

Management and the Gospel:

Luke's Radical Message for the First and Twenty-First Centuries

By Bruno Dyck

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Turning to the last page first is not normally recommended when reading crime novels. Readers of this book, however, may well find it a helpful place to begin. In a Final Thoughts section, the author writes that “this book does not purport to argue that a first-century management lens provides the only way or the best way to interpret the Gospel of Luke” (p.199). That is an important qualification, as a great deal of the book revolves around what might be termed a management hermeneutic.

Returning to a conventional starting point, Dyck introduces his key themes clearly. “It turns out that management is a dominant theme in the Gospel, that its message is consistently countercultural, and that Luke contains a four-phase process model to help readers implement change” (p.3). While the countercultural message – *Magnificat*, Good Samaritan – is common in biblical studies, the management theme and process model may come as a surprise. Indeed, the change process provides the structure for the four core parts of the book: problem recognition, action response, changed way of seeing, institutional change.

Mention of crime novels raises the question of to which genre this book belongs. Bruno Dyck is a Professor at the University of Manitoba's School of Business, and has previously written for an academic management audience. But he has also written about theology and Catholic social thought. His brave attempt to engage the worlds of management thought and biblical scholarship must surely be welcomed, even if such an approach runs the risk of satisfying neither constituency.

Dyck begins by introducing a threefold first-century management lens. The first element consists of managing relationships within organisations, typified by the Greek word *oikonomia*, or household management. The second element is managing money: here Aristotle's distinction between the natural and the acquisitive is used to good effect. The third element is the managing of relationships

between organisations, especially reflecting a patron-client affiliation. Dyck summarises succinctly, “Whereas today some people may be keen to separate ‘business’ from the holy affairs of the ‘church’, such a separation was impossible in the first century” (p.19).

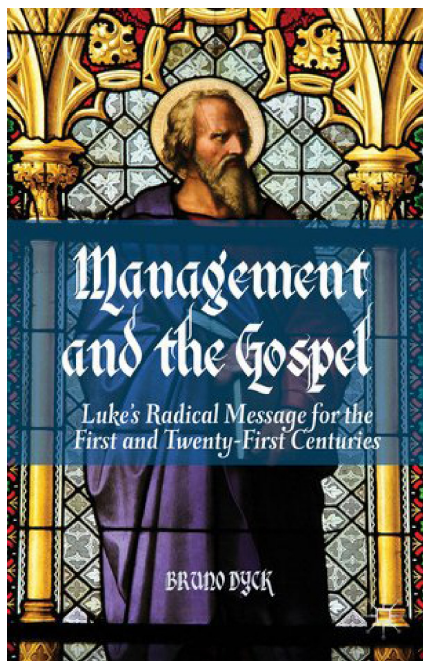
This first-century management lens underpins Dyck's first challenge to conventional interpretations of Luke's gospel. As part of the Problem Recognition phase of his

fourfold process, he devotes a chapter each to the parables of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16.1-8) and Ten Pounds (Luke 19.12-27). The former provides an example of countercultural thinking according to the three elements of the lens: the manager elevates the roles of slaves in the household economy, promotes sustenance (as opposed to acquisitive) economics, and seeks to move away from a patron-client relationship towards benefaction (providing benefits without strings attached).

The second phase of Dyck's fourfold process, Action Response, is represented by chapters exploring passages in Luke in the light of the threefold management lens. Dyck finds a ‘truly remarkable’ consistency

– for example, relating to the power of women or dignity of slaves – which stands in ‘stark contrast’ to first-century norms. He also finds a preference for sustenance economics over acquisition, laid out in a table examining passages in Luke's gospel which do or do not explicitly refer to the ‘rich’.

The third part of the book, exemplifying the New Way of Seeing, examines Lucan passages relating to the Kingdom of God, salvation, and the Holy Spirit. Having considered a series of opposites – future or present, spiritual or earthly, passive or active, for members or everyone – Dyck writes that “A popular twenty-first century understanding of the [Kingdom of God] would lean toward the first interpretation along each of these four dimensions” (p.86). This is an example of where his quest



for clarity is not helpful: he appears to consider this an either/or question, whereas most scholars would expect a both/and response.

The fourth part of the book is the least satisfying. Dyke analyses the Journey Narrative (Luke 9.51-19.40) according to a chiastic structure, with three forward cycles, each with four phases, a pivotal section, and three reverse cycles, again with four phases. The four phases are those of the perceived change process. This chiastic analysis, which Dyke admits is not “the only way or even the best way to interpret this text” (p.122), is backed up by a 23 page Appendix. The rigid structure is a shame, as it runs the risk of missing key challenges, such as the process of management being more important for Kingdom management than outcomes.


The final part of the book draws together implications for contemporary management practice, with a series of short case studies. Several are well-known in the business school literature: Grameen Bank, Interface, Semco. However, the Focolare movement provides a refreshing alternative.

Throughout the book, Dyke is keen on clear structures, such as the three elements of management and fourfold process. While this can sometimes appear rather artificial, these frameworks help key lines of argument to be followed. This clarity is backed up by regular figures and tables, and Summary and Reflection Point sections which conclude each chapter.

Dyke does not always help himself through his use of language. Summarising the Kingdom of God in Luke, he writes that this is seen “where people actively relate to

one another in ways that are consistent with God’s way of managing” (p.94). The phrase ‘God’s way of managing’ may startle, or even alienate, some readers. Yet the four elements Dyke identifies – that the Kingdom is for everyone, is taught and learned, is enacted, and is observable in outcomes – provide a helpful summary.

While Dyke is at home with US management thinkers (eg Argyris on learning, Greenleaf on servant leadership, Porter on strategy), his book would have benefited from a broader canvas. He notes that “humanity’s age-old pursuit of salvation pervades the contemporary management literature, though it is rarely referred to in religious terms” (p.97). He refers to Gary Hamel’s invitation for theologians to join the debate about management, yet authors from outside the North America mainstream who might helpfully contribute to this dialogue, such as Amanda Sinclair, Donna Ladkin or Meg Wheatley, are not mentioned.

In summary, this book is something of an enigma. It contains some innovative and ground-breaking interdisciplinary insights. Yet its rigid structure and language might alienate readers. We began by noting how Dyke’s approach runs the risk of satisfying neither business nor biblical constituency. On balance, the author just about succeeds in offering material for both sets of readers (and especially those who belong in both camps). He himself provides a good summary: “management scholars seeking to embrace the ‘theological turn’ should be pleased to find so much fodder in the biblical narrative... Practitioners seeking to integrate their Christian faith in the workplace should also welcome these findings” (p.118f). 



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SIGNIFICANCE

Many of us begin our careers with the goal of achieving success. If we haven’t entered our work as a result of God’s calling, we will eventually face a chasm of deep frustration and emptiness. Success flatters but does not provide a lasting sense of purpose and fulfilment. So often we enter careers with wrong motives – money, prestige, and even pressure from parents or peers. Failing to match our work with our giftedness and calling is like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. If that happens over an extended period, a person crashes.

At this time, many make another mistake. Workplace believers think that beginning a new career in “full-time Christian work” will fill the emptiness they feel. However, this only exacerbates the problem because they are again trying to put another square peg into a round hole. The problem is not whether we should be in “Christian work” or “secular work,” but rather what work is inspired by gifts and calling. If there is one phrase I wish I could remove from the English language it is “full-time Christian work.” If you are a Christian, you are in full-time Christian work, whether you are driving nails or preaching the gospel.

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