

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

By Bruno Dyck (2013)
New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 290 pages

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The goal of Dr. Dyck's book, *Management and the Gospel*, is to assist 21st century readers to understand and consider the social and economic context of management during the time of Christ. As such, it provides an excellent aid for those who seek to integrate Christian beliefs consistently in all aspects of business. The book is also a fine example of thorough and scholarly Biblical integration and would be excellent to use in graduate classes. Most importantly, I agree with Dr. Dyck that this book may help us break away from what Max Weber called the "iron cage"—our materialist-individualist management ethic paradigm. Whether we agree or not on this aspect, the book is valuable for its depth of Biblical integration, Dr. Dyck's ideas, and the many examples.

In the first-century world, Jesus' audience lived an integrated life. For them, talking about religion implied also talking about management, economics, and politics. The audience also longed for a deliverer that would save them from their current political and social oppressors and create a community with systems and processes guided by the Kingdom of God ethics, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The book submits that in the first-century world of Jesus, the manager or steward was a prominent actor in the social-life narrative. Jesus was speaking to an audience that lived in a world where the *oikos* (or extended household) was the primary social group that produced goods and services. Within this group were distinctive household relationships: husband-wife, parent-child, master-slave, and also patron-client relationship between households. Additionally in this first-century social milieu, masters sought to earn money to make money — what Aristotle had called acquisitive economics. As a result, many people had become socially and economically poor and outcasts from the social structure. To this audience, Jesus spoke

a counter-cultural message: a message of the Kingdom of God that reverses the fall of Adam.

Dyck suggests that those who carefully consider the context of first-century Palestine recognize that Jesus speaks directly about how to manage relationships within the organization, how to manage money, and how to manage relationships between organizations. He develops a change process used by Luke, which uses a four-phase "how to" process to implement what Jesus teaches about management. The first phase is problem recognition. When describing Jesus' teaching, Luke asks us to recognize various issues about management. As we recognize the problematic issues, Luke intends for readers to see management, salvation, the Kingdom of God, and the Spirit's work in a new light. With these new insights, he intended for us to create new systems and processes that would radically institutionalize a new way of managing, or perhaps even changing, the world. The book's structure follows this four-phase process. If we pay attention to what Jesus said in the context of his day, says Dyck, we would radically change our methods of management and perhaps our overall social environment.

Dyck argues that, contrary to conventional interpretations, first-century hearers of Luke would hear a greater emphasis on putting into practice the future reality of the Kingdom of God—as God saves us primarily to provide an inclusive community of especially marginalized people, using new life-giving structures and processes. In this interpretation, Jesus primarily demonstrated a way of life and then died because he was a role model of these radical and life-giving ways, thus reversing the curse of the fall.

Following these assumptions, Dyck presents interpretations that deviate considerably from conventional interpretations of a few of Luke's parables. For instance, in the popular parable of the ten pounds (Luke 19:12-27),

conventional interpretation has the nobleman represent Jesus, those who used the ten talents to make more money as heroes, and the person who hid his one talent as the wicked servant. Dyck argues that in the first century, people interpreted this parable in exactly the opposite way. The nobleman is a wicked person because he uses acquisitive economics; those who use the ten pounds to make more money are no better than the nobleman since they thoughtlessly obey the wicked noblemen. The hero of the parable is the person who stands up against this nobleman and nonviolently protests by hiding the money, or taking it out of circulation. In this interpretation, Jesus was offering sustenance (economics that sustains the social fabric) instead of acquisitive economics (using money to make more money) as a Kingdom of God alternative.

The reasoning behind these alternative interpretations makes sense, following the logic presented in the book. But while I found myself agreeing with Dyck that these interpretations are probable, I am still not ready to agree that they are necessarily correct. His purpose is not to convince us otherwise, but rather to help us think through our own assumptions and consistently work out

our integration of our Christian beliefs in business. In fact, Dyck is clear that the interpretations he offers are not dogmatically true and that there are other ways to interpret them.

The book is well organized and includes specific and current applications to Biblical integration in organizational structure, motivation, leadership, economics, finance, accounting, marketing, supply chain, and strategy — all using the four-phase method introduced in the book. Many of these applications are thought-provoking and helpful for our development of Biblical business integration.

In summary, I found myself seriously wrestling with what Dyck offers, which helped me think through my own beliefs. I also found his examples very useful for generating other ideas. And because I often tend to focus too much attention on the individual, I found Dyck's bias towards community refreshing. In the end, however, I am not prepared to recommend this book to my students without first offering a balanced critique of the book. The book, in my opinion, emphasizes the community too much at the expense of the individual.