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Book review:

Bruno DYCK 2013

Management and the Gospel: Luke's Radical
Message for the First and Twenty-First Centuries
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Book review

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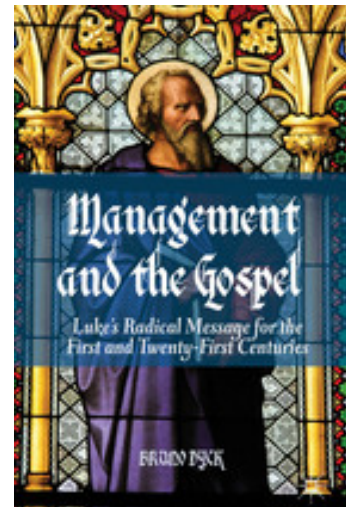
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Abstract

This book is a masterful analysis of Jesus' radical ideas regarding managers and management. These ideas, when understood in the context of the Greco-Roman management system, present transformational possibilities for 21st century managers. A change model that utilizes Jesus' ideas and his discussion about the Kingdom of God frames the book.

Key words: Management and Jesus, Radical messages of Jesus, 1st-century management, Kingdom of God



1. There is a genre of popular business books wherein an author takes a famous historic figure and creates "management lessons for the 21st century" loosely based on his or her words or actions. Dozens, possibly hundreds, of such books use Jesus as the historic figure. Examples of this genre include *Time Management, Jesus' Way* (Beutler, 2012), *The People Skills of Jesus* (Beausay, 1997) and *The Leadership Lessons of Jesus* (Briner & Pritchard, 1998). The book under review is entirely different.

It is rare that a book presents a genuinely different way of examining organizational management, but this one does. The work is a carefully researched, thought-provoking analysis of the teachings of Jesus regarding management, as recorded in Luke's Gospel. Many current management practices, from profit sharing to servant leadership, have assumptions based on Jesus' teachings (Chewning, 2011). However, although the book discusses those teachings, it is neither a business history nor a popular management book. It is, rather, a thoughtful revision of traditional views of organizations, and therefore warrants attention from management practitioners and academics alike.

The title of the book is precise. Many scholars say that the teachings of Jesus are radical, but few give details. One of the important contributions of this book makes is Dyck's demonstration of exactly how Jesus' teachings expanded and radicalized the management practices of his day, and how they can transform 21st-century management practices. Discussion centers on concepts such as the Kingdom of God and salvation, and Dyck carefully explains the relevance of these concepts to contemporary managers and organizational forms. Given the ever-increasing calls from organizational scholars to add the spiritual dimension (i.e. Frey, 2003; Gazzawi & Smith, 2009; Duffy, 2006), this closely reasoned work is a welcome addition to a relatively unexplored area.

The goal of *Management and the Gospel* is "to describe what management theory and practice looked like in the first century to use this as a lens" to examine what Jesus said about management and to apply the results to contemporary business. (page 3). This goal is ambitious, but it is achieved with some authority. Because the discipline of management has deep roots in the Greco-Roman world (Crossan, 2008; Neyrey, 2005), the book's discussion of how managers worked in the 1st century is alone worth the price. In clearly demonstrating where contemporary management is both the same as, and different from, that of the Greeks and Romans, the importance of this book for 21st-century managers cannot be overemphasized.

The unusual nature of the work is apparent from the first page. Dyck begins with a careful explanation of what he is doing and why he is doing it, placing his work as a post-Weberian offering (Chapter 1). Weber argues that the Protestant Ethic imprisons people in an "iron cage" and creates "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart" (Weber, 1958:12). In reply, Dyck states that the teachings of Jesus, placed in proper context, break the iron cage. He then proceeds to demonstrate the validity of this thesis.

Dyck focuses on the biblical book of Luke, one of the four important biographies (Gospels) of the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ (Chapter 2). Luke was a sophisticated writer, and placed emphasis on issues relating to management and material wealth. His book "contains seven of the total of eight mentions of the Greek words for 'manager' or 'management'" that appear in the Gospels (page 14). Luke also focuses on the large themes of Jesus' teachings: creation, the fall of humanity, salvation, and the Kingdom of God.

The role of management in the 1st century was an important one. The expansion of the Roman Empire, in geography, population, and commerce, created the necessity for a professional level of managers (Chapter 3). However, as Dyck points out, the production centers of the empire were not firms, but *oikie*, which acted as the basic unit of economic, social, and political life. *Oikie* were extended households, or estates, with kinship at the core. They typically

included the original family or family group, plus slaves, servants, professional employees and their respective families. Management of first-century *oikos* bears some resemblance to contemporary family business management, but the social implications were different.

The *oikie* created a set of relationships very different from 21st-century firms. In Chapter 4, Dyck details three dimensions that date back to Aristotle: 1) managing relationships within the *oikonomia*, 2) natural and unnatural money management, and 3) patron-client relations, that is, management between organizations. He explains each carefully and then uses them to examine the cultural background behind Jesus' parables and show surprising facets of their meaning.

The center of the *oikos* was the concept of the individual-in-relation-to-the-family. This concept formed the core of the social unit in the 1st-century Roman world. Culturally, the key management relationships within the *oikos* were husband-wife, parent-child, and master-slave/master-servant; these relationships were therefore the social and economic drivers of the empire. Marriages and children united and strengthened the *oikos*, and slaves and their families were members of the *oikos* in a way not unlike that of the family themselves. Consequently, power differentials within the *oikos* were typically modified by affection, proximity, longevity, and family honor.

The second dimension, Aristotle's view of natural and unnatural money management, sounds strange to 21st-century ears, but it is important for an understanding of the teachings of Jesus. Aristotle argues that the proper use of money was to create efficiencies so that the holistic goals of the *oikos* would be met. Money was to be used to help the people in the estate live comfortably, honorably and modestly (the natural use). It was not to be used to make more money with the intent of gratifying unlimited personal or familial desires for power or pleasure (the unnatural use). Having too little money or too much money was therefore equally problematic.

Relationships outside of, or between, *oikie* were largely those of patron-client. A patron-client relationship was a long-term, brokerage-like affiliation in which the power differential was significant. The patron would offer the client protection, support, and benefits such as political appointments or access to loans. In return, the client would give honor (considered more valuable than wealth), political support, and tributes to the patron. In effect, the client advertised for the patron. A successful *oikos* had many clients. Therefore a good manager was a patron who could create and/or maintain clients for the *oikos*.

Basic understanding of the 1st-century management landscape can give 21st-century managers significant insight into the teaching of Jesus. Dyck gives an important example of this by discussing two of Jesus' parables in depth. He begins with what is possibly Jesus' most misunderstood and controversial story, the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-15). After Dyck outlines the conventional lessons that a 21st-century manager would find in this story, he suggests an alternative reading that focuses on how the people Jesus was talking to would have understood the parable. This alternative reading highlights the radical nature of what Jesus was implying. Understanding the cultural context thus demonstrates how this parable could apply to 21st-century organizations.

A second parable, the Parable of the Ten Talents (Luke 19: 26-27) is examined in Chapter 6. Using the Aristotelian view of natural and unnatural

money, Dyck again shows how Jesus' contemporaries would have understood the parable and how that understanding transforms its meaning. The lessons for 21st-century managers are less comfortable than many would wish.

Having established the management landscape as it was in the Roman world, and having demonstrated how Jesus' parables echo that landscape, Dyck moves into a detailed examination of key management themes in the book of Luke (Chapter 7). He begins by showing how Jesus' discussions fundamentally changed the key relationships within the *oikos*: husband-wife, parent-child, and master-slave. For example, Luke records that Jesus put an unusual emphasis on the position of women — and in particular powerless women — such as widows. Discussing the Kingdom of God, Jesus cast God in the role of a benevolent father in charge of the business of the *oikos*, with members of both genders as the kin, or family (e.g. Luke 8:21, Luke 14:12, Luke 18:29). Including women in the management relationship was a radical departure from 1st-century Roman norms that held women as social inferiors. When Jesus placed women as management partners worthy of God's Kingdom, and included widows, he was suggesting what was necessary to bring the powerless into centers of power. His teachings placed God's Kingdom apart from the conventional *oikos*. To Jesus, the Kingdom of God was so important that it was worthy of people forsaking their traditional *oikos* in order to become part of this qualitatively different one. Luke 14:26 records Jesus saying to a large crowd that "If a person comes to me and does not hate [his family] and his own life [in relation to the Kingdom of God] he cannot be my disciple." In an era where family was central, this was indeed groundbreaking.

Jesus not only radically rethought the position of women, but that of slaves too, who were to be given dignity and place in the Kingdom of God. Indeed, Jesus' mother, Mary, called herself a slave of God (Luke 1:38). Dyck suggests that servant leadership, a very different idea from traditional leadership, is evident in the book of Luke. One example of both this and of the dignity given to slaves is the detailed account that Luke gives of Jesus, the host of the Last Supper, assuming the slave's role and washing the feet of his disciples (Luke 22:24-28).

According to Luke, Jesus not only expected basic transformations of relationships within the *oikos*, he also expected transformed ideas of money management. Dyck demonstrates this in Chapter 8 by presenting passage after passage of what Jesus said about the rich and poor, and suggesting how, in each instance, the 1st-century listener would have perceived Jesus' words. Throughout Luke, as Dyck points out, Jesus condemns the unnatural use of money in the Aristotelian sense of acquisitive economics, and suggests ways to give a more holistic emphasis to its use. Dyck also shows that Jesus emphasized the use of finances to restore people to an *oikos*, "...to move them from the margins of society to the center" (page 73).

The first half of the book ends with Dyck suggesting a new way of seeing organizations (Chapter 10-12). In this regard he shows how key elements of Jesus' teaching, such as the Kingdom of God, Salvation and the Holy Spirit, relate to 21st-century organizations. For example, he discusses a key passage in Luke where Jesus talks about his mission in patron-client terms: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of [Jubilee]" (Luke 4:18-19). Dyck shows how

Jesus used this declaration to signal his intention to transform the oppressive and easily abused institution of patron-client into something qualitatively different. Jesus' aim was to create genuine benevolence within a relationship typically based on the counterfeit benevolence of self-interest. The emphasis is on the spirituality of the patron-client relationship and the role that the Holy Spirit plays in it.

Having stretched our minds to envision ideal organizational relationships, Dyck is not content to leave the reader with new ideas. The second part of the book shows how these ideal relationships can be implemented. First Dyck presents a series of extrapolations of the principles Jesus taught, combining them with action responses (to be discussed later) that enable managers to implement these principles into 21st-century organizations. But the book does not suggest the simplistic "Ten Steps" or "Six Principles of Jesus" of popular management literature. The model of organizational transformation presented is both more sophisticated and considerably stronger as a viable tool.

The transformational model in Luke is based on a chiasmic, or ring structure (A-B-B-A). Luke, using the narrative of Jesus' life, creates a four phase process model of organizational transformation: Problem Recognition, Action Response, Changed Way of Seeing, and Institutional Change (Chapter 13). When complete, the model is, arguably, unique in the Change literature as it suggests patterns of institutional change based on the radicalization of people's thinking. The intent is to change the assumptions and worldview of people inside and outside an organization and use that transformation to change the organization itself. Dyck suggests that transformation might be more apt to occur inside an *oikos*, on the grounds that Jesus most often began the cycle by forcing Problem Recognition amongst his own group of disciples and friends. The second phase of the model, Action Response, can be seen as an attempt to identify appropriate actions through a series of mini-thought experiments, each containing one or two "what if" scenarios. The purpose of these thought experiments, says Dyck, is to help the person process options and uncover consequences. This then, in turn, leads the person to Phase 3: Changed Way of Seeing. In this phase, people gain unexpected insights and experience moments that change their worldview. With their perspective altered, the appropriate actions to bring about the Kingdom of God become more apparent. They are transformed; they become new.

Phase 4, Institutional Change, is the final step in the process. Not only individuals but institutions are changed. Dyck illustrates how transformed people can create transformation in institutions, using several further incidents in the life of Christ.

The four phase process model is, by itself, a valuable addition to the Organizational Change literature but Dyck takes the reader still deeper into the change process. He shows how Luke uses the narrative of Jesus to go through six complete cycles of the four phase process, "...first three times forward, and then three times in reverse" (p. 133). Dyck spends some time describing this process and its implications. He argues that the six cycles are not only an interesting literary device, but that Luke is endeavoring to show how the words and actions of Jesus transform people and their *oikos* relationships. His intent is to give both positive and negative examples of the change process, how it works, and the possible outcomes it can cause.

Three important concepts for 1st-century and 21st-century managers emerge

from this multi-phase, multi-cycle process (Chapter 16).

First, everyone is to be treated with dignity. Though this was a radical message in the 1st century, it seems perhaps less so today. In most developed cultures, there is an ongoing attempt to treat people of every demographic with dignity. However, although this attempt is important, it is not, and may never be, complete. There is, for example, a strong bias in the Management literature against religious employees. In general, researchers see intensely spiritual individuals as positive influences on organizations (Fry, 2003; Kolodinsky, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2008). But although approximately 80% of persons in the world follow one of the five major religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism) (Kriger & Seng, 2005), the Management literature seldom discusses religiously committed employees in a positive light (Ghazzawi & Smith, 2009; Helliwell & Huang, 2010). Discussions of religious employees in organizations instead tend to focus on negatives, such as the difficulties firms face in accommodating religious convictions (e.g. Cash & Gray, 2000; Kelly, 2008), or the potential divisiveness of religious faith (e.g. Cunningham, 2010; Weeks & Vincent, 2007). It is, for example, possible that some potential readers of Dyck's book will avoid it because of its religious emphasis. Respect for all persons is an ideal that has not yet been reached.

Second, organizational boundaries are to be porous and welcoming. Again, this would have been a stark contrast to the norms of the 1st century. The security of the *oikia* demanded that there be clear boundaries between them. Clients, for example, were looked down upon if they had multiple patrons. Jesus' teachings challenged people to leave the security of their *oikos* and establish new, inclusive, spiritual, social forms where everyone was welcome to find security.

This principle is as radical in the 21st century as in the 1st because it cuts to the core of the notion of power and the question of which system is in charge. It has been said, for example, that the reason that Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire, and people of other religions were not, was because Christians were not willing to commit to the Empire as their ultimate authority (Schaeffer, 1976). Firm structures in the 21st century are designed for efficiency and effectiveness in reaching economic goals (MacDonald & Gastmann, 2001), and while firm boundaries might be somewhat porous, the imperative of a goal means that an organization is not welcoming to those who are powerless to contribute to it. Dyck understands this but, to his credit, nevertheless suggests ideas for implementing this difficult principle in contemporary firms.

The third management concept that emerges is that when looking for leadership, particular attention should be paid to those who do the basic work of the organization. Jesus implied that slaves could be used as role models for servant leadership. The radical nature of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) has been extensively discussed and therefore will not be further examined here. Nevertheless, it is a difficult concept to implement; though many try, few managers are genuine servant leaders.

Dyck understands that these ideas of Jesus are not easy to implement. Therefore, in the last section of the book he gives lengthy examples, almost case studies, of how the different concepts play out in different functions: structure, strategic leadership, leadership, finance and so forth. This section is, in the opinion of this reader, the weakest part of the book. Dyck's impressive research is still evident, but the examples of companies he argues are utilizing

Kingdom of God principles seem sometimes forced. He uses, for example, the Grameen bank as an example of Kingdom of God principles. While the official founding story of the organization is indeed somewhat consistent with those principles, the well documented problems with the microcredit movement in general (Befus, 2012; Dichter, 2005) and the Grameen bank in particular (Karnani, 2011) suggest that a fuller story might suggest otherwise. The same criticism could be made of his other examples; it is difficult to find organizations that consistently reflect Kingdom of God principles over a period of time. As Dyck himself says, Luke characterizes management “as a journey that is informed by its destination” (page 122). As becomes apparent in reading the book, it takes an almost supernatural transformation of the human spirit for Kingdom of God transformation to occur. This does not, however, negate the importance of this book, nor the importance of continuing to engage in the countercultural and transformational possibilities discussed in it.

The management teachings of Jesus are radical in the sense that they can free managers and organizations from the iron cage of sterile profit seeking and of dysfunctional norms and practices. By gaining the freedom to link the spiritual with the physical organization, the implications of loving God and undertaking altruistic, loving relationships within 21st-century organizations can create a viable and valuable alternative to the materialistic and individualistic hallmarks that characterize the current world.

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