

The Kingdom at Work Project

A communal approach to mission in the workplace

David Clark

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This hefty book demonstrates the author's passion for 'a communal approach to mission in the workplace', the book's sub-title.

David Clark has written extensively over the last 45 years on cities and communities. He has more recently focused on the 'kingdom community' and the 'diaconal church'. The former he defines as 'the divine community which manifests the Trinity's universal and inclusive gifts of life, liberation, love and learning'. And he sees the latter as 'a church which is the servant of the kingdom community'.

Clark describes the purpose of The Kingdom at Work Project as to 'enable Christians to create workplaces transformed by the gifts of the kingdom community.' He sets out 12 stages to this project.

The first seven stages describe the research he has undertaken and his resulting theology. This covers communities of character; a communal theology for the world of work; a communal spirituality for the world of work; a communal economy for the world of work; a communal model of institutions - Christian and secular; transition; and discernment.

Stage 8 (Intervention) sets out some generic practical examples of how Christians might help to transform their workplaces. The remaining four stages cover areas of the church that he believes need attention. Clark notes in his introduction on page 20 that 'The Kingdom at Work Project...remains a work in process.', opposite a useful diagram of the project's stages on page 21. Those who want to understand the project will need to read and understand stages 1 to 7 before they can start to consider the practical examples of 'Interventions' set out in stage 8

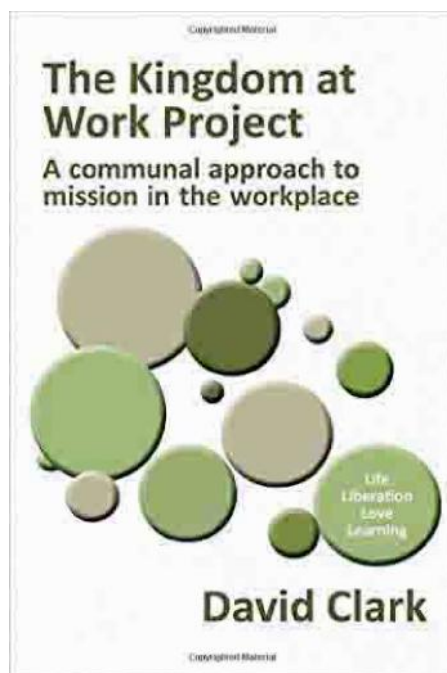
I found this book difficult to assess.

Its strengths include the author's obvious passion for his subject, some compelling material, a comprehensive description of an attractive 'communal theology for the world of work', and a good analysis of the workplace roles (actual and necessary) of both lay and ordained Christians.

However, there are also some significant shortcomings. The words 'community' or 'communal' are used 13 times in the Foreword in just over a page. It was many too many there and elsewhere throughout the book, typifying the repetitive nature of some of the material. Indeed, it is surprising that he does not define exactly what he means by 'community'. The closest he comes is in his Glossary definition of 'Communities of character', a phrase he uses through the book to refer to a specific kind of community. These are 'Social collectives that clearly manifest one or more of the kingdom community's universal and inclusive gifts of life, liberation, love and learning. They may include secular as well as religious communities, from the local to the global.'

Clark also has a tendency to quote other sources, then force-fit these into his 'kingdom model of mission' He tends to contrast this model with his understanding of a 'discipleship model of mission', setting one over against the other. And, whilst his proposition majors on providing a practical approach for Christians to apply in their workplaces, he uses only generic examples and some interesting references to Victorian Christian social entrepreneurs. Contemporary case studies of real-life situations would be of more immediate relevance and application.

I found some powerful & profound insights dispersed throughout the book, often drawn from other sources. For example, Clark cites Armand Larive that 'for too long the church has been captive to theological assumptions which have led to its neglect of the working world' (p.36).



Another section close to my heart is 'Celtic spirituality and the gift of life' on pages 62 to 64. He quotes Esther De Waal: 'In a Celtic cross we see that great round O, the circle of the globe itself, held in tension by the two arms of the cross - creation and redemption together.' I read this whilst on a recent holiday in Cornwall. In that county of rugged beauty I saw many such crosses - my heart leapt at the wonder of God's creation, my praise bubbled up.

At the heart of the book, there is an interesting paradox which may be its Achilles heel.

First, the resonance. The book's focus and passion are about community, our relationship with the Trinity and our relationships with each other, especially in the workplace. This is very much in tune with Matthew 22:36-40 when Jesus described the greatest commandment as "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." The author adds to this both the transformational nature of his theology and the further emphasis that we all need to work together on this. So far, so admirable.

Now, the dissonance. Clark goes out of his way to damn with faint praise many contemporary Christian workplace organisations which he describes as 'evangelical' in stance and/or 'discipleship' in focus. On page 136 he suggests that the message of evangelical groups is '...primarily about the salvation of individuals and not the communal transformation of the workplace....'. He contrasts those promoting a 'discipleship' model and those, like himself, who favour a 'kingdom' model. He suggests that the former promotes 'The world transformed through the

conversion of a multitude of individuals'; 'The gathered church as representing the kingdom'; 'Entry into the workplace in order to draw individuals out of the workplace and recruit them into the gathered church' and 'Mission as an individual endeavour'.



Such statements are not supported by any evidence referred to by the author. Much of what he writes about 'evangelical' and/or 'discipleship' Christian workplace organisations is simplistic or sadly misjudged. My experience is that discipleship and evangelism are very much community movements, whether in the workplace or elsewhere. And evangelism is about very much more than seeking converts.

The paradox between these contrasting positions of resonance and dissonance is summed up in the author's powerful description of servant leadership on pages 113 to 116. He suggests 'No one person has

the ability, skills and resilience to fulfil all the roles which go to make up servant leadership. Thus servant leadership within church and world is invariably a collective phenomenon. This means that within the workplace the concept of the leadership team needs to be very much to the fore.....'.

Similarly, neither a single prescriptive theology of the workplace nor a single Christian organisation can lead, encourage, facilitate or deliver all that he rightly states that is needed to be done there.

Why does Clark argue so strongly for Christian collaboration in the workplace whilst disparaging his most obvious collaborators? We need to work together on this. The Church is one body.

This paradox is a disturbing flaw in an otherwise worthy body of work. 



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