
Andrew D. Clarke’s latest study on Pauline leadership complements his earlier works on leadership in 1 Corinthians (2006) and Christians as leaders and ministers in the first century (2000). Clarke claims at the outset of this volume that while his earlier work concentrated on the historical, social, and cultural contexts of early Christian leadership, this current effort seeks to construct a theological statement for leadership practice today from how Paul and his congregations reflected on and practiced ministry and leadership in their day. His efforts are well-researched, well-argued, well-organized and well-written, with various degrees of success.

Clarke’s opening chapter engages the methodological questions of developing a theology of Pauline church leadership. He acknowledges the difficulties of not having a systematic statement about leadership by Paul and even the relative paucity of relevant terms. Moreover, Clarke is less interested in church structure, he argues, than in “the style, ethos, dynamics and practices of leadership” (3). Although Clarke argues that he is doing theology rather than necessarily history, he does take some clear steps that show his historical judgments about various key issues in Pauline studies. First, while he will not argue for a particular view on the authorship issues in the contested Pauline corpus, he assumes Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles as well as Colossians and Ephesians. The Pastoral Epistles in particular play a prominent role in developing the various “tasks” and “tools” of leadership, terms that Clarke uses in his theological development of leadership in Paul, specifically in Chapters 6 and 7 of this volume.

Second, Clarke argues long and hard throughout this work that Pauline leadership was exercised in the context of hierarchical structure and not in a way that promoted any kind of egalitarian visions. The reasons for such a posture in Clarke’s argument are several, but here I mention only one. If the household is the basic context of Pauline congregational development and practice, as Clarke posits, then the leadership structure in a typical Greco-Roman household must have been replicated in Paul’s house churches. This is certainly so by the time we get to the household codes in Colossians and Ephesians, as well as the description of leadership structure that dominate the discourse in the Pastoral Epistles. However, we do not have similar descriptions of structure based on household in Paul’s “authentic” letters, except perhaps for the oblique reference to “bishops ["overseers"] and deacons” in Phil. 1:1. Clarke sees this singular reference in the earlier or uncontested Pauline corpus as indicative of similar structures that the later household codes and role descriptions represent. Moreover, he posits that the apparent “silence” about structure in the uncontested letters is a sign not of an egalitarian leadership approach in the earliest Pauline communities, but merely that issues of structure, organization, and titles are not prevalent in the early Paul as they were later. In essence, this amounts to an argument from silence. One wonders, however, how the struggles that Paul had with a group of Corinthian leaders was not, at least in part, a disagreement on how leadership should be structured and carried out in at least one Pauline community. Leadership hierarchy was an issue for
some in Corinth, but given Paul’s conviction of the impending parousia, structure or hierarchy was not as important as it would later become in what most scholars argue are the Deutero-Pauline communities.

Besides a preference for hierarchy over egalitarianism—for which Clarke argues especially in Chapter 4 on the “status of leaders”—as a way to approach leadership in Paul, Clarke also engages the hermeneutical discussions about what one can really know historically over against how an interpreter’s personal views or social location might impact interpretation. After a careful discussion across the landscape of historical critical and postmodern, reader-oriented hermeneutics (Chapter 2), Clarke concludes—rightly, I think—that we need an ongoing dialogue in Pauline studies between historical reconstructions that ancient texts and contexts might expose us to and a realization that each interpreter brings personal perspectives and questions to bear upon our reading of texts. As Clarke puts it, in this way “past and present cooperate.” In particular, we should acknowledge the “hermeneutical communities” that influence our reading of texts and give it accountability structures. This notion of “a hermeneutical community” (24-25) is most helpful in Clarke’s book.

After these opening chapters on method and hermeneutics, Clarke proceeds to a careful textual study of various aspects of leadership in Paul—namely, titles, status, power, tasks, and tools—as his building blocks for a theology of Pauline leadership. The first of these, “titles,” revisits old ground on the various terms and phrases used for leaders in the Pauline letters. Clarke, with his expanded view of the Pauline corpus to include the contested letters, as well as making reference to the Book of Acts, focuses on such titles as bishop, elder, and deacon. For Clarke, these become more critical in understanding Pauline leadership than such terms as “co-workers,” “servants,” and “brothers” (and “sisters”) that exhibit some prominence in the uncontested Pauline letters. Moreover, Clarke argues against an “overemphasis” on such terms as “servant leadership” (95-102), because most studies do not sufficiently nuance the metaphoric meaning of the term in light of what Clarke again assumes to be a hierarchical structure of the Pauline house church. “Servant leadership” is an attitude with which one approaches ecclesial governance rather than an indication of one’s status in a hierarchy, argues Clarke. (This 2008 work nowhere engages my own 2005 work on New Testament leadership entitled, Servant Leadership: Jesus and Paul, which does argue for a more egalitarian view of the leadership practices in the Pauline assemblies of the uncontested letters, in part because of Paul’s use of the metaphor of service—dia-

konía—as not only an “attitude” but a way of exercising leadership that transcends the concerns for one’s place in a hierarchy.)

The rest of Clarke’s work on the power, tasks, and tools of leadership in Paul is very thorough. His discussion of “power” in conversation with Elizabeth Castelli’s book on “the discourse of imitation in Paul” is particularly helpful. Clarke does not think that Paul’s use of his power and authority is always negative, as Paul used them selectively to ensure the ongoing survival of the gospel and the gospel community. The call to imitate Paul is one tool, along with persuasion and rhetoric, to enhance the leader’s character to achieve transformation and unity in the community. With such focus on