



Christopher A. Beeley
Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today

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Christopher A. Beeley, Walter H. Gray Associate Professor of Anglican Studies and Patristics at Yale Divinity School and an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church, is best known for his work in the Trinitarian thought of Gregory Nazianzus. Having published broadly in the area of Cappadocian theology and fourth-century doctrinal development, Beeley's *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* is a surprising and refreshing book. Beeley carefully weaves biblical insight with Patristic sources to produce a book of *timeless* pastoral wisdom. Based on the fruit of years spent with the Fathers, *Leading God's People* fills a hole in the area of practical theology and should be a serviceable text for scores of divinity students for years to come.

Beeley's premise is simple: the early church provides "key principles of church leadership" which should serve to "renew our

understanding of ministry” and “offer a vision of the kind of leaders [readers] should hope to become” (p.ix). Leaning on the great pastoral traditions from important figures such as Gregory Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory the Great, Beeley reveals the weightiness of pastoral ministry from an early Christian perspective.

Each chapter is laden with practical, pastoral wisdom and studded with insights from the Fathers. Chapters include broad topics such as the necessity of pastoral piety, the knowledge of God’s Word for effective ministry, and the deeply personal nature of pastoral counseling. Perhaps the most helpful section is chapter three, “The Cure of Souls,” wherein Beeley relates the Patristic understanding of pastoral ministry as akin to medical practice. The pastor, as a healer of souls, helps to diagnose spiritual conditions and offer spiritual remedies appropriate to the ailment. The pastor’s main task is to point the sick to the ultimate healer—Jesus Christ. As Beeley relates, “In this sense the deep logic of pastoral therapy is really the doctrine of Christ himself, or orthodox Christology” (p.75). Beeley helpfully demonstrates the significance of knowing scripture for pastoral ministry from a Patristic perspective. While the Fathers rightly emphasized principles of rhetoric in preaching, “all the Fathers insist that whatever training and education one has, what really enables one to teach, delight, and sway others in Christ is a prayerful faith, founded on the spiritual study of scripture” (p.122). As examples of scriptural knowledge and application, the Fathers are preeminent.

While *Leading God’s People* offers a wealth of insight in such a concise book, some subjects are less developed than others. For example, hermeneutical approaches in early church exegesis receive only slight attention. Furthermore, early church ecclesiology figures little into Beeley’s discussion, and the Patristic doctrine of scripture is

not extensively considered. Consequently, readers should not consider *Leading God's People* as a critical engagement with the Fathers on the subject of pastoral ministry. While Beeley's egalitarian language might put off some readers, the pastoral principles that he promotes are applicable for all readers.

Leading God's People provides a valuable starting point for those wishing to enter the ministry. Although similar to Andrew Purves's *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Westminster John Knox, 2001), Beeley's approach offers greater practical insight, and focuses primarily upon Patristic sources. Beeley drives readers to the primary sources and provides a reading list for those interested in engaging them at a deeper level. Beeley imparts a natural and well-versed interaction with the Fathers, and his wisdom, which is rarely anecdotal, is refreshing and compelling. By allowing the Fathers to speak for themselves, Beeley's readers will feel the significance of pastoral ministry and the gravitas of leading God's people, both in classical Christian perspective and for today.

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