

Reading List

Books to stir your thoughts . . .

Raising Spiritual Awareness *and* Money Overcoming Public and Personal Perceptions

By Larry Matthews

As a fund-raising consultant focused on Christian organizations, I have learned to be content to be the Rodney Dangerfield of ministry. Like the comedian, “I don’t get no respect.” Fund-raisers and their consultants stand on the lower rungs of esteem. Whose mother ever introduced her child as “My son, the fund-raiser”?

We joke with our clients about our status. When our company president was also a politician, the barbs were even more pointed. As any good joke draws on shared cultural assumptions and beliefs, one eventually realizes that there are widely-held perceptions of fund-raising that are not flattering.

Christians who raise funds fret over those perceptions. More important, they wrestle with bigger theological, philosophical, and spiritual challenges. In addition to facing demanding financial goals, they struggle to be faithful to their identity and calling as Christians and Christian organizations.

Growing Givers’ Hearts: Treating Fundraising as Ministry will resonate with Christians engaged in fund-raising. There is a deep hunger to reduce the perceived dissonance between Christian conviction and proven fund-raising practice—and the authors promise “a vision of fund-raising as a process that is as much concerned with the effect on people’s character and values as with the effect on organizations’ incomes.”

The book arises out of a research project by two experienced fund-raisers who are also thoughtful and well-read analysts of their industry. They have excellent qualifications and did what seems to be substantial research. They also have substantial convictions about fund-raising. They write that the research “began with the sense that

Growing Givers’ Hearts: Treating Fundraising as Ministry by Thomas H. Jeavons and Rebekah Burch Basinger (Jossey-Bass Publishers, \$22.95)

fund-raising can be a process by which Christian organizations actually encourage and strengthen the faith of donors as well as convey gospel values to the ‘unchurched,’ and so enrich the life of the whole church.”

Within its eleven chapters, Jeavons and Basinger attempt to define Christian fund-raising (three chapters) and identify six “essential characteristics of fund-raising as a ministry” (one chapter each). A discussion of fund-raising as a calling and fund-raising as “an invitation to cooperate with God’s grace” brings the book to its conclusion. They are careful to note that the book is not a “how to” guide to fund-raising, but

rather a “‘what might be better’ exploration.” The focus is on parachurch agencies rather than congregations, because, the authors argue, of the “growing importance” of parachurch agencies (including such organizations as colleges, universities, and seminaries) to the church as a whole; and because those agencies “employ many of the same strategies and techniques for fund-raising as secular nonprofits.” The discussion is thoroughly ecumenical, demonstrating a broad awareness of the different ways the issues play out in different Christian traditions.

The greatest immediate contributions of the book occur when the combination of observations from research and the authors’ own insights is presented in a chart or other summary form. A good example is Table 1.1, “Differing Visions of Christian Fund-raising.” Five categories—“focus and goals, ideal outcomes, ethical framework, philosophical and cultural underpinning, and ultimate objective”—are characterized in two columns: “Conventional paradigm of fund-raising for Christian organizations” and “Alternative vision: Fund-raising as ministry.” Other lists and summaries are a great asset to the reader.

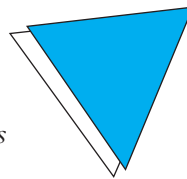
Commentary on scriptural texts is also handled very well, and the authors know their church history. While I might quarrel over a detail or two, bringing together the material and examining it with the specific question of how fund-raising can be ministry refreshes the whole discussion.

I winced as the authors indicted much of what Christians who are raising funds have done, because most of what they critique deserves it. Yet they sometimes overstate their case. At points, such as when Jeavons and Basinger imply that Christian fund-raisers do not think about the messages implied by the use of certain techniques, they present a near-caricature of the people in the field. Despite statements intended to recognize the complexities of fund-raising, the tone is sometimes condescending. Occasionally their negative illustrations are extreme and would be dismissed by anyone reading the book.

Some commentary seems off-target,

Book Tips for Fund-raising Success

Despite the heavy reliance placed on their work, fund-raisers are all too often the Rodney Dangerfields of religious organizations. They “don’t get no respect.” Reviewer and fund-raiser Larry Matthews argues that fund-raising must be treated as ministry. He says a new book by Thomas H. Jeavons and Rebekah Burch Basinger should be required reading for anyone in fund-raising.



such as the discussion of “integrated organizational planning” as one of the six essential characteristics. What the authors say is true, but the connection to their main argument remains unclear. And statements such as “Though it is important that Christian organizations constantly seek new sources of gifts, the quest for more and ‘better’ donors should not come at the cost of neglecting or hurting old friends,” seem obvious at best. Does that need to be said to anyone?

The comment does highlight an underlying tension that will distract experienced fund-raisers: distinguishing between what is specifically Christian, and what is merely good fund-raising, conducted by decent human beings. The writers, as with other fund-raisers, cannot always make the difference convincingly clear.

Still, these are minor criticisms. This is an excellent, insightful, and inspiring work. I would make it required reading for any student of fund-raising or aspiring newcomer to the profession. In fact, since I reviewed this book I’ve ordered a quantity of copies to give to those my clients who wrestle with these issues. There are no stunning revelations for those involved in fund-raising. Yet the reflection is of sufficient depth to be truly useful in organizing one’s own convictions, adding background, depth, and rationale. The book sets a very high standard and makes a strong case that fund-raising can be ministry.

One might wish there was a “how to” section, but it still remains to fund-raisers to work out their own salvation. Maybe then we’ll get some respect!

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An Empty Abundance

By Rebekah Burch Basinger

In the early 1960s, the Beatles bemoaned the fact that “money can’t buy me love.” Some forty years later, author and social psychologist David Myers reports in *The American Para-*

dox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty that money hasn’t bought us happiness or spiritual well-being either. Myers, a faculty member at Hope College (Michigan), has devoted many years to exploring the dual

The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty by David Myers (Yale University Press, \$29.95)

questions of who’s happy and why. In the process he’s discovered that, for most Americans, personal well-being and contentment are an elusive dream. By every global measurement, contemporary or historical, North Americans are among the richest people who have ever lived. Yet, in Myers’s words, “Never has a culture experienced such physical comfort combined with such psychological misery.”

Therein lies the quandary at the heart of his latest book. How can it be, Myers asks, that Americans “have been soaring materially and, until recently, sinking socially?” He pursues this question across four decades and through mounds of media sources and national polls. The range of quotes, newspaper clips, and academic studies referenced in the book, along with a lengthy “Notes” section, suggests the author has left no cultural trend unexplored. Through a happy wedding of scholar-

Appetizer

One of social psychology’s premier lessons is that we are as likely to act ourselves into a way of thinking as to think ourselves into action. Not only do we often stand up for what we believe, we also come to believe more strongly in what we have stood up for. Saying becomes believing.

—*The American Paradox*

ship with journalism, Myers has produced an informative and easy-to-read guidebook for cultural explorers.

The time frame of the book is 1960 until the early 1990s—a period during which, according to Myers, “America slid into a deepening social recession that dwarfed the comparatively milder and briefer economic recession that often dominated our news and politics.” He develops a lengthy list of societal woes—including doubling of the divorce rate, tripling of the teen suicide rate, quadrupling of the violent crime rate, quintupling of the incarceration rate, and numerous other negative trends—as evidence of a troubling cultural shift. On the whole, the picture of our national psyche that emerges from Myers’s efforts is anything but pretty.

That said, however, his work is not without hope. “After dealing with the

