3) Adjusting to the knowledge revolution

In the information society, traditional authorities are losing their power because everyone now have access to the information that were formerly possessed and owned by the higher authorities. Furthermore, the organizing principle of social structure will be shifted from a top-down model to a bottom-up model. This society, therefore, will be restructured from a pyramid type into a network system.

This kind of new society requests a new type of leadership, such as the servant leadership, mentoring leadership, and coaching leadership. The church must make efforts for laypersons to find their own visions and leadership styles that can contribute to the kingdom of God as well as church growth.

4) Equipping lay leaders to relate their Christian faith to their daily lives

The only sacrifice of the church is to present herself as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1-2) and offers "the sacrifice of praise." (Heb. 13:15) As a result, we need to come up with various places and settings where gatherings can be held together for a communion of Christians, and not just a holy place for wor-

ship and sacrifice. (Jn. 4:20-24) Christianity has no holy place, only holy people. We can distinguish the churchgoer from a Christian as a church. From the biblical point of view, we are the church wherever we go. This people-centered church structure can form a life-sharing structure not only in the church but also out in the world. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt. 18:20)

Such structures could exist in families, schools, institutions, and in many companies in their own diverse forms.

5) Adjusting to the increasing demands of urban living

I agree and feel for the laypersons in their ministry, especially to the demands of cell group ministry as an increasing burden. How then can our church programs be pruned and made less demanding? I believe that the Korean churches should carefully consider a radical paradigm shift of their ministries from pastor-oriented ministry to layperson-oriented ministry.

Layperson oriented ministry which fits to the laypersons' ordinary lives must admit some shifts, such as:

- (1) Shift from Sunday-centered ministry to weekdays-centered ministry
- (2) Shift from church building-centered ministry to world-centered ministry
- (3) Shift from program-oriented ministry to real life-oriented ministry

Korean churches, especially in the urban settings must develop their theological foundations, for example like urban theology, lay theology, and worker's theology. Those theologies enable us to explore new ways of mission strategies focusing on laypersons' competitive work places, specific family lives, and their ordinary lives. Urban Churches should help laypersons to live in their work place as witnesses of Jesus Christ.

When we talk about the mission of laypersons, we should not forget the church in relationship with the kingdom of God, which influences the vision of the church. The core of the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14: 17) The vision for the kingdom brings communal life in God's love. This kingdom movement, the mission of the church, starts from tiny gatherings and grows like a mustard seed or yeast. This movement, as a form of incarnation and the way of mission of Jesus, has a down-up or horizontal form, which spreads out, into the world with concern for human lives. This kingdom movement denies the hierarchical, top-down, and management-oriented approach to mission. The belief in the Kingdom will be very helpful in understanding the paradigm

shift of Korean churches' ministry structure.

6) *Affirming and empowering younger leaders*

Dr. Gibbs suggests, "The bold step today is to appoint couples to share the leadership responsibilities, and to appoint younger leaders in order to bring their insights and concerns for Christians of all ages to give their response."

I believe that building leadership of younger generation is one of the most important tasks of Korean churches today. Without the younger generation, churches cannot have their future. Also, the young adults feel this world in a different way. In this rapidly changing world, older generations need to listen more carefully to the voice of the younger generation.

Here, I would like to raise one more issue.

7) *Responding to diverse society*

Diverse forms of lifestyles were generated together with the rise of economic development. Due to better education, professional areas are becoming more varied. Many diverse civil groups and spontaneous gatherings are growing. Various cultural activities are flourishing. As a result of the improved living standards we now have a wide variety of food and see a wide variety of fashion. Multiforms of hobbies and dilettante lives are developing. In the society in which diverse values co-exist, authoritarianism is not viable.

For effective mission in diverse society, the church should develop new church structure, which emphasizes dispersal of power rather than a concentration of power. The church should work through diverse communities in specific context. For example, if a church identifies a need, for example like the mission for the disabled, this church can start organizing a group of volunteers and experts in this particular area. They can gather, pray, plan, and do their mission work. Here, we can clearly see that the church is not the leader or controller but rather the helper and supporter. As a result, this church can have various communal groups according to their working areas in mission. The numbers of groups grow as the tasks grow. Also, these groups can gladly work with non-Christian communities in their societies for their mission. These kinds of approaches to non-Christians will provide very good opportunities for evangelism.

I would like to hear someone from YFGC on this matter.

I'd like to finish my response by saying that Dr. Gibbs' presentation will lead us to more profound discussion for the new tasks of lay equipping leadership, evangelism and church growth in the new millennium.

Writer

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