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Review: The Timothy Principle

A. Boyd Luter

Liberty University, abluter@liberty.edu

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Trull is largely correct when he writes in the Preface, "For most Christians the Seven Last Words of Christ from the cross are as familiar as the Ten Commandments" (p. 9). Also, he is right in pointing out that the "real last words of Christ" came not at Calvary but "during his ten resurrection appearances" (p. 9).

Thus, the author is to be commended for venturing beyond the more familiar ground of Jesus' dying words to several somewhat lesser-known passages which "contain some of his more significant statements" (p. 9), as well as addressing the prevalent misnomer about Christ's "last words." Fortunately for the reader, these are not nearly all the reasons for which the writer and publisher should receive commendation.

It is worthy of note that chap. 4, "Locked Out by Doubt," dealing with the Apostle Thomas, from John 20:19-31, has already been published in vol. 3 of *Award Winning Sermons* (Nashville: Braodman, 1979). Even more noteworthy, from this reviewer's perspective, is that chap. 4 did not at all overshadow the other chapters. Comparable homiletical quality is seen consistently throughout the volume.

The chapters are arranged in historical sequence, beginning with "Turning Grief into Joy (to Mary Madgalene)," from John 20:1-18, and concluding with "Be My Witnesses (to all Christians)," from Acts 1:1-8. Each of the seven begins with a skeleton outline, including overviews of introduction and conclusion. The wording throughout is delightfully crisp, reading more like spoken sermons than purposefully written communication (which may well have been the intent of author and publisher for Baker's "Pulpit Library" series). Further, the volume is replete with good illustrations.

The Seven Last Words of the Risen Christ was a well-conceived series of sermons from a creative mind (see the words to his song "Mary Magdalene's Easter," pp. 11-12) before it became an exceedingly helpful book. As such, it should prove tremendously suggestive for pastors and teachers looking for further insight into and a creative approach to the Easter and postresurrection narratives.

The only caution light to be noted in Trull's occasional emphasis on a present-tense experience of the resurrected Savior (e.g., "a face-to-face experience with the living Lord Jesus Christ can be *your* Easter experience . . .," p. 23), which could be taken as neo-orthodox in perspective. Such wording, however, may be nothing more than the pastoral heart of an effective preacher seeking to address with relevance "our deepest struggles" (p. 9).

A. BOYD LUTER, JR.
San Antonio, Texas

The Timothy Principle, by Roy Robertson. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1986. Pp. 120. \$5.95 paper.

Author Roy Robertson has worked with the Navigators for over 40 years. He has opened Navigator work in seven Asian nations, and has served as

Asian director and overseas coordinator for the Navigator ministry. Presently he lives in Denton, Texas, and directs Training Evangelistic Leadership (p. 6).

Because of this amazing fund of experience, almost exclusively with one high-specialized para-church ministry organization, the reader will do well to carefully understand where Robertson is coming from in setting forth the thesis of his book. Certainly he is totally on target when he writes, "Spiritual reproduction . . . is the vital link for carrying out the Great Commission of Jesus . . ." (Preface, p. 8). But, what does he mean by that statement?

Whatever others of equally fervent evangelical persuasion may mean by "spiritual reproduction" and "carrying out the Great Commission," Robertson understands what he calls "the Timothy principle" (p. 8). He explains to his readers, "Just as Paul adopted Timothy to follow in his spiritual footsteps, you can find someone special to be your spiritual child. . . . This is the spiritual multiplication process in action. . . ." (p. 8). In other words, Robertson is really doing nothing more than presenting another somewhat-personalized account of how classic Navigator one-on-one discipling works. This becomes particularly clear when one turns to the Appendix (pp. 107-20) of standard Navigator material.

There is much that is helpful about this little book. This reviewer especially appreciated the many ministry anecdotes and illustrations. It definitely is an interesting and effective presentation of Navigator philosophy and practice.

However, there is a troubling aspect to such a volume, and it's not so much what it says . . . as what it *doesn't* say. Even though this work claims to be about carrying out the Great Commission by using the Apostle Paul's methodology, it gives, at best lip-service to the local church. By contrast, the record of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts 13-19 reveals that the organization and edification of the local churches was the very centerpiece of the Apostle's reproductive strategy.

In particular, Acts 14:21-23 shows that "disciples" (v 22) is interchangeable with "church" (v 23) in the only passage outside Matthew where the verb "to make disciples" (see the Great Commission imperative in Matthew 28:19) is used (Acts 14:21). Could it be that Timothy, who emerged from these churches (Acts 16:1-2), and went on to later lead the church at Ephesus, as seen in 1 and 2 Timothy, would have wanted his name attached to a "principle" or approach that displayed so little regard for the local church? Would Paul, his mentor, have appreciated his wider approach to carrying out Christ's commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19) being so selectively applied?

The answer on both counts must be "NO!" Thus, *The Timothy Principle* can only be recommended with great reserve. Its approach to the Great Commission contains a "great omission" concerning the local church.

A. BOYD LUTER, JR.
San Antonio, Texas



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