SUBVERSIVE WITNESS

Alliance Theological Seminary

Location: ATS/NY

Leadership Development

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Thesis Statement: This book offers a paradigm shift on how Christians perceive and steward privilege and exercise power. The existence of privilege must be acknowledged, and wielded subversively to enact transformational change that disrupts the oppressive systems, structures and established social order, norms, authority, and hierarchy, for the advancement of the Kingdom.

Overview

The most effective subversive witness should be the church, but complicity has weakened our testimony. Morrison, in her endorsement mentions that the church is as fractured as the nation in which we live. An indictment against the witness? Yes, there is a breach to be repaired, and a people who have failed miserably to deal with the truth. Soong says, "The Church is called to a deeper dive into God's word in order to find the healing balm of truth." We need to identify and name the culprit we have been prostituting with for centuries and decades. Dominique names it, "*Privilege*."

The author speaks to the many forms of privilege, and reminds us that not every manifestation holds the same social currency."[1] "Historically, some forms are more prominent than others. He identifies the top contenders as race, gender, citizenship and class; accompanied by freedom/status were politically valued and socioeconomically subsidized."[2]

Labberton, who grew up in 'thick privilege' says, "Each of us participates in a world of disordered power, personal or systemic; either as the perpetrator or the victim; and possibly both." The pertinent question is, are Christians ready to turn away from "privatized" privilege,

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[1] Gilliard, Dominique Dubois. Subversive Witness: Scripture's Call to Leverage Privilege. Grand Rapids; MI. Zondervan Reflective, 2021 page 6

[2] Ibid., Gilliard, 6

and to leverage whatever form of privilege and power we possess to subvert the status quo and bring about God's kingdom here on earth?"

Analysis

What then is privilege? A privilege is a certain right, advantage, entitlement, or immunity granted to a particular person or group. The author describes privilege in different categories such as unchecked privilege, unbridled privilege, white privilege, legislative, economic and educational privilege. Looking back at Scriptures, the evidence points to the existence of privilege long before the United States. According to Acts 6:1-7 (New International Version), this divisive, systemic issue was in the early church. Once the complaint was lodged, leadership conducted proper analysis; named and addressed the problem. Confrontation facilitated transformation. The word of God spread, and there was kingdom expansion.

America, 'the land of the free and the home of the brave' boasts an astronomical number of Christians with stacked privileges who choose to put on their blinkers blinders to the injustices, abuse, and the suffering of other image bearers. I concur with the author that, "The church should lead the way in naming oppression, confessing our role in it, and endeavor to address and eradicate the systemic disparities that privilege engenders."[3] Unfortunately, self-preservation seems to have replaced the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment; and individual freedom is promoted over collective liberation.

Strengths

Call and Response: Zacchaeus' immediate response to Jesus' call is of eternal value. He responded with urgency to acknowledge Jesus as Lord; and to correct his fraudulent transactions.

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[3] Ibid., xviii

While the Spirit was working on his heart, reparation was on his mind; (Luke 19:1-10). America needs some Zacchaeus' to give back to the poor what has been stolen.[4]

Getting into Good Trouble: "Many Christians are discipled to think of justice as a secular issue, rather than a matter of Christian discipleship."[5] I concur with Dominique that advocating for justice in an oppressive context is biblical. Therefore, every Christian should love mercy and be ready to do justice in adherence to Scriptures. Getting into good trouble means prophetically resisting evil; disobeying civic laws in order to obey the God of heaven.

Unchecked Privilege

"Unchecked/Unbridled Privilege distorts how we see God, our neighbor, ourselves, and creation. It also perverts how we read the bible and live out our faith."[6] The author speaks about how easily our free-will gets corrupted by privilege; and how Satan uses unbridled privilege as a destructive tool against the believer.

Usefulness:

Subversive Witness is relevant for the intended audience. The book implores Christians collectively, to move beyond our comfort zone, thick privilege, mythology, and indifference in order to participate in the inbreaking kingdom. The narrative helps to reframe some Scriptural context especially of Pharaoh's daughter's role in God's redemptive plan. The way the author interweaves the theological implications, the paradigmatic references, the cost of discipleship, and the complicity of Christians provided much food for thought.

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[4] Ibid., 127-128
[5] Ibid., 163
[6] Ibid., 171-172

Take-aways

First, "The gospel has the power to break generational curse and bigotry. It bears witness to the fact that the Spirit can transform those most ensconced in bias and immersed in injustice."[7] This proves that God have leaders in the king's house and on the backside of the mountain.

Second, Proximity Changes Things; Stevenson inserts himself in spaces and circumstances where the Imago Dei needed a missional posture; with intentionality to fight for the disenfranchised. Leading by example, Stevenson exhibits great leadership. He leveraged privilege; he uses his education, financial resources, time and talent to advocate for deliverance and justice in advancing the kingdom of God.

"Good leaders foster a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit, and pattern their lives after Christ."[8]

Significance

I will be praying without ceasing for a servant's heart so I will serve others from a place of deep love. I will always remember that godly leadership makes the difference in the world! Therefore, wisdom is a main ingredient in the dispensation of the gospel especially to the least of these. The Pharaoh of Egypt despotic model; and the current American model of leadership needs to be dismantled. I want to be an instrument of change under the guidance of God.

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[7] Ibid., 32
[8] Ibid., 21-22

Gilliard, Dominique DuBois. *Subversive Witness: Scripture's Call to Leverage Privilege*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021.