

Book Review

Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers.

Andrew D. Clarke

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Usually, scholarly treatises on ancient Graeco-Roman society are not regarded as relevant for the contemporary church. Andrew Clarke's work, I suggest, is an exception. In his *Introduction*, Clarke identifies a problem to which modern Christians can surely relate. He writes, "The first Christians were struggling to establish an identity within the complex and multicultural world of the early Roman Empire." The Graeco-Roman world surrounded the church and exerted powerful social, political and religious forces as they endeavored to express their faith.

Today's church finds itself in a similar predicament, asking, "What is our identity in a complex multicultural world, and how do we engage our surrounding cultural context?" Clarke has chosen to answer the question of identity as it relates to church leadership. How did the Early Church compare with Graeco-Roman and Jewish societies in their understanding and practice of leadership? Clarke proceeds to ask about the extent the Early Church was influenced by models of leadership from the administrative structures of the Graeco-Roman society and the Jewish synagogue. Finally, he examines the New Testament (primarily the Pauline letters) for evidence of that influence and any corrective teaching that it may have provided.

The foundation of Clarke's study is a historical survey of the theory and praxis of

leadership, as it existed in the first century Graeco-Roman world (chs. 1-6). His analysis includes the various contexts of leadership: the Graeco-Roman city (ch. 2), the Roman colony and city (ch. 3), voluntary associations (*collegia*/clubs and guilds—ch. 4) and the family (ch. 5). He then expands his study to include leadership within Jewish synagogues (ch. 6).

Clarke's book is a masterful portrait of Graeco-Roman institutions of leadership. Particularly illuminating is his discussion of honor, which was the driving and overarching motivation in Graeco-Roman society, especially among those seeking positions of political governance (49). Honor defined one's status in society. Clarke shows how honor was pursued through the widespread practice of patronage, where those who occupied a superior status in society were obligated to become benefactors to those beneath them on the social ladder. These, in response, bestowed honor in various ways to their benefactors. This reciprocal arrangement is shown to exist within all classes and institutions of Graeco-Roman society.

Interestingly, within the aristocracy, status was largely determined by family background, education and inherited (or accumulated) wealth. These persons already possessed an elite status and were granted honor accordingly. Why then the pursuit of patronage? Clark paints a negative picture of

Graeco-Roman aristocracy as largely self-serving. Individuals who already belonged to the privileged class pursued the enhancement of honor, power and prestige. What is clear from Clarke's portrayal of this societal phenomenon is that not only was the quest for honor ubiquitous, but the lust for authority, power and influence universal and insatiable.

In the chapter on leadership in the Jewish synagogues Clarke shows that the organization and governance of the synagogue incorporated current honorific titles and functions (e.g., the "synagogue leader") which closely paralleled the *collegia*, or Graeco-Roman voluntary associations. This serves to confirm the long-standing conviction (since the seminal work of Martin Hengel) that Judaism did not escape the influence of Hellenism but made major cultural concessions to it.

It is a little surprising that, given the cultural and social matrix in which the Church was created, church leadership reflected the roles of civil government already in place. This is verified in the Church's choice of *ekklesia*, the word for the civic popular assembly, rather than "synagogue" for their term of self-identity. Consequently, it is not surprising to see in the New Testament evidence that early Christians looked for their leaders to evince qualities and characteristics similar to those that defined leaders in the civic *ekklesia* (153).

However, apart from these terminological parallels, New Testament apostolic teaching is anything but an endorsement of secular models of leadership. Clarke does not go the route of Baur, von Harnack and others who identify leadership in the church as a second century development, an early "catholicization" which departed from a "charismatic" leadership without any authoritative roles (172). Instead, using mainly the witness of

the Pauline corpus, Clarke acknowledges the leadership roles that were clearly in place in the Early Church. He shows that at numerous points the church followed Graeco-Roman social conventions in choosing their leaders. For example, the choice of civic leaders with wealth and influence as local church benefactors seems to explain why Erastus, the *oikonomos* (city treasurer), is singled out for mention in Romans 16:23. Further adoption of the values of Graeco-Roman society is reflected in the evidence of patronage (176-78) and the esteem of wisdom and rhetorical eloquence in their leaders (174, 179). More commonly, the writings of Paul give evidence that such values created problems for the fledgling church, which Clarke illustrates mainly from the Corinthian correspondence (180-208).

The significant contribution of this work is the author's analysis of Pauline ministry in the Church and the way Paul viewed himself as a leader. He clearly demonstrates that contrary to the authoritarian and manipulative ways of his opponents, Paul used his platform as an apostle to teach an ethos that challenged the fundamental views of the Graeco-Roman world on leadership. Its relevance is at once apparent to those seeking to adopt a leadership model faithful to New Testament teaching and the values of God's kingdom. Paul's understanding of leadership was not elitist, contra the personality cult prevalent in Corinth (1 Cor 3:4-9). In fact, he reminds the Corinthians that among them are not many who are wise, powerful and of noble birth (1 Cor 1:26). Leadership is a calling, the prerogative of which belongs to God, not man. Even Paul's apostleship is the stewardship and exercise of a charismatic gift (12:18ff), a calling that lies in stark contrast to an elitist cadre of Corinthian leaders (4:8-13). At the center of the controversy was the conception of authority, its origin and manner of exercise.

Paul's apostolic authority was self-acknowledged, but must be viewed in the contexts of his self-understanding as a spiritual father (219-223), a model of Christ to be imitated (223-28), and an apostle whose calling is from God (228-32). In other words, Paul's apostolic authority is functionally derived from his apostolic calling and carried out as a stewardship of the grace of Christ.

Clarke concludes that, in principle and example, Paul teaches a model of leadership that is neither hierarchical nor authoritarian. This is seen in his avoidance of classic Graeco-Roman terms such as *arche* ("rule/ruler"), *time* ("honor") and *telos* ("power" or "authority" of a magistrate) in reference to ecclesiastical offices. Instead, Paul overwhelmingly uses the most basic word for servant (*diakonos*), or the verb for service (*diakoneo*) to describe the role and function of a leader. For Paul, a church leader, like the Lord who calls him, must be a servant-leader (233-52).

Although the central thesis is virtually unassailable, a few minor criticisms are warranted. For example, Clarke's emphasis on Paul's avoidance of some Greek terms for leadership does not equate with his conclusion that Paul "did not regard himself as a leader" (250), unless one defines leadership in the precise character that Paul is correcting. His consistent rejection of hierarchical structures, as portrayed in the Graeco-Roman world and mirrored by aberrant models in the Church, are warranted but avoids treatment of passages where some sense of hierarchy is unavoidable (e.g., 1 Cor 12:28; cf Eph 4:11), or where Paul seems to be exercising or expressing supreme and unilateral authority as Christ's apostle (1 Cor 5:3, 9-13; 14:37-38; 1 Thess 2:13; cf. Gal 6:17). Certainly, a careful exegesis of 2 Corinthians calls into question his conclusion that "Paul's ministry is challenged not when his apostleship is

challenged, but when believers are being drawn away from Christ and his grace" (p. 246). It is precisely because Paul identifies the gospel with the Christ he preaches and imitates (1 Cor 11:1) within his apostolic calling (Gal 1:6-8; 2 Cor 11:1-4), that he passionately defends his apostleship (See 2 Cor 11:6-33). To reject Paul's apostleship is to reject the gospel he preaches and the *via crucis* (God's power perfected through human weakness) that his life models.

The above criticism should not diminish the assessment that Andrew Clarke has produced a valuable work which amply underscores Paul's emphasis that leaders are called to serve the church. His survey of leadership in the Graeco-Roman world, while presented through careful and meticulous research of primary sources, is a well-written and very readable work. His citations of Greek and Latin texts usually are accompanied by translations, or rendered intelligible by their immediate contexts. Part 2, which treats leadership in the Christian community, is fair, balanced and exegetically informed.