**A Theology and Practice of Fundraising**

A. theological starting point in thinking about this good and necessary, but often controversial and divisive topic, is to look again at the nature of God. What is clear from the biblical narrative is that God is a self-giving God as both creator and redeemer.

1. God’s great generosity is everywhere writ large in the pages of scripture. God is the liberating God of the exiles in Egypt, the sustaining God of his people in the promised land, the purging God of his unfaithful people, the restoring God in the return from captivity, the revealing and salvific and healing God in the person of Christ and the beautifying God in the outpouring of the Spirit.

 2.      What is equally clear in the pages of both the First and Second Testaments is that while God’s generosity is towards all, God has a heart for the poor and needy and seeks their well-being. Theologically, following the liberation theologians, we may say that God expresses a preferential option for the poor. This means that God has a heart and concern for the poor that manifests itself in making them the first focus. This in no way means that God has no concern for others. His generosity is towards all.

 3.      From the nature of who God is and what God does, we may derive a vision of who we are to be and what we are to do. Put most basically, we are to be like God in every regard, including in reflecting God’s generosity to all, and especially to the poor.

To be godly is to be God-like. And to know God is to be like God and do what God does. This means that generous giving, whatever form that may take, is not a project or a special activity, rather it is the unfolding of the life of God in us. Put in Christological terms, the salvation that Christ brings is Christ’s life taking form and shape in us. As a consequence, the life of Christ is thus ‘repeated’ is us in a smaller or greater way.

Thus to be a self-giving servant in the reign of God is an expression of who we are as caught up in the life of the New Adam. Giving, generosity, and servanthood are first and foremost not practical activities and certainly not utilitarian, they are ontological. That means these responses are intrinsic to who we are as part of the new creation in Christ. This means that generosity is not an ‘extra’ in the life of the Christian. Instead, it is basic and intrinsic.

 4.      All of this is simple and clear enough, although these core concepts are often not taught in the contemporary church. No wonder we have problems with giving!  But what is much more difficult to come to terms with is how God chooses to do his/her work in the world.

Put most basically, if God has a heart and concern for the poor, how does God, who is both word and deed, express that concern? Does God only work sovereignly?  Does God work only through human instrumentality? Does God only use the community of faith? Does God use secular agencies and governments? Or, rather than these categories being either/or, are they both/and?

To push all of this a bit further, has God linked his/her sovereignty to human instrumentality? In other words, if we humans (secular or ‘sacred’) do nothing then God does or can do nothing? While this core idea highlights human responsibility and cooperation with God, it is hardly a satisfactory concept.

This idea limits the radical freedom of God. God works in a whole variety of ways. God can put social legislation in place in Israel that provides for the poor and the sojourner, but God can also raise up a Cyrus to serve Yahweh’s purposes.

What is much clearer, however, is that God does want to use us in God’s concern for the world and God uses any human instrumentality to seek to bring about good in the world. In terms of the categories of Reformed theology: God is both the God of saving grace and the God of common grace and both bring forth their fruit and goodness in our world. This means that both the people of God and the wider human community are to be God’s servants to bring about God’s shalom in our world. This means that the church (the people of God) has both a calling to generosity and a calling to advocacy.

 5.      All of this may be well and good, but what is to be my attitude to giving in relation to how I see my possessions? And what is the basic orientation of my life in relation to income, possessions, and security?

 And in what ways do I demonstrate a different set of values in the following of Jesus to what are the dominant values in my culture. Put most basically, am I as self-focused and committed to security and much-having as my secular counterparts?

And to press that further, is my generosity merely the left-overs of my selfish life-style. It is at this point that most of us have nicely avoided the challenge of the gospels and the early church. In both there is the vision that what I have belongs to God and to the community. I am thus a steward not an owner.

And it is the early church father, Tertullian, who has summarized this well: ‘Christians have all things in common except their wives.’ Clearly, if we wish to move forward on these practical matters we have to be brave enough, like Jacques Ellul in his *Money and Power,*to tackle these challenging issues.

 If there is anything true in this regard in contemporary Western Christianity is not that we possess our possessions but that our possessions possess us.If we are afraid to address the issue of Mammon we will never do justice to issue of generosity.

6.      One of the practical questions that needs to be addressed is: who do we give to? Some insist only to the local church. Others include para-church agencies. Others believe that we may give to any group/agency which seeks to do good in our world.

Clearly we are to give to those in our immediate sphere of responsibility be that family or brother and sister in the faith community. But it is clear enough that we are to care for the stranger and anyone who is in need. Luke 6:27-36 rejects the virtue of an in-house generosity only. Instead, it calls us to a general generosity based on the nature of God who ‘is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.’ Paul echoes this in Galatians 6:10 to ‘do good to all…’