

Jesus' Method of Inclusion in Leadership: A Model for Innovation and Creativity in the Early Church

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The early church evolved from its limitations of internal focus to boundless efficacy by utilizing innovation and creativity in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Utilizing social rhetorical criticism and social and cultural texture, this paper is an exegetical study that emphasizes Jesus' encounters with women, sinners and the culturally diverse to point to the applicability of Jesus' method of inclusion in informing creativity in the early church and in contemporary organizations. Contemporary organizations can emulate Jesus' methodology of eliciting creativity in followers by demonstrating care and trust through inclusion. Essentially, creativity thrives in environments where there is acceptance and encouragement (Messmer, 2001). Creativity and innovation are, in essence, facilitators of organizational success.

The utilization of creativity and innovation in the early church propelled it from humble obscurity to renowned attraction, infectiousness, and respectability. The early church evolved from its limitations of internal focus to boundless efficacy by utilizing innovation and creativity in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. The teachings and methodology of Jesus Christ invariably caused the early church to "turn the world upside down." (Acts 17:6, KJV). The purpose of this paper is to highlight the lasting effectiveness of Jesus' methodology of inclusiveness on the ability of the early church to transition from an insular movement to a worldwide institution and religious standard. Utilizing social rhetorical criticism and social and cultural texture, this paper is an exegetical study that emphasizes Jesus' encounters with women, sinners and the culturally diverse to point to the applicability of Jesus' method of inclusion in informing creativity in the early church and contemporary organizations. Social rhetorical criticism is a form of literary analysis that emphasizes the principles, mores and ethics as conveyed in particular texts and integrates them with the worldview of the reader (Robbins, 2001). Social and cultural texture examines social and anthropological theory as they characterize the nature of particular texts (Robbins, 2001). Exegesis is the examination, analysis and interpretation of sacred text. For the purposes of this paper, the Holy Bible is the sacred text of reference.

Jesus' methodology of inclusion was non traditional and highly contradictory to rabbinic law. Rabbinic law attributed status and distinguishable rights to religious men and men who observed the law, whereas, women, sinners, gentiles and the infirmed were marginalized by society and regarded with low status (West, 2007). However, Jesus consistently modeled boundless love and democratizing acceptance of women, sinners, and those seen as foreigners. Jesus described His ministry as fulfilling, not destroying the law. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17, KJV). Jesus challenged his contemporaries and followers to look beyond basic behavioral adherence to the law to the deeper revelation of love as the stimulus for obedience. According to Jesus, the authenticity of righteous living could be only realized through love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22-37b-40). Jesus based His leadership methodology on love and acceptance. Thus inclusion, for Jesus, was love made manifest. Following Jesus' example of demonstrating creativity through inclusion, early church leaders ushered the early church from its embryonic status as a sporadically tolerated religious sect to worldwide recognition and membership. Robbins (2001) intimates that Jesus choices and subsequent actions weighed heavily in the community because of the religious, social and cultural norms that he challenged.

Rabbinic literature was filled with disparagement toward women. Women in the first century were treated as objects whose sole purpose was to please and serve men, which included bearing men children (Cruz, 2006). The rabbis taught that women were not to speak, be spoken to or even acknowledged in public. Additionally, women were made to walk six paces behind their husbands and were considered harlots if they wore their hair uncovered in public (Cruz, 2006). Women were not allowed to vote, not allowed to be educated and not allowed to receive an inheritance (Cruz, 2006). Women were also viewed as "unclean" during menstruation and after childbirth, and would suffer further isolation for specified periods of time during and after each of these events (Cruz, 2006).

Jesus, in His treatment of women, demonstrated value for their individual and collective humanity. In John 4:7, Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well and initiated a conversation with her. "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink" (KJV). In initiating a public dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus rebelled against rabbinical teachings, traditions and attitudes toward women. The fact that Jewish men did not, as a matter of practice, speak to women in public lends depth to Jesus' deliberate and creative act of inclusion. On another occasion a women, who was, by rabbinic standards, ceremonially unclean, publicly touched Jesus' garment. "And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment" (Matt. 9:20). In fear outweighed only by her desperation, the infirmed woman confessed her actions to Jesus only to find compassionate acceptance and healing in Jesus' response. "The woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was

done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague” (Mk 5:33-34).

Once while Jesus was a dinner guest at the Pharisee Simon’s house, a city woman described as a sinner arrived uninvited to see Jesus. The woman approached Jesus as he was dining and began to weep. With tears flowing, the woman washed Jesus feet and drying them with her hair- which being exposed, was a violation of rabbinic teaching- kissed and anointed Jesus feet with oil. “And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment” (Luke 7:37). Jesus did not rebuke the woman as was the expectation of his host, Simon the Pharisee. Jesus instead spoke words of love and comfort to her. “And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven [...] Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace (Luke 7:48-50).

Following the examples of Jesus, leaders of the early church exercised sensitivity to the needs of women and acknowledge them as effective leaders and contributors to the establishing of the church. Deacons were assigned to minister to the needs of widows (Acts 6:1-6). Peter healed Dorcas and many townspeople received Christ as a result (Acts 9:36-42).

Leaders today can emulate Jesus’ example by abandoning binding traditions that foster alienation in women. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR), leaders should promote and highlight the importance of women’s contributions (PR Newswire, 2007).

Further demonstration of Jesus’ method of inclusion is evidenced in the occasions when Jesus chose people of ill-repute, sinners and members of diverse populations to minister to. The Samaritan woman had been married five times and was a sinner. “Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly” (John 4:17b-18). According to Rabbinic teaching, a divorced woman was impure (Cruz, 2006) and sinners were to be avoided because of their innate indifference to the law (West, 2007). The Samaritan woman was of an ethnicity and culture, which had been alienated by the Jews as mongrels, impure and unclean (Wyckoff, 2005). Furthermore, rabbinic law stated that Jews were not to associate with non Jews. “It is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation...” (Acts 10:28). Jesus similarly demonstrated inclusion and acceptance to a Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24-30. Notwithstanding their gender, by all accounts of the law regarding sinners and foreigners, Jesus should have bypassed the Samaritan and Syrophenician women altogether.

Jesus’ method of inclusion extended to His practice of dining with the ill-reputed as well. “And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples” (Matt. 9:10). Traditionally, the Jewish meal was considered an intimate occasion to be shared with family and those of high social or religious standing (Zaspel, 2002). However, Jesus made it clear to His detractors that His mission was to minister to sinners. “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13).

Following the examples of Jesus, leaders of the early church encouraged diversity and acceptance in converting sinners. "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5:16). Jesus' creativity in going outside of tradition inspired creativity in those who were the recipients of His grace, namely the leaders of the early church who had been Jesus' disciples. "And (Peter) said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). "For so hath the Lord commanded us (Paul and Barnabas), saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).

Contemporary organizations can emulate Jesus' methodology of eliciting creativity in followers by demonstrating care and trust through inclusion. Following the example of Jesus, leaders first need to understand that creativity is not just reserved for a select group. Leaders' attitudes undoubtedly affect those of workers. If leaders demonstrate belief in the abilities' of workers to creatively contribute to the organization, workers will respond (Jensen and Luthens, 2006). Jesus modeled creativity for his followers and entrusted them to continue His practice (Acts 1:4-5). Von Krogh, Ichijo & Nonaka (2006) discuss the need for leaders to demonstrate care and willingness to share and develop tacit knowledge skills. Jesus demonstrated care in initiating assistance and responding to the needs of followers and those marginalized by society. Essentially, creativity thrives in environments where there is acceptance and encouragement (Messmer, 2001).

In this age of globalization, contemporary organizations face the challenges of increased competitiveness. Creativity and innovation have become the great equalizers in a global marketplace no longer restricted by cultural boundaries. Creativity and innovation are, in essence, facilitators of success. In order to realize the benefits of creativity and innovation, organizations have to employ the characteristics that perpetuate creative cultures. Jesus' method of inclusion as emulated by the early church was enduringly creative and caused the church to rise from obscurity to become a world religion. As evidenced in scripture, Jesus and the early church leaders demonstrated inclusion through the practice of care and trust for followers.

Jesus and His followers set aside the traditional mores of exclusion and alienation and realized growth never afore experienced. As did the early church, contemporary organizations will encounter various differences in its representative workforce and client base. These differences may consist of economic, social, political, cultural, and educational disparities. However, as Jesus demonstrated, the value of human capital should be exploited indiscriminately. Inclusion maximizes organizational potential and allows for growth and development that may otherwise not be achieved.

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