

## MANAGEMENT AND THE GOSPEL: LUKE'S RADICAL MESSAGE FOR THE FIRST AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

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NEW YORK: PALMGRABE MACMILLAN, 2013

303 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN 978-1-137-37733-3

The matter-of-fact title *Management and the Gospel* worried me. There are already far too many books claiming that faddish twenty-first century organizational leadership theories just happen to mesh conveniently with the Bible. But Bruno Dyck, business professor at the I. H. Asper School of Business (University of Manitoba), is also leery about those kinds of claims. He attempts something far more sophisticated and unique, even unprecedented.

Dyck demonstrates that “management” is not just a contemporary concept but aspects of it were already evident in the ancient world (including in Aristotle’s reflections) and in the Bible. Management had three foci: relationships in organizations, dealing with money, and relationships between organizations. With that in mind, we realize that many scriptural passages about households and financial stewardship all have to do with *management*. Dyck wants to know what Luke’s gospel in particular contributes to exploring such concerns. He convincingly demonstrates that Luke has much to say about management, organizations, finances and various forms of relationships. Furthermore, he asserts that Luke’s message was then and remains now highly countercultural.

While Dyck is not in fact a scripture scholar, he draws amply on excellent Biblical scholarship for various assertions and conclusions. He provides a helpful overview of Luke’s gospel before plunging into exploring a number of its themes especially pertinent for management. I was particularly impressed by his careful analyses of two passages often used to teach about “leadership.” He examines how the Parable of the Shrewd Manager and the Parable of the Ten Pounds were understood in the first century. He convincingly demonstrates that we twenty-first century readers usually misinterpret both. For example, we conclude that the Shrewd Manager teaches us to be shrewd as well; but Dyck contends that this is actually a warning against being untrustworthy and against love of money. While we often see the Parable of the Ten Pounds as commending good stewardship of even the little one has, Dyck demonstrates that the master is exploitive and corrupt, definitely not a role model. While such interpretations of familiar texts may seem counterintuitive, Dyck further substantiates his readings by showing them to be consistent with how the Church Fathers read these passages.

There are other unexpected reversal gems in this book. Thus, for example, he shows that “turning the other cheek” does not actually propose “encouraging a passive response to abusive managerial behavior,” rather it is “teaching ... listeners to boldly *confront managers who abuse their power!*” (20). One reason that such counsel was especially relevant then is because the management class was growing in first-century Palestine at the very same time that the poor were growing poorer.

Once we see Luke through the management paradigm (households mentioned over 100 times, wealth over 50 times, et cetera) Dyck’s case is strong: “it becomes virtually impossible to read Luke without seeing the Gospel as an indictment of the status quo, and a trumpet call for alternative socioeconomic structures and systems.” (83) In first-century Palestine, much like our day and age, the rich grew richer at the expense of poor; thus the message of Luke is as challenging as ever.

Luke’s priority in all this can simply be summarized as seeing “instances here on earth ... where people actively relate to one another in ways that are consistent with God’s way of

managing.” (94) Luke calls for everyone “to be treated with dignity,” for organizations to show welcoming hospitality and to treat the lowly with special honor (“servant leadership”). (159)

Such observations lead to one more strength of this remarkable volume. Dyck does not leave all this discussion to theological reflection and speculation. Throughout the book he includes case studies of businesses and other enterprises that successfully and fruitfully implement key aspects of Kingdom of God priorities of caring for the created world, providing meaningful work, and fostering human community. Examples abound: Ricardo Semmler’s drastic reorganization of Semco; Robert Greenleaf’s redressing of lack of women telephone line installers at AT&T; Richard Feuerstein’s voluntary payment of employees even when the burned facilities were being rebuilt; Grameen Bank’s alternative financing in Bangladesh. I did wonder whether these case studies, usually just a few paragraphs, truly had enough information to be sure that the examples were as radical as Dyck suggested. I further questioned whether it is in keeping with Luke’s biting critiques of the status quo to have so many examples come from the corporate world. While I agree with Dyck’s conclusions about the kinds of relationships and management that the Kingdom of God calls for, I remain unconvinced that such ideals can be fully embodied in organizations.

While raising concerns, I also note that Dyck at times does go into overly painstaking detail, summarizing, explaining, and reiterating ideas, so that the book in my view could have been greatly shortened. Perhaps that is one place where his book is typical of other leadership texts; they too often involve lots of summary and repetition.

These, however, are minor quibbles. This remarkable effort will be of especial use to Christian practitioners and scholars who wish to reflect theologically on leadership. One would be hard-pressed to find anything comparable to this work.

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