

## Book Review:

### ***Ministering in Patronage Cultures: Biblical Models and Missiological Implications***

By Jayson Georges

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. 176 Pages.

Reviewed by Thomas Seckler

Jayson Georges has extensive experience serving in patron-client cultures and is thus well-equipped to write about Christian ministry among them. His book, *Ministering in Patronage Cultures: Biblical Models and Missiological Implications*, is eye-opening to those originating from non-patronage cultures. The author explains that patron-client relationships are an everyday reality for most humans (19). His thesis is captured well in his final pages: "Patronage can be a fruitful model for establishing genuine relationships, discipling believers, and mediating grace." (152)

Georges' focus for this book is threefold: 1) introduce this new paradigm of patronage, 2) give examples of patronage and 3) present potential applications for ministry (6). The author accomplishes these goals well by organizing his book into four parts: cultural issues, biblical models, theological concepts, and missional implications. Georges begins Part One by defining patronage as follows: "Patronage, simply put, is a reciprocal relationship between a patron and a client." (9) He explains that this relationship is "asymmetrical" with the responsibilities of the wealthier patron including providing for, protecting and helping the client. The client, in turn, "offers obedience, gratitude, allegiance, and solidarity to the patron" (9).

Part Two explores numerous biblical examples of patronage, noting that in those cultures patronage was the "unstated assumption guiding social interaction" (27). Theological concepts are discussed in Part Three. The author argues that the concepts of God as Patron, Sin as Ingratitude, and Salvation as Patronage are biblical and that they can be utilized in ministering to others from a patronage culture. In part Four, missiological implications, Georges explores the application of patronage concepts to practical ministry.

He proposes that the patronage system can be used either positively or negatively and invites us to ponder, "How can we function as biblical patrons?" (113) Here the author shines as he provides approaches to patronage and ministry which do not sidestep the potential pitfalls of patronage.

This book has several strengths and one weakness. First, it provides an excellent description of patron-client relationships. Second, it is balanced. Although the author recognizes the abuse of patron-client relationships, he refuses to dismiss patronage cultures out of hand and argues that it is possible to utilize the patronage concept in God-honoring ways. Third, the book interacts with biblical material regarding patronage. In doing so the author not only shares insight about biblical events and teachings but also lays a foundation for biblically-based ministry in patronage cultures. It is in these central chapters, however, that the weakness of the book is revealed. The author does provide "patronage lenses" to interpret biblical teachings and theological concepts, but at times he appears to overemphasize the patronage framework as a way to understand the scriptures. It is used to narrowly describe concepts which are broader than their patronage context. One example is the statement "Repentance, in essence, is the transfer of one's allegiance from false patrons to the true Patron, a change in patronal relationships." While this information is true, there are other aspects of biblical repentance that are left out (sense of personal sin, recognition of forgiveness available through Christ, etc.). It would be helpful for the author to explore how the patronage concept, while revealing, has limits as a lens to understand biblical truth.

The strengths of this book, however, far outweigh its weaknesses. Georges' book can be used as a vital

resource for training cross-cultural workers originating from non-patronage cultures. As one who has served many years in patronage cultures, I found myself repeatedly being reminded of previous experiences as well as gaining additional insight into them. This book is thus valuable reading *before* people like myself enter patronage cultures. It can also benefit those from patronage cultures as it prompts discussion about how to serve effectively in God-centered and life-giving ways. *Ministering in Patronage Cultures* is a revealing and easily-read book which would be an excellent secondary resource for college-level courses such as cross-cultural ministry or anthropology for ministry.