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MASTER OR SERVANT?

(A Look at *'Management Theory and Tools'* In Relation To the Local Congregation – With Reference to *'Marketing'* and *'Church Growth'* Philosophy)

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Psalm 127:1-2

1 *"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain.*
2 *It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he gives his beloved sleep,"* (KJV, slightly amended)

Thought Starter

"Three types of growth can occur within a local congregation; these are a growth of muscle, a growth of fat and a growth of cancer. The first stands for true Christianity, the second for nominal Christianity and the third for militant forms of heresy."

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Definitions

Gimmick: an attention grabbing trick or stunt that's designed to produce a desired response from a carefully targeted audience.

Management: the ability to organise resources in order to accomplish particular organisational aims.

Marketing: a branch of management concerned with finding, fuelling and fulfilling legitimate customer needs and wants.

SWOT Analysis: an orderly way through which an organisation can assess its own **s**trengths and **w**eaknesses in relation to the **o**pportunities and **t**hreats in its environment.

NB: The traditional approach to church growth is represented by the mnemonic **FPBSGI,** which stands for **f**aith, **p**rayer, **b**ible **s**tudy and **g**ood **i**ntentions. The terms *"local congregation," "local church,"* "*local assembly"* and *"local body"* are used interchangeably throughout these summary notes.

Section One: Introduction

"When churches ignore or surrender to the world they betray the Gospel."

1) This particular study will focus upon the question, *"to what extent can management and marketing practices be incorporated into the life of the local Church."* In response to it, four stances can be taken on the relationship between management theory and practice (known as the *'management approach'* or *'management approaches'* for short) and the local congregation, these are: -

1.1.1 An **Antagonistic stance** – management approaches are totally rejected as a deceptive *'worldly'* philosophy or satanic Trojan Horse; a Platonic divide between the spiritual and the secular is assumed and this encourages the view that congregations should only grow through the traditional methods of **f**aith, **p**rayer, **b**ible **s**tudy and **g**ood **i**ntentions **(FPBSGI).**

1.1.2 An **Assimilation stance** – management approaches are taken on *'lock stock and barrel'* and become a substitute for the Holy Spirit; there's total capitulation to the anti-Christian value systems dominating this world and this expresses itself in the importation of silly gimmicks.

1.1.3 An **Integrationis**t stance - management approaches are integrated *'willy-nilly'* into the life of a local congregation; although more balanced than the other two approaches it can lead to incoherence and confusion in church practice as in those instances where a traditional choir is immediately followed by a heavy Christian rock band.

1.1.4 A **Subordination** stance – key areas of the management approach are carefully assessed in the light of scripture, so that only those parts concurring with its teaching and assisting in the application of key principles are imported into the life of a local Congregation. Those that don't are rejected.

2) In this session the fourth approach will be advocated, and as shall be seen it does leave a lot of scope for a wise and appropriate use of management. It also has the advantage of encouraging local bodies to filter out unhealthy elements arising from the secular humanistic elements pervading this discipline. A background in both management and theology enables the writer to see all sides of this issue. What is said about the management approach will also apply to marketing, which is one branch of management favoured by churches wishing to enjoy a major increase in numbers. It's more concerned with the specific areas of selling and market research rather than administration, leadership and organisational structure.

Section Two: God's Word and the Management Approach

"God is glorified by good administration."

1) Genesis 6:11f, the main theme expressed here is the need to continue building up God's work in a structured manner, even at a time of universal corruption when the world is about to be judged. Note how Noah was not passive in the face of this corruption. He didn't hang around grumbling *'woe is me'* but instead took practical action in obedience to God's command. Noah is therefore a role model for all believers ministering in a highly corrupt social setting.

2) Exodus 18:13f, the main theme expressed here is the need to delegate when faced with a high volume of work. Note how Moses had the humility to listen to the advice of Jethro who was a relative outsider. He didn't respond with a tantrum when criticism was offered. Perhaps Jethro should be the patron saint of all management consultants. His approach was very diplomatic.

3) Numbers 11:16-17, the main theme expressed here is the way God directly commands Moses to employ a particular organizational structure before there's further blessing. Note how Moses had the structure in place BEFORE a major infilling of the Spirit occurred. He's also been provided with people to help him in his ministry.

4) Ezra 8:1-14, the main theme expressed here is the way Ezra kept lists of names and statistics before making key appointments for the temple. Note how he took great care to take an audit of human resources before making organizational reforms involving the second temple. He assumed that as long as it was done under the will of God, there was nothing wrong in gathering statistical data and analyzing it. Ezra however, was using such data to build God's work and NOT his own personal, religious empire.

5) Nehemiah 4:15f, the main theme expressed here is the way good management and leadership helps overcome potentially murderous opposition. Note how Nehemiah and his supporters were working under immense pressure. He managed to combine faith in God with good organizational and practical measures. Indeed one good test of a ministry is whether the Lord provides helpers with the necessary skills to fulfill it. These helpers may either be few or many but what really matters is the quality of help that's provided.

6) Psalm 127:1-2, the main theme expressed here is the futility of trying to build God's work on human strength alone. Note how doing this creates unnecessary frustration, worry and failure. The author was warning believers not to begin an enterprise on human strength – all that does is lead to a prolonged dose of FLOP (Failure, Loneliness, Oppression and Poverty)

7) Proverbs 11:14, the main theme expressed here is the need to establish management or marketing feedback structures in order to create an abundance of advice, which prevents a people from falling into sin. Note how leaders are to rely upon a variety of counsel and not on just one or two sources. The writer assumed that leaders are wise to carefully consider different views before making a crucial decision. In this passage there's a direct link between scripture and management views of decision-making.

8) Proverbs 24:6, the main theme expressed here is the way good counsel is necessary to wage war. Note how it's assumed that conflict is an inevitable part of the believer's condition. The writer assumed that leaders are wise to seek out good advice before waging a war and avoid starting a conflict on the basis of preconceived ideas. (The writer has had direct experience of the way market research can help apply the principle contained in this passage. An abundance of wise counsel was written on a significant number of questionnaires and this greatly helped him to improve the quality of his teaching.)

9) Proverbs 29:18, the main theme expressed here is the need for an authentic vision to provide God's people with a sense of purpose and discipline. Note how restraint is lost when there's no vision to unify a people. The writer assumed that such a vision must be from God rather then one devised by ambitious men wishing to create their own religious empires with themselves at the centre. In reality, this type of vision amounts to nothing more than a carnal or even satanic induced delusion. Local congregations need to get their vision right before anything else – otherwise all good management will do is to lure them down a wrong direction more quickly. However, local church leaders must be very careful NOT to make their particular vision a test of spirituality. Whilst it's legitimate to employ a congregation as a means to fulfil their vision, they also have a responsibility to nurture (or at least tolerate) any legitimate vision of an individual member even though it differs from their own. For example, whilst a minister may have a godly vision to help one section of society, he should still accept that some members of his church might have an equally godly vision to help an entirely different section of society. One sign of a healthy assembly is its ability to bring together people possessing highly diverse callings. Great care must be taken in any ministerial appointment to ensure that no mismatch exists between the vision of a minister and that of the body he's leading. Churches can often survive disagreements over methods and priorities, but they cannot survive disagreement over vision and direction. Where there's a complete divergence of vision it's usually helpful to arrange an amicable parting of ways before an unpleasant form of acrimony occurs.

10) Daniel 2:46f, the main theme expressed here is the fact that an uncompromising faith can be combined with a senior management position in what was a thoroughly pagan environment. Note how Daniel preserved good internal communication and made wise appointments. He assumed that accepting a senior position implied a responsibility to manage well. His approach was that of a professional rather than an amateur. Present is another biblical character anticipating the management approach thousands of years before its official inception under the American Quaker Engineer F. W. Taylor (1856-1915).

11) Matthew 10:1-15, the main theme expressed here is the way Jesus deliberately created a structure which would require good management. Note how the disciples were given a clear set of aims. Jesus assumed that the possession of clear aims was one pre-condition for a fruitful ministry. No aims, no fruit or means to test the effectiveness of an individual or congregational ministry

12) Luke 9:51-56, the main theme expressed here is the need to cope with rejection, which INEVITABLY comes in any ministry. Note how the disciples were firmly told to leave God to judge those who had rejected them, they were NOT to take that judgement into their own hands. Jesus was assuming that the best way to cope with rejection was to move on and avoid wasting time (either condemning or trying to reason) with those who were unreceptive to the truth. Ministry is not for those who are unable to handle rejection. Remember, we are not necessarily here to be liked but we are here to do what's right.

13) Luke 10:29-32, the main theme expressed here is the danger of being so caught up in the bureaucracy of religious ritual that one fails to meet those practical needs one has a responsibility to meet. Note how the priest and the Levite provided a clear example of goal displacement in which the preservation of an organisation becomes more important than the aims for which it was founded to achieve. Jesus assumed that in the religious life it's easy to lose focus and become obsessed with trivia.

14) Acts 6:1-7, the main theme expressed here is how easily tensions can arise in a rapidly growing organisation even when it's been founded by God. Note how a division of labour had to occur in order to avoid resentment building up and creating a messy division. Luke assumed that good organisation and management are a necessary part of the church life.

15) 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, the main theme expressed here is how ONLY God can give healthy growth to a church. Note how particular ministries performed different functions in building up the local body. Paul realised that good management alone cannot produce healthy growth in an organisation.

16) 1 Corinthians 12:27-28, The main theme expressed here is the way practical gifts like administration are given by the Holy Spirit, who often regards them as being important. Note how this gift is closely linked to other gifts like tongues or prophecy. Paul assumed that there's nothing unspiritual about good management, particularly when it can help the poor.

17) Ephesians 4:11-14, the main theme expressed here is the need to provide a structure to encourage the display of spiritual gifts. Note how Christians are to avoid jumping from one doctrine (or church growth gimmick) to another. Paul assumed that the Holy Spirit worked constantly to increase maturity and provide doctrinal stability, so that Christians would not credulously accept everything that the world or particular false teachers had to offer. (In this context, beware of those who come with instant panaceas of church growth. If it sounds too good to be true it usually is!)

18) Titus 1:5-11, the main theme expressed here is the way elders were needed to contain the disruptive effects of false teaching. Note how strict standards were required to be an elder. Paul assumed that eldership was NOT an optional extra to healthy Church life. (Although some ministers perhaps wish it was!)

19) 3 John 9-11, the main theme expressed here is the way spiritual tyranny is regarded as being a total evil. Note the strong language employed against Diotrephes by John who was '*the apostle of love'*; he could see that Diotrephes was trying to establishing an exclusive sect in which he would be the all-powerful autocrat. John assumed that those who lead congregations should be accountable and, if necessary, removable.

20) Revelation 7:9-12, the main theme expressed here is the way heaven is organised into a hierarchical structure complete with ranks of angels, elders and saints. Note how this structure provided a setting in which God is praised. John assumed that God had been in the business of good management from all eternity. Where His Spirit is at work there's organisation but NEVER an idolatrous attachment to organisation.

Limited time makes it impossible to fully describe how such *'heroes of faith'* like Abraham, Joseph. David, Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel were also effective practitioners of good management. Nor is there opportunity to recount how their managerial and leadership abilities helped them to fulfil their respective vocations. However, it had already been seen that scripture and contemporary management explore the same issues of leadership, strategy, organisation and communication. The witness of scripture strongly confirms that good management practice is NOT an optional extra for a local assembly. Yet, it still remains an open question as to whether current management theory and practice can be justly imported into the life of such a gathering.

Section Three: Friend or Foe?

"When churches rely upon human technique to accomplish their mission, they commit the sin of idolatry but when they refuse to learn from the world they commit the sin of pride."

3.1 Arguments <u>For</u> Adopting A Contemporary Management Approach

Such an approach provides an opportunity to: **-**
3.1.1 Apply key biblical principles, *e.g.* market research can help apply Proverbs 11:14.
3.1.2 Build structures for the Holy Spirit to use, *e.g.* the Church had to be assembled in Jerusalem before the Spirit could descend, (Acts 2:1).
3.1.3 Glorify God through good administration, *e.g.* assisting and helping the poor.
3.1.4 Clarify thinking with useful concepts, e.g. SWOT analysis
3.1.5 Examine the environment in which an assembly operates, *e.g.* SWOT analysis can help prevent a Platonic divide between the Church and local community.
3.1.6 Be practical and efficient in one's dealings, *e.g.* in time keeping and paperwork.
3.1.7 Thoroughly analyse any problems, *e.g.* why there's a large demand for a particular false teaching such as the prosperity gospel.
3.1.8 Enjoy the various types of freedom Christ gained for us through his death, *e.g.* the freedom to serve God in an efficient and effective way so that positive fruit is manifested in people's lives.

3.2 Arguments <u>Against</u> Adopting A Contemporary Management Approach

Such an approach provides a temptation to: -
3.2.1 Bypass scripture in favour of human technique, *e.g.* evangelistic gimmicks, which display no real reverence for the Lord.
3.2.2 Make an idol of organisational structures, *e.g.* those factions wasting time trying to save the Church of England – a futile task if there ever was one.
3.2.3 Have conveyor belt charity, which dehumanises individuals who are treated like widgets, *e.g.* this can be a problem with Relief Organisations.
3.2.4 Imbibe Secular Humanist ideas, which put man rather than God at the centre, *e.g.* Maslow's concept of *'self-actualisation.'* (Apparently, this somewhat vague concept means finding personal fulfilment through the exercise of one's own human potential.)
3.2.5 *'Paralysis through analysis,' e.g.* time is spent gathering data only for nothing to be done with it.
3.2.6 Become over formal and businesslike in one's dealings, *e.g.* Eldership meetings may be conducted in a businesslike manner but without prayer.
3.2.7 *'Go for growth'* through using carnal human techniques without considering whether it's a growth of muscle, fat or cancer, *e.g.* the *'big numbers mentality'* pervading many American Churches.
3.2.8 Become a substitute for the cross, *e.g.* the gospel maybe diluted or ignored in order to please people with the result that a consumer orientated rather than Christ orientated form of Christianity is created.

3.3 By this stage, it's possible to discern that Management tools can be employed in a Christ like or an anti-Christ like manner. Here, motive is absolutely crucial. Is our desire to do the will of God and accept the level of growth HE wants for us or is it simply to *'put more bums on pews?'* If the latter applies than a combination of efficient management and effective marketing MAY provide the desired level of growth but it's hardly likely to be a growth of muscle. ALWAYS respect God's sovereignty. In terms of numbers He may not want to give an increase; instead, His call to a congregation may be to focus upon the quality of their doctrine, relationships or getting the toilets in some form of working order!

Section Four: Conflict Resolution

"When the Holy Spirit guides expect good management to follow."

4.1 By this stage it has become apparent that individual management tools like SWOT analysis are morally neutral. They can be used in either a Godly or ungodly fashion. If it's the former then scripture is applied and real fruit is manifested, if the latter a shallow self-sufficiency is promoted. To use management and marketing tools in a godly way it would be useful to: -
4.1.1 Carefully check ones motives before using a tool.
4.1.2 Determine the particular Biblical principles being applied by any given tool.
4.1.3 Detach them from any underlying Humanistic or New Age Philosophy.
4.1.4 Examine the advantages and disadvantages of using a tool.
4.1.5 Employ the tool at an appropriate time and in an appropriate setting.
4.1.6 Evaluate the *'fruit'* that occurs from such an employment.
4.1.7 Study the opportunities and temptations provided by these tools.
4.1.8 Seek the **Lord's** will in prayer and scripture study through all of the above stages.
(As a memory jogger, it's perhaps helpful to think of these steps as consisting of a single *'C,'* a double *'D,'* a treble *'E'* and a double *'S.'*)

4.2 This last point suggests that there's no fundamental incompatibility between the employment of management tools and the traditional approach of **FPBSGI.** Indeed, there can be a complimentary relationship in which: -
4.2.1 The traditional approach provides the discernment needed to select ONLY those tools, which are going to be of benefit.
4.2.2 The management approach provides a means whereby any vision gained through **FPBSGI** is successfully implemented, with the result that the Gospel spreads and God honouring fruit is manifested in people's lives. On a historical note it's interesting to see how well known Saints like Benedict, Francis or Hudson Taylor often practised management principles through a process of serendipity, (accidental discovery). They were led by the Holy Spirit to apply relevant management principles, especially in the areas of leadership. God also guided them to find a specific area where they could be fruitful in their ministry. In such cases, there was also an application of a marketing principle, which states, *'Find a niche where one can be effective in supplying people's legitimate demands.'*

4.3 Overall, it's hard not to escape the conclusion that where the traditional approach plants the management approach can water but it's still ONLY God who can provide a healthy increase. It's necessary to be totally dependent upon His grace at all times. In particular, we need His wisdom to discern exactly what management techniques He may be calling one to use. Under his guidance, the management approach can increase humility rather than fuel a self-sufficient pride.

Section Five: A Reasoned Verdict

"In all things, let scripture be supreme."

5.1 Toward the close of this study, it's possible to come to a reasoned verdict about the use of management theory and tools in relation to the local body. In order to reach this verdict, it's helpful to recall that, by his death, Christ freed us to start managing our individual and corporate lives in accordance with God's will. He also provided believers with the inner resources to avoid being seduced by any given society worshipping material success. This point suggests that Christians have the potential to use management tools for godly ends whilst avoiding the *'success orientated'* humanistic philosophy often underpinning them. By applying such tools they are stealing the treasures of the Egyptians, (Exodus 12:35-36). Admittedly, if one's motivation is simply to build an ecclesiastical empire with *'self'* at the centre adopting a management approach can be highly self-destructive. Whatever growth did occur would consist of either the fatty or cancerous variety. In such situations, even the best management practices become a devil's tool, which first deceives and then ultimately destroys. A lot of this appears to be happening in the American-based Church growth movement, which is dominated by a shallow *'big numbers mentality.'* In Britain some of the literature produced by the far more moderate Christian Research Institute suggests that it has fallen into the same trap of trying to promote growth through human technique. Also present

is an underlying philosophical confusion in which excellent statistical analyses on the collapse of English Christianity belies the effectiveness of this *'growth by technique'* approach, (Coupe, May 2004). It's a case of an organisation's philosophy being refuted by its own data! Like their American counterparts Christian Research gives little assessment on the quality of teaching offered by rapidly growing Congregations, which in many cases appear to be heretical. With such examples in mind, it's unwise to be over impressed by large churches that pull in the crowds. Hitler could do the same.

5.2 At the other extreme, some of the arguments advocating a total rejection of the management approach appear to be based upon a Platonic World-View, which belittles the material realm in favour of some form of spurious, super-spirituality. One feels that the biblical heroes cited earlier would have been given a hard time from those totally opposed to any use of management practices. Admittedly, some criticisms do strike home and care should be taken to avoid the very real temptations inherent in the management approach. However, in the area of practical organisation influential management consultants like Peter Drucker (b.1909) do have a point when they state that non-profit organisations like churches are often not so much badly managed but non-managed, (quoted in Leslie et al 2004. p.25). His recommendation that Churches should abandon programs that fail to produce results could easily be defended on the basis that such abandonment can represent a godly pruning of activities no longer manifesting proper spiritual fruit – either in terms of numbers coming to faith or improvement in the quality of discipleship, (John 15:2). Under God, local assemblies need to know when to abandon what has become a dead work – otherwise all they will do is to waste time and energy propping up an unhealthy situation. Remember, even Jesus counselled his disciples to abandon some bad situations, (Luke 10:11-12).

5.3 In the end, it's possible to conclude that both management and marketing tools make great servants but terrible masters. They must always be employed in clear subordination to the teaching of God's word. To make sure that they remain servants it's essential that individual Christians and local assemblies ask whether God is calling them to employ such tools at this present moment of time. The management approach can only be of real benefit when it's applied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Information Sources

For details of statistical information about the UK Church please refer to successive issues of *Quadrant Magazine* published by Christian Research

For literature based on church growth philosophy please refer to The Spring 2004 Edition of *Resources for Leaders,* also published by Christian Research

For an example of statistical data, recording the collapse of English Christianity please refer to: The *'Fifties Freefall'* by Rachel Coupe in the May 2004 Issue of Quadrant Magazine

For a criticism of a particular aspect of church growth philosophy please refer to *The Purpose-Driven Life: An Evaluation* by Gary E. Gilley published in Discernment Newsletter Volume 15, Number 1 (January/February 2004)

For a more general criticism of the use of management practices in the life of the church please refer to *The Pied Piper of Purpose* Part 1: *Human Capital Systems and Church Performance* by Lynn D. Leslie, Sarah H. Leslie and Susan J. Conway published by Conscience Press 2004

For a summary of key management thinking please refer to Carol Kennedy, *Guide to Management Gurus,* published by Random House 2002

N.B: This material was prepared as notes for a talk that was given on Monday, 19th July 2004.