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Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today [review] / Beeley, Christopher A.

Stanley E. Patterson
Andrews University, patterss@andrews.edu

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4. To develop mastery, students must acquire component skills, practice integrating them, and know when to apply what they have learned.

5. Goal-directed practice coupled with targeted feedback enhances the quality of students’ learning.

6. Students’ current level of development interacts with the social, emotional, and intellectual climate of the course to impact learning.

7. To become self-directed learners, students must learn to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning. (pp. 4-6)

The seven principles are presented in an intuitively sequential pattern that allows the reader to connect each principle to the one that precedes and follows it. This pattern contributes to and facilitates the metacognitive work that allows an instructor to self-assess and adjust teaching behavior to fit an effective and proven process of teaching and learning. In addition, the psychological context of learning is addressed in four of the seven principles which recognize the student as a person with variable attitudes and experiences that impact the effectiveness of teaching and learning. This creates a holistic model wherein teaching and learning become a relational transaction that recognizes variables in both instructor and learner with interactions that affect each.

The authors identify their intended audience as “faculty members, graduate students, faculty developers, instructional designers and librarians.” They add that “it also includes K-12 educators” (p. 12). But this classroom-centered focus ignores the fact that teaching and learning is a part of nearly all of the various facets of life, particularly in the work environment. Therefore, it should be recognized that effective teaching and learning strategies are elemental realities in leadership processes. These learning principles are important not only to leaders in educational institutions, but also those in churches, businesses, or other organizations. The need for effective teaching and learning is ubiquitous.

The authors of How Learning Works have produced an excellent research work. Generally well laid out and easy to read, the book is an excellent text with very good guiding principles to assist the teacher in effective learning strategies. The book is a good read for any beginning college instructor, for parents who are interested in how their children learn, and certainly for leaders who are interested in developing the people who serve their organizations. It’s for those who identify with the following statement: “based on years of study and work, you are an expert in your field—but you are certainly not an expert in how to teach others about your field” (p. xiv). How Learning Works fills gaps that many professionals face on the journey to becoming an effective developer of those they lead.

Raquel Rodríguez is a graduate student at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and is a member of the 2011 International In-Residence Leadership Cohort in the Doctor of Ministry Program. She is a citizen of the Dominican Republic.

LEADING GOD’S PEOPLE: WISDOM FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FOR TODAY

By Christopher A. Beeley Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (2012) Paperback, 149 pages
Reviewed by Stanley E. Patterson

Christopher Beeley, an experienced Anglican theologian and pastor, expresses the purpose of Leading
God’s People as extending the impact of effective church leadership beyond the membership of the church. “The vitality of the church,” he says, “holds enormous potential for the well-being of the many societies in which we live” (p. xi). This book is structured around the foundational dimensions of pastoral leadership—spirituality of the leader, service to parishioners, the role of Scripture and theology, and finally ministry of the Word.

Beeley reports that the development of pastors capable of sustaining effective church leadership is given priority by the early church. “Those who shepherd God’s flock on behalf of Christ” (p. 6) are presented as stewards with leadership responsibility for the care of God’s people. The bishop (supervisor of pastors) is also described as being a pastor who cares for his people rather than as an “administrative official” (p. 7). Ideally the bishops assume “servant-like authority and authoritative service” whereby they “exercise their authority not by throwing their weight around, but by helping to build others up” (p. 12).

Beeley quotes the counsel of Ambrose, who said that pastors should not demonstrate their effectiveness through self but rather that they should “show your virtue in your spiritual children” (p. 15). This focus on generative service to people is common in the comments assembled by Beeley regarding the role of the pastor and bishop in the early church and reveals a strong likeness to the servant leadership model encouraged in church leaders today. This presents a challenge to the practice of evaluating pastors on the quantitative basis of growth productivity rather than on the basis of disciples created through training and equipping.

It is also interesting to consider Beeley’s report that the early church practiced a “profoundly social” (pp. 19, 73) selection process in choosing their pastors and bishops. This was done through a relational process of observation of the person and discernment of their giftedness. Multiple reasons are given to support the idea that “the candidate’s inward sense of calling is much less important compared to the discernment of the community” (p. 20). Though not dealt with in the book, this revelation piques my curiosity as to when that community component faded from common practice.

This book emphasizes the need for pastoral leadership to be buttressed by authentic biblical spirituality. Nanzianzus is colorfully quoted in support of this emphasis: “Who would think of teaching a musical instrument, Gregory asks, without first learning to play? Or who would presume to captain a ship who hasn’t first handled the oar, taken the helm, and had some experience of the wind and the sea?” (p. 31). The trust invested by the people in their leader is directly related to the godly spirituality demonstrated by the leader.

The title of Chapter Two couches the ministry task in the language of healing—“The Cure of Souls.” As such, the pastor’s primary role is the process of bringing the members to a place of wholeness and peace with God.

Gregory the Great reminds us that pastoral guidance must be exercised in great humility by leaders who attend first of all to their own spiritual condition before God, “for the hand that would cleanse others must itself be cleansed, or it will soil everything it touches” (p. 73). This emphasis of the prerequisite spiritual fitness of the pastoral leader is consistently emphasized.
The final two dimensions—Scripture and theology, and ministry of the Word—were collectively the most outstanding contribution of this book. The counsels from these ancient sources bear a powerful testimony to the centrality of the Word in the life and leadership of the pastor. The effective pastor must be and remain a committed student of the Word and follow a discipline of theological study as a condition of being entrusted with the authority of spiritual leadership. Beeley again quotes Gregory the Great:

No one presumes to teach an art that one hasn’t mastered through study. How foolish would it be therefore, for an inexperienced person to assume pastoral authority when the cure of souls is the very art of arts? . . . And yet, how often do people who are completely ignorant of spiritual precepts show no fear in proclaiming themselves physicians of the heart, when anyone who is ignorant of the power of medicine would be embarrassed to be a physician of the body? (p. 77)

For the pastoral leader, the application and distribution of the Word through teaching and preaching is, according to Nanzianzus, “the first of all our concerns” (p. 105). Integrity in the use of Scripture and professionalism in its presentation are matters of highest importance.

My primary criticism of this book would fall in the area of sensitivity to the broad readership it will likely attract. Use of the more generic term of “pastor” rather than “priest” would allow a more inclusive understanding and application of the content Beeley is recommending.

The secondary criticism relates to the stated purpose which did not seem to have been adequately fulfilled. The narrow use of non-inclusive ecclesial language and little mention made of how this purpose would be realized led to this conclusion.

Lastly, the book totally sidesteps the historical context marked by the decay of leadership behaviors that led to the clergy dominant church during the period of the Church Fathers.

I would recommend *Leading God’s People* as helpful reading for church leaders who would better understand the heritage of an age long past wherein faithful men served as bishops and pastors and who led the church during difficult times of transition. Reading and benefitting from Beeley’s work will require an understanding of the unique characteristics of the Anglican tradition from which he writes, but spiritual leaders should know that there is wisdom to be gleaned from this book, as exemplified by my favorite quotation from the book: “No exhortation can encourage the laity, no reproof can correct their sins if the person who is supposed to be a protector of souls becomes the executor of earthly affairs” [Gregory the Great] (p. 103).

STANLEY E. PATTERSON is Associate Professor of Christian Ministry and chair of the Christian Ministry Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and also serves as the director of the Christian Leadership Center at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

**SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP: MOVING PEOPLE ON TO GOD’S AGENDA (REV. & EXPANDED ED.)**

*By Henry T. Blackaby & Richard Blackaby*

*Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman (2011)*

*Paperback, 418 pages*

*Reviewed by STANLEY E. PATTERSON*

This “revised and expanded edition” of *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* follows the