Interpretation through the Exegesis of Acts 1 and 2:

Strengthening and Guiding Decentralized Organization:

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of organizational structure and examines (a) how the early Christian Communities were structured to flourish in hostile environments and (b) how contemporary organizations can utilize these principles by utilizing Socio-Rhetorical Criticism analysis of Acts. The study focuses on Acts 1 and 2 for this investigation. This effort will contribute to further explore the application of biblical text to leadership issues in organizations.

Introduction

Jesus spoke. People listened. Matthew 28:19 proclaimed, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (King James Version). This commission launched a decentralized organization guided by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as Christians operated under persecution and in a hostile environment (Acts 28:22), the culture began to shape the organizational structure of the church (Quinn, 2003). However, how can a leader guide followers he does not see? This was the physical dilemma of the apostles. This is the same issue that executives in business, government and nonprofit organizations must address. Answering the leadership call, the Apostle Paul began to create community order and structure through his Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 2:1-6:1). In this congregational transformation, there was not a distinction made between church culture and structure. They were integrated.

Secular businesses, on the other hand, continue to build organizations with a global reach but fall short of their expectations. Although there is clearly a need for organizations around the world to unite, Hitt (1996) notes that events around the world demonstrate an *uncommon ground*. In this scenario, leaders do the opposite of what is best for the future of all humanity. In addition, Mobley, and McCall (2001) argue that this global uncertainty has created an environment of uncalmness and befuddlement among contemporary leaders. Therefore, globalization and the advancement of technologies provide a new set of problems for traditional institutions across the globe. Demographic changes continue to shape the realities of globalization and make it difficult to apply the same marketing approach to different countries (The Personnel and Organization Committee of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, 1992). Doing work globally requires two dimensions of complexity: business and cultural complexity (McCall and

Hollenbeck, 2002). Furthermore, Lamy (2006) maintains that global customers require businesses to humanize globalization. In responding to this market need, multinational companies are decentralizing their workforce. The church faced similar issues of business and cultural complexity. The early Church's foundational strategy was the development of a clearly defined and embraced world view. The first century Roman world presented similar diversity challenges and the only means to unite the geographically dispersed Jews and the many ethnic and racial gentiles was to develop a unified culture with a common set of suppositions/theology to cultivate mission, vision and values consensus.

More and more employees are working remotely today; therefore, they function like a virtual organization, which is geographically separated and has very little personal contact (Yukl, 2002). As a result, some workers feel alone and betrayed. Today's organizations are increasingly becoming self-directed. Furthermore, the impact of globalization has decentralized most multi-national companies and damaged the value alignment of organizations. Contemporary leaders can benefit from the early Christian church in learning how to lead followers in decentralized organizations. Therefore, the focus of this study will be to explore how modern organizations can be improved by analyzing the Christian church discussed in Acts 1 and 2.

<div align="center">Background</div>

The Acts of the Apostles

The Book of Acts (Acts) provides an eyewitness account of the early beginnings of the church and gives an accurate record of the birth and growth of the Christian church (Life Application Study Bible, 1991). Moreover, Acts is the connecting link between Christ's life and the life of the church, between the Gospel and the Letters (Keck & Leander, 1996). However, much of the biblical information from the author Luke comes from the Apostle Paul (Schultz,

2002). Therefore, Christians have the Acts of the Apostles to provide a story of the establishment and growth of the Christian church.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit was a critical part of the organizational development of the early church. Luke mentioned the Holy Spirit 57 times in the Book of Acts, and according to Schultz (2002), the Holy Spirit is the spark for the New Testament church. Warren (1996) described the Holy Spirit as carrying out the following five actions in the Old Testament: (a) creating the physical world, (b) equipping God's servants for service and leadership, (c) producing moral righteousness in God's people, (d) conferring the prophetic gift upon God's prophets, and (e) foretelling the Messiah. Throughout the Old Testament history, the "Spirit of the Lord" was found guiding leaders. Witherington (1998) argued that the presence of the Spirit throughout Acts is a distinguishing mark of the New Testament church. Estrada (2004) maintained that the day of Pentecost was the beginning of the disciples' transformation from followers to leaders. Clearly, this empowerment for leadership was needed to spread the Gospel during times of hardship and persecution of the early church. The key today for the modern Christian executive is instilling "a spirit filled" passion that is the foundation for a "free-will" intrinsic motivational approach in which employees voluntarily commit to God-honoring performance (both character and competency)

Analysis and Discussion of Study

Social, Psychological, and Cultural Texture Analysis

Applying texture analysis to Acts provides the framework for exploring aspects of the language and affords an understanding of social, psychological, and cultural perspectives of the times. Therefore, this analysis provides an overall interpretation of the scriptural circumstances

through the eyes of the people in their cultural and social setting (Robbins, 1996). Social, psychological, and cultural texture analysis gives the reader a clearer understanding of sacred texts as they relate to living a committed religious life even in the midst of a hostile environment and provides an application for today's organizations. The three major lessons from the Book of Acts relates to the importance of creating a vision, developing a unified world view, and encouraging followers in the face of adversity. We will address these issues in more detail below.

   Leaders create. Exemplary leaders provide a vision for followers. Vision relates to the ability to look beyond physical constraints of the natural realm; a shared vision denotes that followers have bought-into the leader's vision. In the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the disciples did not understand Jesus' mission. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was critical in forming the vision for the church and supplying it with the vital skills (Eph. 4:11) for service. Thus, the works of Jesus and his apostles are perceived as the eschatological outworking of the divine plan for the renewal of God's people (Kee, 2005). For example, the Apostle Paul supported the vision established by Jesus Christ. He understood that this vision was the unified force to a scattered group of believers undergoing persecution. In Ephesians 4:3-5, Paul encourages, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit…one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (King James Version). The unified vision enables organizational members to focus with clarity on the specific goals and objectives with laser like quality. In enables, as Jim Collins notes, for the organization to avoid distractions and "rabbit-trails" that lead to mission drift (Collins, 2005).

   Likewise, in dealing with decentralized organizations, contemporary leaders need to create a shared vision for employees. Miller (1995) argues that the inherent power of vision can

inspire followers to action. The meticulous research of Kouzes and Posner (1995) found that highly effective leaders inspire a shared vision. However, most business leaders are too busy with the current issues of today and find little time for vision building. This leaves workers as well as the organization unfulfilled. In a changing environment, communicating a clear vision is important for survival. Having a shared vision provides an organization with a competitive advantage. On the contrary, bad leaders are not primarily concerned with providing such a vision. Many senior executives carry the burden of leader and do not want to share strategy for the organizations. In this type of organization, information does not flow well, and employees are kept in the dark about major organizational changes. This leader may feel he or she is protecting this staff by keeping the vision hidden. However, it creates an environment with no clear direction. Therefore, today's leaders should inspire their workforce with a shared vision.

There are numerous modern day examples of the power of vision casting across all sectors. The growth and success of Southwest Airlines is a testament to an intense focus on high quality customer service within very tightly defined parameters. Southwest did not attempt to emulate the growth of other airlines by trying to maximize customer choice; they focused on the key issues most important to customers (price, reliability, safety, customer treatment) and "ruthlessly" devoted all management systems to authentically implementing the values.

Leaders build. Leaders must provide an organizational structure for achieving their objectives that is flexible and organic. From the very beginning, God provided structure for His people. In the Old Testament, God's people were led by priests, judges, prophets/prophetesses, and kings; however, followers paced slowly behind the leaders. In general, the ancient world was built on three leadership structures: leaders chosen to make the decisions and exercise authority, a Roman characteristic; leaders chosen to carry out the will of the people, a Greek trait; and a

society of unequal members where leaders make decisions in conjunction with other members, a Jewish trait. The last type of community was characteristic of the early church (Berardino, 1992).

Furthermore, officials of the Jewish people, such as scribes, were essential to certain functionaries within Jewish society during Greco-Roman period. Jerusalem was the religious center for as many as four million Jews scattered abroad from Rome to Babylon. Mingled with these various beliefs in Jerusalem were the cultural, social, and political influences of the Greeks and Romans (Reader's Digest, 1992). Even during the time of Jesus, an elite group in the synagogue selected which individuals could take leadership positions in a Jewish community (Berardino, 1992). Unlike the Jewish establishment, the early church structure was agile, mobile, and reactionary to hostile environmental forces. Faced by heavy persecution by the Jewish establishment and the Roman Empire, the church had to function remotely (Kee, 2005). Estrada (2004) argued that Luke understood the leadership structure of the time but redefined it in Acts. Clearly, there is a transformation of the apostles' roles and status in the early church. Thus, the apostles were able to transfer leadership to the new church leaders.

The autonomous, self-governing congregation had no external body or hierarchy ruling it; therefore, it functioned as a virtual organization meeting with small groups of believers in homes for worship and fellowship (Early Christian Church, 2007). When Paul wrote to the church in Rome in the '50's, there was no ecclesiastical hierarchy; therefore, "fellow workers" provided this leadership led the by Holy Spirit (Reader's Digest, 1992). Berardino (1992) suggested that the early church structure was a two-fold ministry of presbyter-bishops assisted by deacons in the churches over a wide geographical area in the latter part of the first century (Acts 11:30; Acts 15:6; Acts 14:23). There are elders (1 Tim. 5:1), bishops (1 Tim. 5:17-18), and deacons (I Tim. 3:8). Therefore, strategy preceded structure for the early Christian church.

Exemplary leaders understand the importance of organizational development. On the contrary, bad leaders are not concern themselves much with structure. Some senior managers want to provide the business strategy for getting the work done while leaving the details of organizational structural to their subordinates. When new strategies are implemented and fail, these same leaders are puzzled at why their initiatives failed. In many cases, the organization was not structured in a way to support effective implementation of these initiatives. While bad leaders overlook the details of structure, effective leaders understand the importance of organizational design. In today's contemporary organizations, leaders who want to be successful must provide structure for followers.

Successful executives recognize that strategy and organizational structure must be organically derived from the mission and vision, that purpose always trumps technique and process. This is a major factor in the success of major corporations and nonprofit organizations such as Southwest Airlines and the American Red Cross that allow for varying combinations of centralization and decentralization based upon mission enhancement. Every Southwest employee is empowered and is instructed on the need for working outside of their job description to solve problems (O'Reilly & Pefeffer, 2000), hence a form of accountability and ownership.

Leaders encourage. Effective leaders inspire followers even in the darkest of times. In the Book of Acts, the early church was confronted with conflicts on several major levels. Through the Challenge-Response (riposte) approach, a type of social communication in a cultural setting was transferred in the form of a challenge (Robbins, 1996). As the church spread to all parts of the world due to persecution, factions begin to form, claiming different interpretations concerning Jesus and the apostles (Reader's Digest, 1992). Without a doubt, the early church found itself in the midst of trouble and struggled to survive while existing in a

communal lifestyle (Early Christian Church, 2007). During this time, there were very dangerous heresies, which threatened the church. The following were basic characteristics of opposition: (a) it was sizeable and dangerous; (b) the opponents were engaged in false teaching, both in the church and in members' homes; (c) the opponents were deceived by Satan; (d) they rejected the truth; and (e) they were immoral because they took advantage of the people (Marshall, 1999). Moreover, false teachers attacked at the heart of the gospel by providing misinformation.

At this point, the early church needed something to unite its organization. Jesus knew that His church would face this challenge. In Acts 1:8, Jesus responds to this challenge: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Therefore, the early church leaders exhorted followers to continue despite their circumstances**.** Therefore, instead of destroying the early church, dissenting opinions and beliefs appeared to spur the development of a unified position that helped strengthen the dominant segment of Christianity (Reader's Digest, 1992). Kee (2005) argued that the enabling power of God came through the Holy Spirit as the central agent in Acts for the instruction and empowerment of the early church (Acts 1:2; 2:1-12). The Apostle Paul understood the psychological pressures of persecution and what it could do to an individual; therefore, he was constantly inspiring the early church by having them focus on the ultimate vision (Fee, 1984). For example, Paul shared in their tribulations. In 2 Timothy 1:12-14, Paul explained, "That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day…guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." Persecution is the true test of the internalization of vision and the presence of genuine commitment. Persecution only increases resolve and faith when the cause is truthful

Likewise, today's leaders need to provide encouragement to employees operating remotely. Good leaders know their followers' needs. Hackman and Johnson (2000) advocate that exemplary leaders provide a model for their followers by seeing these qualities in their leader. On the contrary, bad leaders fail to see the need for encouragement. Typically, managers would prefer an impersonal approach to leading workers. Furthermore, followers are only viewed as a business resource such as a personal computer. However, most workers want a more hands-on approach that will foster good leader-follower relationships. Workers can be discouraged in working alone and not knowing that their managers care about their personal challenges on the job. Therefore, leaders who foster encouragement to workers in a virtual organization can stimulate a more effective working environment. .

One of the most important means for encouraging employees is driving fear from the workplace through a "Godly Excellence" value set. This requires the redefinition of excellence as a long-term character and competency growth building process that by definition requires mistakes, errors and setbacks. Organizations should encourage and reward employees for good-faith efforts that fail to reach objectives through forgiveness policies and formally recognize and thank employees for their efforts and sacrifice. For example, Men's Wearhouse embraces encouragement and forgiveness as essential mission elements (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000). Many of their employees are "wounded" from the ill-treatment of other retail employers and engage in theft, but there is a policy of forgiveness which provides tough love accountability and grace with reeducation for even second and third violations. Eventually the employees' "hard shell" is removed, and they recognize the genuine care that the company demonstrates resulting in character transformation. George Zimmer, the founder of the company noted:

> If every time you were a kid and you made a mistake, either your parents or the teacher said something that made an emotional impact on you, then you can grow up with a fear

of making a mistake, which will bring you to the world of consultants quicker than anything else. It's a way to theoretically avoid making a mistake. I take the position that the best way to grow a business is to encourage people to make mistakes and learn from their mistakes. In fact, our corporate mission statement says that we're a company that wants people to admit their mistakes (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, pages 88-89).

Another example is reducing reliance on comparative performance standards as they accentuate employee insecurity and depreciates teamwork and cooperation. When the focus is comparative, it encourages employees to become prideful and complacent when anointed "superior", and insecure and fearful if they fail to "measure-up." When the focus is on meeting benchmarked standards of objective quality, there is less "scapegoating" of individual employee performance and more emphasis on management and employee joint responsibility for problem solving.

Conclusion

Today's organizations are struggling to restructure their operations in order to better handle the global threat. Clearly, there are similarities between contemporary organizations and early Christian churches as it relates to decentralized structures. On the day of Pentecost, revelations were revealed "as the Spirit gave them utterance" and the disciples began to understand Jesus' commission (Reader's Digest, 1992). Corporations are in need of a divine revelation. During these turbulent times of the 21st century, organizations are yearning for leaders who share a special connection with followers. Building effective organizations that operate remotely requires that God equips leaders through the sacred guidance of the Holy Spirit.

From the previous social, psychological, and cultural texture analysis, it was determined that the apostles and other church officials understood how to lead the early churches in a hostile environment. It is clear that these principles can be applied to a non-religious organization

dealing with decentralized organizations. By following these exegetical recommendations,

organizations create vision, develop the proper structure, and encourage their followers.

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Appendix

Biographical Sketch

Daryl Green is pursuing a doctoral degree in leadership at Regent University. Mr. Green received a B.S. in engineering and a MA in organizational management. Currently, he is an ordained deacon and youth advisor at his local church.

Gary E. Roberts is a faculty member in the Regent University School of Business. Dr Roberts' current research interests center on the influence of religion and spirituality on occupational stress, the impact of the religious friendly workplace, organizational policies to promote employee work-life balance and mental health policy. He has authored numerous journal articles and book chapters.