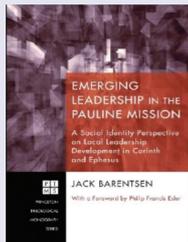


Training Christian leaders: Then and now

Book Title:

Emerging leadership in the Pauline mission: A social identity perspective on local leadership development in Corinth and Ephesus

Book Cover:



Author:

Jack Barentsen

ISBN:

13:978-1-161097-244-4

Publisher:

Pickwick Publications, 2011, \$39.60*

*Book price at time of review

Review Title:

Training Christian leaders: Then and now

Reviewer:

Christoph Stenschke^{1,2}

Affiliations:

¹Forum Wiedenest, Bergneustadt, Germany

²Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa, South Africa

Email:

stenschke@wiedenest.de

Postal address:

PO Box 392, Pretoria 0003, South Africa

How to cite this book review:

Stenschke, C., 2014, 'Training Christian leaders: Then and now', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35(1), Art. #1362, 3 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.1362>

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

The portrayal of Paul's mission in the book of Acts, as well as the references to leaders in the *Pauline Corpus*, take it for granted that Paul readily could identify and appoint people for leadership roles in the communities of Christ believers which he had founded. But where did Paul find those leaders? How did he prepare them for their tasks and develop them as they were in their new roles? What processes took place to stabilise these communities of new converts and institute their leadership? These are the issues that the present comprehensive monograph addresses through a good mixture of solid exegesis and insights from a group-dynamic, social identity perspective.

In the 'Introduction' (pp. 1–15), Barentsen briefly sketches developing patterns of leadership. He rightly notes concerning previous research:

Traditionally, NT studies on church leadership have focused on church office as it developed in the NT and the few centuries afterwards. These studies often became an apology for the leadership structure of the denomination to which the author belonged. More recently, the application of social science approaches has unearthed a wealth of material about ancient patterns of leadership. Renewed study of NT leadership has pointed to a variety of people, functions, and norms involved, so that abroad scholarly consensus on a normative or apostolic pattern of leadership seems further away than ever. The only agreement seemed to be that the NT does not prescribe any one of these patterns as the universal norm for all churches. However, most of these studies have ignored the dimension of group dynamics in their study of leadership. (p. 1)

However, as leadership is essentially a dynamic group phenomenon, these insights have to be applied to the early Christian communities and their patterns of leadership. After describing groups, their dynamic, and the emergence of leaders within them, Barentsen explains his own approach as one focusing:

on patterns of leadership as they develop within Pauline groups or communities. These developing patterns can be fruitfully studied by analysing leadership emergence, maintenance, and succession. Leadership emergence refers to the ways a regular group member comes to be a group leader. Leadership maintenance discusses the ways established leaders maintain their influence, whether or not in competition with others. Leadership succession relates to the ways established leaders empower new leaders to emerge, either joining the established leaders or taking their places. The study aims to trace the development of these leadership patterns by studying the social and psychological mechanisms that drive this development. (p. 2f.)

He moves on to outline the basic issues in Paul's correspondence to Corinth and Ephesus, the social identity model of leadership, various definitions, and the plan of his own investigation.

Chapter two addresses the ideological challenge of church leadership studies (pp. 16–31). These include issues of modern historical scholarship and denominational ideology which have so often blurred the perception of leadership, the turn to the social sciences, the need to rethink leadership in terms of the first century, authority and ideology in group contexts and the challenge to integrate social and ideological factors.

In the third chapter, 'The social identity model of leadership' (pp. 32–74), Barentsen lays the methodological foundation for approaching the biblical evidence in a fresh way. He describes the foundations of the social identity approaches, social identification processes, leaders as (competing) managers of social identity and the development of different leadership patterns. There is a brief summary of the social identity model of leadership at the end of the chapter (p. 73f.). The bulk of the volume applies these perspectives to 1–2 Corinthians and to the church(es) of Ephesus as they appear in Ephesians and 1–2 Timothy.

Chapter four, 'Realigning emerging leadership with Christian social identity in 1 Corinthians' (pp. 75–111), first situates the Corinthian correspondence in Paul's ministry, surveys social

Copyright: © 2014. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS OpenJournals. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

identification in the Corinthian community in about 55 CE, analyses the Corinthian leaders as 'managers of Christian social identity' and Paul's own leadership as 'identity management' and sketches the development of local leadership patterns in Corinth in 55 CE. The results are presented here in some detail in order to give an example of the approach and results of this examination. Barentsen observes that the stability of local leadership in Corinth suffered from tensions in social identification. The letter gives evidence of several Corinthians influential in the congregation, as indicated by their relative wealth and social status:

It is probably correct to identify these people as local leaders that were loyal to Paul, while some passages indicate the presence of other unnamed leaders. As the social situation grew more complex and Paul's (and Apollos') absence was prolonged, local leadership shifted increasingly to familiar cultural patterns of patronage and traveling sophists, resolving social tension through the more familiar comparative fit and category accessibility. The local leaders provided subgroup cohesion and maintained their loyalty to Jewish teachers following these cultural patterns, to the detriment of the cohesion of the community as a whole. These leaders failed to adapt to collegial leadership overseeing the entire community, and fragmented into leadership over subgroups. (p. 111)

In response to this reconstruction to the leadership situation:

Paul acknowledged that leadership is shaped by familiar cultural structures, since he acknowledged leaders who have the status and wealth to offer their services to the church. However, Paul clearly did not legitimate their leadership by the cultural norms of honour and competition, but by Christian in-group norms of self-sacrifice, personal involvement, and group-oriented service. In this letter, Paul demonstrated his sensitivity to social identification processes and how his exercise of authority is related to his prototypicality in any given situation at any given time. His commendation of Stephanas and others is not based on office, training or on official recognition but on their ability to serve in order to navigate the Community through this stage of growth and instability. The letter does not indicate any interest in precise structures of authority, in defining the nature and extent of a leadership office, or in constructing a leadership hierarchy. However, the existence of differentiated intragroup leadership roles is plain, even if the precise structural features were unsettled in this climate of social growth and change. (p. 111)

With this thematic structure, Barentsen moves on to examine the other letters.

Chapter five interprets 2 Corinthians as an exercise in re-establishing Paul's leadership as model (pp. 112–140) by situating 2 Corinthians in Paul's ministry and covering social identification in the Corinthian community in 56 CE, the Corinthian leaders as managers of Christian social identity, Paul's leadership as identity management and the development of local leadership patterns at Corinth in 56 CE. Concerning Corinth, the volume would have benefitted from interaction with P. Marshall's study *Enmity in Corinth: Social conventions in Paul's relations with the Corinthians* (WUNT II.23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987).

Chapter six assesses 'Leadership legitimation and empowerment in Ephesians' (pp. 141–183). It situates Ephesians in Paul's ministry and discusses social identification in the Ephesian community in 61 CE, the Ephesian leaders as managers of Christian social identity, Paul's leadership as identity management and the development of local leadership patterns at Ephesus in 61 CE. Ephesians gives evidence of Paul's intentional model for empowering local leadership and of the Roman origin of the leadership model of Ephesians. The letter should be read:

as a legitimating document for new levels of leadership to carry forward Paul's vision of Christian social identity in expanding local and regional networks of Christ-believing communities. This makes Ephesians a key leadership succession document, even if only implicitly and in the very early stages of succession. (p. 183)

The next chapter, 'Structuring leadership and group participation in 1 Timothy' (pp. 184–251) opens with an excursus on the authorship and social context of 1–2 Timothy, situates 1 Timothy in Paul's ministry, describes the social identification in the Ephesian community in 63 CE, the Ephesian leaders as managers of Christian social identity, Paul's leadership as identity management and the development of local leadership patterns at Ephesus in 63 CE. 2 Timothy aims at correcting leadership misconceptions and establishing succession (pp. 252–289). It would have been instructive to add to this discussion of leadership in early Christian Ephesus the Ephesus-passages of Acts, including Paul's detailed instructions to the Ephesian elders; see, for instance, S. Walton's, *Leadership and lifestyle: The portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians* (SNTS.MS 106; Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

The final chapter, 'Conclusions and implications: Emerging leadership in the Pauline mission' (pp. 290–325), first traces the developing leadership patterns in Corinth and Ephesus by 'outlining the patterns of leadership emergence, maintenance, and succession along with the forces at work to shape and change these patterns' (p. 290) (on leadership patterns in Corinth see pp. 291–295; for Ephesus see pp. 295–298). On Ephesus and its particular challenges, Barentsen observes:

The Ephesian leadership did not need to be rescued as in Corinth, but needed to be stabilized by a consistent orientation on God's mission with the church in the world. The increasing perception of Christian social identity in terms of household relationships seems to indicate not the growing dominance of hierarchical household structures in the community, but the perspective of the leadership subgroup as it sought to order the life of the community. It is not surprising that Paul experienced instability and conflicts with his newly founded communities. Although they adapted some structures from their Greco-Roman environment, their leadership style and community life were so different from their environment that group members found it difficult to know how to behave or how to lead in new situations that they had not encountered before as Christ-followers. Thus, Paul's followers frequently defaulted to behaviour and processes of identification that were more familiar with them ... For almost all members, with or without

prior experience with Jewish identity, Greco-Roman values of honour, status, and competition presented a constant pull away from such important distinctives as self-sacrifice and mutual service in Christian social identity. (p. 298)

This is followed by a comparison with the leadership patterns in both early Christian centres (pp. 299–303), in which Barentsen notes:

The differences outlined are generally due to different stages of community and leadership formation, to differences in Paul's personal accessibility for the community in Corinth or Ephesus (implying less or more social distance), and this to differences in available strategies for intervention on the local level. (p. 301)

Then come observations on Paul's rising charismatic status in historical context and Corinth and Ephesus as stages of similar developing leadership patterns.

Barentsen further argues that the documents relating to Corinth and Ephesus indicate uniform patterns of leadership (pp. 307–312): 'Paul advocated a relatively uniform pattern of leadership in his communities on the leadership level responsible for intragroup teaching (identity maintenance) and for group communication' (p. 291). Similarly:

Paul transformed leadership patterns in both Corinth and Ephesus to converge on a standardised pattern in order to facilitate the intra- and intergroup communication of the gospel as the defining message that shaped their Christian social identity over against Jewish and Greco-Roman influences. These similar patterns of leadership are presented as universal and normative, not in their specific structures and titles but as a condition for this intra- and intergroup communication to provide long-term stability and cohesion for Christ-following communities in their understanding of Christian social identity. (p. 311)

There is a discussion of the implications for further research (pp. 312–322), which includes aspects of the historical development of church office, Paul and moniscopacy: a social psychological framework, charting the Pauline mission, implications for the study of Paul's opponents, a reading strategy for the *Corpus Paulinum* and social identity theory as a hermeneutical tool. At the end, Paul is described as a social strategist and situational theologian (p. 324f.):

Paul's Aegean mission is one unified missionary effort with similar patterns of community and leadership formation, patterns that may be replicated in other areas of the Pauline and the larger Christian mission. Paul himself emerges from this study as an entrepreneur of social identity, not only by virtue of the theological and ideological sources he employed, amongst which the revelation he received played a key role, but also by virtue of the social strategies with which he sought to contextualise his theology. Whether and to what extent he was outwitted as entrepreneur in his own time remains a subject of debate ... later generations have often turned to Paul as their key authority, accepting his vision of Christian social identity as normative. Subsequently, churchmen adopted patterns of leadership that they considered most suitable for their time and culture to faithfully implement and embed this vision of Christian identity in the church. It remains a challenge today to adopt Paul's vision of Christian identity and his patterns of leadership to the demands of our own time and culture in order to provide the vitality, continuity and cohesion for today's churches that Paul envisioned for the churches of his own time. (p. 324f.)

The inspiring volume closes with a bibliography (pp. 327–346) and indices of authors, subjects and Scripture.

Barentsen presents a thorough and persuasive study of an important aspect of Pauline praxis and theology that has not received much attention since the earlier studies of A.D. Clarke (2000–2008). He shows how methods and insights from the social sciences can be applied to ancient literature with considerable gain. The volume is part of a welcome recent interdisciplinary focus on the nature and construction of early Christian identity (for a survey of the issues see, e.g., B. Holmberg, ed., *Exploring early Christian identity*, WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

The volume not only sheds fresh light on Paul's mission and the early Christian communities but also offers biblical inspiration and guidance for all who are involved in planting churches in the twenty-first century (Barentsen himself served for many years as a church-planting missionary before teaching New Testament and Practical Theology at the ETF in Leuven; <http://www.etf.edu>). It is also useful for anyone involved in the identification and development of Christian leaders in different global contexts and similarly provides a space for those who want to reflect critically on their own leadership experiences, skills and approach.