

INNOVATION AND THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

Significant institutional change is a difficult process for most organizations. The first century Christian Church faced a number of hurdles as it transitioned from the prevailing Jewish culture to a new Christian paradigm. One issue particularly problematic to the Jewish culture was the refusal of the fledgling Christian body to honor Jewish dietary restrictions. Although the initial focus seemed to be on dietary regulations, the greater issue in Acts 10 centered on God's offer of salvation to those outside the Jewish faith. Without the realization of a substantial conceptual shift to overcome these cultural barriers, the emerging Christian Church would be stillborn, unable to expand beyond the narrow constraints of the predominant Jewish culture. The issue was made more complex because key Christian leaders were exemplary adherents of the Jewish traditions, and also in need of reframed personal worldviews. In addition, requisite changes needed to be translated into easily understood universal principal. This paper uses the interaction of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 to explore the specific methodologies used by the first century Jewish and Christian communities to recognize, interpret, integrate, and decide on new and challenging ideas. The paper asserts that mechanisms of organizational learning shown in Acts 10 serve as a worthwhile model for leaders of corporate innovation through the ages.

INTRODUCTION

How does a new and substantively different idea find its way into an organization? What roles do individuals, groups, and the organization play in vetting the new concept, comparing it to established corporate values, and then deciding whether to accept, modify, or reject the challenging idea? What are the differences between doctrine and dogma, and how is each involved in the consideration of new ideas? This paper considers the remarkable story of Peter and Cornelius as detailed in Chapter 10 of the Book of Acts. The paper explores the specific actors and methodologies used to consider a new concept, the inclusion of the Gentiles in the family of God, and offers a worthwhile model for leaders of organizational innovation through the ages.

ELEMENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND CHANGE

Institutional learning is a dynamic, largely imprecise process that requires specific actions

from individuals, groups, and the organization. As Crossan noted,

The three levels of organizational learning are linked by social and psychological processes: intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999, p. 523).

Institutional learning requires change:

Creativity is nothing more than going beyond the current boundaries, whether those are boundaries of technology, knowledge, social norms or beliefs (Anderson, 1992, p. 41).

As shown by **Diagram 1** below, institutional learning is iterative and bi-directional: that is, as concepts are developed and clarified, they may move back and forth between individuals, groups, and the organization, perhaps numerous times. Institutional learning, by definition, always involves individuals:

"At its most basic level, individual learning involves perceiving similarities and

differences — patterns and possibilities. Although there are many definitions of intuition, most involve some sort of pattern recognition” (Behling & Eckel, 1991, p. 49).

As Nonaka asserts, individuals manipulate discrete concepts throughout the process:

The cognitive elements center on what Johnson-Laird (1983) called ‘mental models’ in which human beings form working models of the world by creating and manipulating analogies in their minds. These working models include schemata, paradigms, beliefs, and viewpoints that provide ‘perspectives’ that help individuals to perceive and define their world” (Nonaka, 1994, p. 16).

Changes in thought between the three actors are not uniform:

Changes in systems, structures, and routines occur relatively infrequently in organizations; as a result, although the underlying processes of intuiting, interpreting, and integrating are more fluid and continual, significant changes in the institutionalized organization typically are punctuated (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999, p. 530).

In addition, there is demarcation in roles among the individual, group, and organization:

Whereas the focus of interpreting is change in the individual’s understanding and actions, the focus of integrating is

coherent, collective action (Crossan, Lane & White, 1999, p. 528).

Institutional learning routinely creates dynamic tension within the organization:


Given that the environment is constantly changing, the challenge for organizations is to manage the tension between the embedded institutionalized learning from the past, which enables it to exploit learning, and the new learning that must be allowed to feed forward through the processes of intuiting, interpreting, and integrating (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999, p. 530).

It is through the friction of the iterative, bi-directional process shown in **Diagram 1** that organizations sort through what new concepts match their foundational doctrines and should be accepted, and which pose a threat to organizational coherence and should be rejected.

(See **Figure 1**, below).

Integral to the institutional learning process are “conversations.” Organizational learning is never a solitary function, and interlocutors are a requisite element of the consideration of new ideas. As Isaacs noted, “Some writers have gone so far as to conceive of organizations themselves as networks of conversation” (Isaacs, 1993, p. 24), and, “Dialogue can thus produce an environment where people are consciously participating in the creation of shared meaning” (Isaacs, 1993, p. 26). Nonaka said,

Conversation is the most natural and commonplace of human activities: at the



Level	Process	Inputs/Outcomes	Christian Context	Interpretive Questions
Individual	Intuiting	Experiences	Historical relationship with God	
	Ideation	Images	Current circumstances	"What do I see?"
		Metaphors	Direct revelation	
	Interpreting	Language	Scripture	
Group	Elaboration	Cognitive map	Prayer	"Does it fit a pattern?"
		Conversation/dialogue		
		Shared understandings		
	Integration	Mutual adjustment	Counsel of Christian friends	"What does this mean?"
Organization	Institutionalizing	Routines		
	Normalizing	Diagnostic systems	Organized Church body	"How should I live?"
		Rules and procedures		

Adapted from Blackaby & King, 1994; Crossnan, Lane & White, 1999; Nonaka, 1994.

same time, it is one of the best means for sharing and creating knowledge. Good conversations are the cradle of social knowledge in any organization (Ichijo & Nonaka, 2007, P. 88).

Similarly,

It is argued that while new knowledge is developed by individuals, organizations play a critical role in articulating and amplifying that knowledge. Although ideas are formed in the minds of individuals, interaction between individuals typically plays a critical role in developing these ideas. That is to say, ‘communities of interaction’ contribute to the amplification and development of new knowledge (Nonaka, 1994, p. 15).

Conversations clarify:

Talking and acting with others, developing words to describe what had been vague insights, and enacting these insights enabled a deeper meaning to evolve” (Bruner, 1990, p. 97),

and,

Through dialogue the group can evolve new and deeper shared understandings” (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999, p. 529).

Consideration of ideas by groups composed of diverse individuals is especially important:

Groups of people can bring many diverse perceptions and intellectual specialties to bear on a problem. They can provide a supportive emotional environment and the resources necessary to develop initial concepts into believable detail in a reasonable time (Adams, 2001, p. 159).

Conversations between diverse interlocutors not only enhance review of incoming ideas, they also call into question and focus on organizational assumptions used in the inquiry:

Dialogue is a discipline of collective thinking and inquiry, a process for transforming the quality of conversation and, in particular, the thinking that lies beneath it (Isaacs, 1993, p. 25).

Through the process of reviewing new ideas, groups and organizations often clarify the difference between corporate doctrine (actual foundational principles) and dogma (principles coupled with social norms and tradition). Ultimately, the organization must decide on elements of new learning. As learning proceeds from individuals through groups to the organization, new ideas may be accepted, accepted as modified by the organization, or rejected *en toto*.

As shown in **Diagram 1**, Christians share the same learning process inputs and outputs as those in secular society, but may also frame their learning with additional resources, including their historical relationship with God, current circumstances in their lives, direct revelation from God, the Holy Bible, prayer, the counsel of Christian friends, and the deliberation of the local Church body. As detailed in **Diagram 1**, idea consideration flows back and forth between the individual, group, and organization, and the margins between the specific levels are porous.

THE IMPORTANCE OF JEWISH PURITY LAWS

Every successful organization harbors foundational doctrines or principles by which it is defined. The protracted viability of the organizations often depends on the regular and oftentimes vociferous defense of its foundational doctrines. The doctrines routinely must be reiterated, diffused to the corporate body, and used as a touchstone by which to measure every ideological challenge, regardless of its strength or import. For thousands of years, the cohesiveness of the Jewish people has been based on doctrines handed down from generation to generation, including the “purity laws.” Besides defining the Jewish community, the reasons behind the purity doctrines were not obvious to all:

The rationale for these laws is never clearly spelled out, but several explanations probably have some validity, including hygiene, the need to dissociate oneself from disgusting or pagan things, various other ethical lessons, the association of Yahweh with life and whole-

ness rather than death or disorder, the separation of worship from expressions of sexuality, and the need for Israel to be separated from the Gentiles” (Sprinkle, 2000, p. 637).

If the purity doctrines were offended by a person of the Jewish faith, specific actions are required to become clean:

Purity rules describe the rituals, varying according to the “severity” of the impurity contracted, for ceremonial uncleanness due to skin disease, bodily discharges, touching unclean things, and eating unclean foods (Sprinkle, 2000, p. 637).

from Gentiles, especially the dietary laws. Nor would any Jew eat food prepared by a Gentile, for he believed this too would make him unclean (Horton, 1994, p. 126).

For the Jews, entry to membership in God’s family was exclusively

reserved for the seed of Abraham, the circumcised, those who prized the temple and the sacrifices, those who obeyed the law of God given to them directly in the Old Testament (Green, 1993, p. 19).

The emergence of the early Christian Church from the prevailing culture of Judaism catalyzed what have been termed “innovation antibodies,” those who either tacitly or actively resist the

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In sum, “the most important message conveyed by these laws is that God is holy, and man, conversely, is contaminated and unfit, in and of himself, to approach a holy God” (Sprinkle, 2000, p. 637). The purity system symbolically reinforced the teaching that Israel was a “holy nation” (Exod 19:6), set apart by God from all others. Raised in a Jewish family, Jesus too followed and endorsed the strict purity laws of the Jewish faith.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, His followers, many of whom came from within the body of the Jewish faithful, posed an ever increasing challenge to many of the foundational principles of the Jewish tradition. One issue particularly troublesome to the prevailing Jewish culture was the refusal of the fledgling Christians to honor Jewish dietary restrictions:

Many laws and customs separated Jews

proposed change. As Davila noted, “Typically, the more radical the innovation and the more it challenges the status quo, the more and stronger are the antibodies” (Davila, 2006, p. 23). As von Krogh et. al. said,

People are loath to accommodate new knowledge that undermines or runs counter to their stories, especially if that knowledge is conveyed by other group participants with different backgrounds (von Krogh, et. al., 2000, p. 21).

Longstanding values favored the Jewish tradition:

Although they promote internal harmony and homogeneity, deep-seated beliefs, widespread norms, and traditional behavior and performance standards are toxic to innovation (Negroponte, 2003, p. 34).

Griskiewicz similarly noted,

At the other extreme are those who are resistant to change, often because the familiar is so comfortable and doing things differently from how they have always done them is confusing and threatening (Griskiewicz, 1999, p. 23).

Resistance by organizations to new ideas has strong historical precedent. Business strategist Scott Berkun noted that personal rejection has often been the reward for innovative people throughout history:

Every great idea in history has the fat red stamp of rejection on its face. It's hard to see today because once ideas gain acceptance, we gloss over the hard paths they took to get there...Big ideas in all fields endure dismissals, mockeries, and persecutions (for them and their creators) on their way to changing the world (Berkun, 2007, p. 54).

Interestingly, there was not unity of thought regarding the purity rules even within the people derisively called, "The Way." Quietly simmering among the Christian faithful was a

fundamental controversy within the Jesus movement over the ethnic boundaries of the Jesus movement and the continuing validity of conventional Jewish purity rules as standards of behavior (Elliott, 1991, p. 105).

Acts 11 clearly demonstrated the dynamic process of a new and different idea engaging the Jewish community, how the dialectic forced clarification of foundational principles by the Jewish and fledgling Christian communities, and how this process encouraged the Christian Church to flourish.

GOD AUTHORS PARADIGM SHIFTS - PETER AND CORNELIUS

Acts 10 contains both an "outer story" (the conversion of Cornelius and his family) and an "inner story," the process through which Peter learned that salvation was now available to all persons, not just the Jews. While at his home

in Caesarea, an angel of God appeared to a devout man named Cornelius and enjoined him to contact Peter, who was staying in Joppa. Cornelius obeyed and sent his men to find Peter. The next day, Peter had a dream wherein three times a sheet containing clean and unclean animals descended from heaven, and God told Peter to eat of it. Peter declined because of the presence of unclean animals but did not understand the meaning of the dream. Cornelius' men arrived in Joppa, and Peter and some Jewish friends went with them to the house of Cornelius. Peter went inside the home of Cornelius (acting against the Jewish purity laws), and addressed the assembled family and friends of Cornelius. While part way through Peter's sermon, the Holy Spirit was poured out among the crowd, and they began speaking in tongues and praising God. Peter and his Jewish friends were awestruck when they realized that salvation had now come to the Gentiles, and Peter realized the meaning of his dream.

First, it is important to clarify the meaning of Peter's vision in Acts 10. Is the focus of the vision the abrogation of the dietary laws, the acceptance of Gentiles as equal citizens in the Lord's house, or both? As Humphrey noted,

Whenever visions are used within argumentation, there is a possible collision of modes of expression. Vision reports have the potential to take on a life of their own and tend towards polyvalence (Humphrey, 1995, p. 71).

As further clarified by Miller,

Can visions be polyvalent? Perhaps they can. This study cannot begin to speak to this broader question, but it can speak to the polyvalence of Acts 10. The interpretations of food and people seem distinct enough to be called separate meanings. By the way Luke drew the reader along with supreme rhetorical skill, it seems clear that he wanted his readers to understand the visions clearly in human terms, and as Humphrey says, Luke went to 'great pains' to avoid references to food. This event could be dealing with the abrogation of the food laws, but it would be very difficult to prove it from

the Book of Acts” (Miller, 2002, p. 317).

Similarly,

The major problem is that, although Peter’s vision in Acts 10.9-16 is ostensibly about the abolition of the distinction between clean and unclean foods, Peter’s own interpretation of the vision is that the distinction between clean and unclean people has been abolished (Acts 10.28). With this the judgment of the other apostles and the Judean Christians, recorded in 11.18, agrees. Likewise, Peter speaks of the cleansing of the hearts of the Gentiles in Acts 15.9 (Tyson, 1987, p. 625).

Sprinkle also argued,

The division of animals into clean and unclean symbolized the separation between Israelites and Gentiles. Accordingly, the abolition of the kosher laws must symbolize a breaking down of the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. That this is the correct understanding of the symbolism is seen in God’s lesson to Peter in Acts 10-11: God now declares the Gentiles ‘clean,’ and Peter is not to continue to think of them as inherently unclean. In the new messianic age, the principle that God’s people are to be separate (holy) from the world remains, but the lines drawn are no longer ethnic in character (Sprinkle, 2000, p. 652).

As Miller concluded,

In summary the textual and historical evidence suggests that what both Peter and his fellows in Jerusalem objected to was Cornelius’s company rather than his menu (Miller, 2002, p. 310).

The interaction between Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10-11 and subsequent melting of Peter’s resistance to acceptance of the Gentiles into the Christian Church clearly demonstrated that God not only ordains change, He intentionally inserts Himself into the earthly process. God was at work in every element of the organizational learning process (see **Diagram 1** above). As Kee showed,

The point is made emphatically: it is God

who is the agent at work in this vision and hence in the epoch-making action that Peter has been ordered to carry out (Kee, 1997, p. 144).

Guthrie considered God’s influence in the change process:

In His infinite wisdom He had superintended by means of visions [Peter and Cornelius] a major breakthrough which not only transformed the Christian Church, but also transformed man’s relationship with his fellow men (Guthrie, 1975, p. 85),

and Marshall showed that the acceptance of the Gentiles into God’s family was the necessary fulfillment of prophecy:

Part of the demonstration lies in Luke’s claim that what took place in the early church was in accordance with prophecy. Luke’s purpose was to show not only that the coming of Jesus fulfilled prophecy, but also that the rise of the church and the spread of salvation to the Gentiles fulfilled the prophecies in the Old Testament and the promises of Jesus (Marshall, 2002, p. 20).

Nineteenth century Oxford priest John Henry Newman considered the process of personal paradigm shifts:

Or again, we get acquainted with someone whom God employs to bring before us a number of truths which were closed on us before: and we but half understood them, and but half approve of them; and yet God seems to speak in them, and Scripture to confirm them. This is a case which not infrequently occurs, and it involves a call ‘to follow on to know the Lord’ (Newman, 1900, p. 1584).

In the modern era, Strategos CEO Peter Skarzynski said that, for organizational leaders,

Your goal is to identify the things that are hindering new thinking and innovation, the things that are frustrating experimentation, the things that are stopping talent and capital from flowing to the best

ideas. Try to understand exactly which things would need to be changed in your company in order to make innovation a sustainable, corporate-wide capability (Skarzynski & Gibson, 2008, p. 257).

Wise leaders accept God's willingness to alter their horizons, and those of their followers.

CONVINCING LEADERS

Throughout Scripture, God first changed the heart of a reluctant individual leader and then encouraged him to "spread" the change among others:

God convinced a key leader and allowed that leader himself to champion the change (Acts 11:1-18). Some changes need the support of a few key leaders who will then help others to reconcile themselves to the new circumstances (Leadership Bible, 1998).

Relative to Peter's acceptance of the Gentiles into God's family,

The desire for certainty often leads to a process of 'conversion' from the old mindset to the new, and the converts become the new model's most fervent advocates (Wind & Crook, 2006, p. 65).

In many contemporary cultures, no change occurs unless it is first endorsed by an "elder statesman" of the group. Leadership scholar Warren Bennis said that, "Virtually every Great Group has a strong and visionary head" (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 11), and Jesus proclaimed that the strong-willed Peter would be the rock upon which He would build His church. Rev. John Stott noted,

Both apostles [Peter and Paul] had a key role to play in liberating the gospel from its Jewish clothing and opening the kingdom of God to the Gentiles (Stott, 1990, p. 181).

Bennis & Biederman considered how dramatically different an innovation may be relative to prevailing thought: "Groups that change the world have an original vision, one that is as likely to be rooted in dreams as

in experience" (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 95). It is likewise crucial to note that God usually initiates significant change through those, who, like Peter and Cornelius, initially misunderstand or disagree with an innovation, but still love God and desire to walk in His ways. Innovative paradigm shifts, like the acceptance of Gentiles as Christian brethren, may be personally uncomfortable for leaders:

To confront reality is to recognize the world as it is, not as you wish it to be, and have the courage to do what must be done, not what you'd like to do (Bossidy & Charan, 2004, p. 6).

As Curtis Carlson, CEO of SRI International said,

Change brings resistance. There are familiar behaviors that are played out as people move to a new vision (Carlson & Wilmot, 2006, p. 208).

In many instances, only God can effectively alter that these behaviors by inserting Himself into the learning process to initiate transforming conversations between individuals, groups, and organizations.

A LEADER'S CHANGING HEART IS REFLECTED IN CHANGED BEHAVIOR

God began his crucial change in Peter at the point of Peter's current convictions. As Guthrie noted,

In the house at Joppa, Peter was still harboring his ingrained Jewish prejudices. In spite of what Jesus had told the disciples about preaching to all nations, traditions die hard. It had probably never occurred to Peter that the Christian faith would require the abolition of the prejudice about Jews going to Gentile homes (Guthrie, 1975, p. 81),

and that God would use others to initiate that change in Peter. God's involvement in earthly activities is often built upon the response of mere mortals:

The intrusion of the Holy and the divine direction are explicit here, but they require human trust and obedience to

become effective (Johnson, 1983, p. 70).

As Kouzes and Posner have noted, followers expect to witness the unmistakable linkage between what their leaders believe and what they do:

When it comes to deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words, then they watch the actions. They listen to the talk, and then they watch the walk (Kouzes and Posner, 2002, p. 37).

Private thought, discussion, contemplation, and refinement of an innovative idea ultimately result in public action. When Peter received the emissaries sent from Cornelius and began to understand their message, he responded immediately. As Faw noted,

Then Peter the Jew does a surprising thing. He invites these Gentiles in to be his guests overnight! (10:23a) They even eat together. This is the first in a series of unclean-making contacts with the uncircumcised and will later be called into question by the elders at Jerusalem (Faw, 1993, p. 126).

God's leaders do not wait until they have obtained perfectly clear and logical information. They know that, though sometimes personally uncomfortable, they must respond to God's leading even with seemingly incomplete or ambiguous orders:

The importance of Peter's first response should be clear. Even though not fully understanding the direction of God given by the coincidence of vision and visit, he obeys it. Peter receives Gentiles into his abode as guests. He makes no discrimination (Johnson, 1983, p. 71).

FREEDOM TO CHALLENGE CHANGE

God allowed Peter the opportunity to challenge the change (vv. 14-15). God had anticipated Peter's questions and had strong evidence to support His answers (vv. 1-7, 19-23, 30-33). It is not possible to know if Peter was recalcitrant or simply dense:

Although he [Peter] was perplexed at the meaning of the message, he was not per-

mitted to ignore it. It was repeated three times. A threefold message impresses itself more vividly than a single message (Guthrie, 1975, p. 83).

Peter allowed other trusted advisors (even gentiles!) to help refine and focus a new vision, and showed that Peter recognized that a process of change was taking place. Peter carefully listened to the delegation from Cornelius. As Francis Horibe asserted, "Honor those who naturally want to speak truth to power, even if they feel infuriating to deal with" (Horibe, 2001, p. 25). Peter wisely invited a number of his Jewish friends to accompany them to the house of Cornelius, where the full import of the vision given to Peter was forcefully clarified and driven home:

It was one thing to make an attempt to preach to Gentiles; it was quite another to see the sermon interrupted by the clear signs of their conversion and reception of God's gift. There could be no mistake about what had happened. Just as the first Jewish believers had received the Spirit and praised God in other tongues on the day of Pentecost, so now these Gentiles received the identical gift of God (Marshall, 2002, p. 194).

Knowing the inner turmoil Peter felt when faced with considering the monumental reversal of reliance on the traditions of Judaism for salvation, God showed Peter the dramatic effects of this change with the Gentile family and friends of Cornelius. Guthrie summarized:

While Peter was still speaking these words (vv. 44-48) there came a sudden interruption from heaven. The Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the Word. This totally amazed the Jewish believers who had come with Peter. In fact, it almost knocked them out of their senses to see the Holy Spirit poured out on the Gentiles... This evidence clearly convinced these Jewish believers. It also shows that the Pentecostal experience can be repeated (Guthrie, 1975, p. 134).

The bi-directional orientation of the learning process was apparent, as was the realization of

a coming fracture between the Jews and Christian faiths.

AGING INNOVATION

Peter obeyed but was not immediately able to internalize and accept this “paradigm shift.” As Walasky has shown,

In modern psychological terms, we would call Peter’s experience cognitive dissonance. That is, he has heard a voice commanding him to do something that ran counter to an established set of beliefs and values which he firmly held to be true—and not just true in human valuation, but divinely ordained as absolutely and eternally true (Walasky, 1998, p. 104).

Theologian Stott pondered,

The primary question was how God would deal with Peter. How would he succeed in breaking down Peter’s deep-seated racial intolerance? The principal subject of this chapter is not so much the conversion of Cornelius as the conversion of Peter (Stott, 1990, p. 186).

God gave Peter, as he does all faithful Christians, the requisite time and a serviceable mechanism to work through his reservations about the “innovation.” Successful leaders know that significant change requires refinement through an intentional process of discernment and validation incorporating the individual, group, and organization.

TRANSLATION TO SIMPLE, UNIVERSAL PRINCIPAL

Although the initial focus seemed to be on dietary regulations, the greater issue centered upon the availability of salvation to the Gentiles. Without an ultimate realization of a substantial paradigm shift to overcome this significant cultural barrier, the emerging Christian Church would be stillborn, unable to expand beyond the narrow constraints of the predominant Jewish culture. Refining, simplifying and sharing information is critical to the encouragement of positive innovation:

Unlike the relatively easy work of organizational change — process design, teamwork, leadership, etc—institutional change involves redefining the underlying rules or values that govern these social structures” (Halal, 2008, p. 108).

Similarly, Kouzes and Posner asserted,

Before you can clearly communicate your message, you must be clear about the message you want to deliver (Kouzes and Posner, 2002, p. 45).

The innovation must be carefully defined, rendered into words followers may understand and not misinterpret, and then transmitted. Peter did just that, as portrayed in Acts 10:34-36. Peter’s discovery and his willingness to participate in the learning process had importance that stretched far beyond the first century church and the resolution of his antipathy to gentile dietary practices:

The church is a colony of heaven, and its relationships are meant to be a picture of God’s ability to unite the seemingly irreconcilable into a single fellowship” (Green, 1993, p. 280),

and,

The divine purpose is to achieve reconciliation, not only between God and man, but among diverse and often hostile sociocultural distinctions imposed by humans (Kee, 1997, p. 140).

As Doohan noted regarding the Book of Acts,

The focus of Acts is essentially universal. In Acts the Church breaks the closed circle of Judaism and becomes open to universality, a vision based on the ministry of Jesus (Doohan, 1994, p. 112).

Miller similarly summed the meaning of this event:

As the angel and Peter entered Cornelius’s house, so also Cornelius entered God’s ‘house.’ God has now granted the Gentiles not only repentance unto life, but also the fullness of the Holy Spirit and full acceptance into His household

as first-class citizens (Miller, 2002, p. 316).

Acts 11 shows that Peter had ultimately internalized and communicated the universal principle:

Hearing it all laid out like that, they quieted down. And then, as it sank in, they started praising God. "It's really happened! God has broken through to the other nations, opened them up to Life!" (Peterson, 1995, p. 310, Acts 11:18).

IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Every organization, including religious non-profit organizations, is afflicted by entropy. As Gary Hamel noted, "Strategy decay is not something that might happen; it's something that is happening." Organizations that do not innovate in response to changes in the outside environment will cease to exist when the last true believer in the original organizational vision dies. The interaction between Peter and Cornelius in their somewhat clumsy effort to understand God's will has profound implications for religious non-profit organizations. As Christians, it is important to realize that,

You have been chosen to transcend the furthest reach of your own definition of glory to be part of a greater glory, the glory of God and his work of making all things new (Tripp, 2008, p. 46).

At the same time, we don't easily understand God's will for us:

I don't think the way you think. The way you work isn't the way I work. For as the sky soars high above earth, so the way I work surpasses the way you work, and the way I think is beyond the way you think (Peterson, 2003, p. 1317, Isaiah 55: 8-9).

How institutions understand and act on God's will should reflect the Peter/Cornelius interchange. Organizations must recognize that fresh ideas and innovation are not restricted to pastors or consistory members, and God's revelation for the institution may even be given to those "out-

side of the family." Innovative ideas may initially be fragmentary and not-fully-formed. When it comes to innovation, organizations are sometimes "led from the middle" and it is therefore crucial that the internal conversation be continuous and freely open to all. The process of organizational sensemaking may be emotionally wrenching and the dialectic may require time to resolve as a new direction is "talked into being." Organizations must continually evaluate the difference between doctrine and dogma, understand that God's will may lie outside the borders of tradition and historical precedent, and may be delivered by the most unexpected messengers. Leaders must choose between attempting to maintain strong control of the organizational direction or instead be open to God's will. In summation, He "who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20 NKJV) has promised to show His unpredictable will to those who seek him and are willing to receive His guidance in whatever type of package it arrives in.

CONCLUSION

The visions of two people from widely different cultures and their joint obedience to interpret universal meaning from those visions had extraordinary results:

The strange rooftop dream of a Galilean fisherman has led to a religious turn of events that will be nothing short of revolutionary in the history of humankind" (Walaskay, 1998, p. 111).

As the early Christians learned, "The organization needs to move forward, and only challenges and surprises will move the company forward" (Davila, et. al., 2006, p. 244). Peter's personal engagement with the process of learning and final acceptance and public promotion of this remarkable innovation required courage:

Without courage, there can be no hope. People are inspired by leaders who take initiative and who risk personal safety for the sake of a cause. Only those leaders who act boldly in times of crisis and change are willingly followed... Leaders

must summon their will if they are to mobilize the personal and organizational resources to triumph against the odds (Kouzes and Posner, 2003, p. 227).

Changing organizational paradigms may be a complex, emotionally wrenching process. **How** the innovative concept of God's plan of salvation for all people overcame the prevailing strategy of the day is also important, and provided valuable lessons for leaders in the 21st century.

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