

Content Selection Brief

7/8/16

Purpose

This brief provides a tool for conversation participants to select where they prefer to begin regarding innovation theology. When conversants are able to choose and agree on what interests them, ensuing conversations should prove more substantive and useful. Freedom to select and agree enables diverse participants to enter into the "same room" literally, figuratively and willingly.

The conversations envisioned will likely prove more valuable than their starting points. However, conversations need to start somewhere. The set of essays prepared serve as conversation starters. Each essay intends to stimulate, focus and frame constructive dialogue among participants, not restrict or contain it.

The essays are arranged under a working title: *Innovating in the Company of God: For a Biblical Theology of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*. The title intends to alert conversants to three underlying precepts; namely that

- 1) change and responses to it reflect the presence or absence of God, as well as human alignment or resistance to God's purposes;
- 2) innovation is understood as a *response* to change, not simply a manifestation of change; and that
- 3) theological aspects of the conversations are intended to be grounded in the common canon of Scripture.

These precepts provide a rationale for grouping the essays in the following four sections:

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| I. | Change, Innovation and Theology | (three essays) |
| II. | Accepting Change | (three essays) |
| III. | Making Sense of Change | (four essays) |
| IV. | The Company of God | (three essays) |

Rationale for the Sections

Combining the subjects of change and innovation with thoughts about the interests of God could prove unwieldy if we fail to keep change, innovation and theology in a consistent position relative to the others. Conversational coherence will be more difficult to achieve without a consistent constellation. The first section aims to clarify this constellation.

Innovating is a kind of response to change. Acceptance of change and our ability (or inability) to make sense of it are critical areas for which theology has much to offer. As a result, both accepting change and making sense of it deserve our attention. Describing what theology can offer to accepting and making sense of change are the purposes of the second and third sections.

The fourth section deals with innovating as something other than an exclusively human activity. It presumes that God is not only interested in innovation but is actively involved. In fact, the over-all usefulness of innovation theology may reside in its ability to help us answer whether our innovating efforts are aligned with (or in) the Company of God.

Essay Summaries

I. CHANGE, INNOVATION AND THEOLOGY

All participants in the conversations should read (not necessarily agree with) the three essays in this section prior to the first conversation. The remaining ten essays represent an initial set from which participants can select three to guide and direct subsequent conversations in the pilot phase. Selections will be made before the conclusion of the first conversation.

#1 *"Curves, Chasms and Crossings"*

The spread of innovations—an outcome sought by every entrepreneur and innovator but realized by few—is itself an important part of what contributes to success. Indeed, in many cases it often defines whether innovations are successful or not.

How innovations are (or are not) adopted is a subject examined by many, including Everett Rodgers (1962) and Geoffery Moore (1991) and the business life cycle observations of William Wilson (Cheverton, 2000). All describe a rich field for theology to plow and plant seeds of understanding regarding the influence of God's Company. In fact, when theological perspectives are brought to what is believed about the diffusions of innovation, success may no longer be viewed as an isolated event. Success may itself be redefined as a part of the succession of God's purposes.

#2 *"Theological assumptions and practical purpose"*

Given the variety and fluidity of understandings associated with "change," "innovation" and "theology," this first essay addresses a bare minimum of theological assumptions; specifically how "change," "innovation" and "theology" are defined and positioned relative to each other.

#3 *"Innovating needs theology"*

This essay makes the case for why the intersection of change, innovation and theology should be of interest in general, and specifically, how the intersection might form the basis of a new field of applied theology.

II. ACCEPTING CHANGE

Attitudes and mindsets regarding change are rich with relevance for both innovating practice and the application of theological inquiry. Three essays comprise this section addressing both attitudes and mindsets related to change.

Accepting change can be partial or complete, felt or thought, imagined or real. Accepting change is worthy of investigation, not only because of its importance to innovating, but also because theological perspectives contribute directly to whether, how and to what degree change is accepted. All three of these essays presume that responding to change—whether an innovating response or not—requires some degree of acceptance, both rational and emotional.

#4 *"How do you make God laugh?"*

The first essay in this section addresses the typical approach of many individuals and most organizations to change—planning. Planning can seduce as well as produce.

Planning processes in the context of innovating differ significantly from planning in operating contexts. Theological perspectives can be particularly helpful to understanding these differences and support the peculiarities of planning when innovating appears an appropriate response to change. Scriptural concepts such as *kairos*, *chronos*, and *kenosis* (Philippians 2), along with the theological implications of contrition, crucible and catharsis should prove particularly useful to innovators.

#5 *"Change wounds; grieving heals"*

The second essay takes up the challenge of accepting loss associated with change. This challenge affects an essential capability for innovating—imagination. The premise here is that grieving begins a healing process necessary before the new realities change brings can be fully accepted.

This essay relies on the seminal exegetical work of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. Brueggemann's inspired concept of the prophetic imagination, in contrast to a dominant or incumbent imagination, expresses the chronic phenomenon innovators and entrepreneurs face in the early stages of their innovating efforts. To the prophetic and dominant, are added the emancipated and innovating imaginations.

#6 *"Change as invitation"*

The third essay of this section reframes the vocational possibilities embedded in change as an "envelope" in which God delivers an invitation to us to respond by participating in God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus' attention to the details of invitational dynamics as depicted in the gospel of Luke (Luke 14) in particular, form much of the potential contribution theology has to offer the innovator in accepting and embracing change. Viewing change as an envelope containing an invitation from God to create new value for others should make us more ready, willing and able to see the opportunities to innovate in the Company of God.

III. MAKING SENSE OF CHANGE

Accepting change is one thing. Making sense of it is quite another. Making sense of change is a purpose both theology and innovating share in common. Each, however, goes about sense-making in different ways and for different reasons.

Four essays comprise this section. Each has to do with what philosophy calls epistemology—the study of how we know what we think we know. While theology has dealt with epistemological questions for centuries, innovating has only recently become aware that knowledge-creation is the *sine qua non* of innovating. Looking at the ways we make sense enables a more robust dialogue between theology and innovation.

These four essays benefit greatly from the works of Karl Weick (University of Michigan) on sense-making, Paul Moser (Loyola University, Chicago) on religious epistemology, and of course, the apostle Paul's reflections on wisdom and knowledge in I Corinthians and elsewhere.

#7 *"Making sense in the Company of God"*

The first essay in this section describes what differentiates sense-making from interpretation. The difference should be encouraging to the theologically educated given their competence in interpretation. The essay's intent is to make a case for the potential contributions theology can make to sense-making, especially in the context of change and for the purposes of innovating.

Native to making theological sense is an understanding of God's interests—the purpose, movement and operations of the Company of God. Native to making sense in innovating efforts is an understanding of what makes for new value. Theology tends to source much of its sense-making from what God has done in the past. Innovating tends to source much of its sense-making from new realities emerging in the present. Both, however, are needed to understand where these realities are headed in the future.

#8 *"Make meaning before money"*

Value and meaning are often separated and divorced. Economic values too often become delaminated from intrinsic ones. As value is essential to innovation, this essay intends to re-laminate extrinsic to intrinsic value and point to where theology can reconcile meaning and value.

"Connecting the dots"—discovering meaningful associations between realities otherwise thought unrelated—is a core competence of theology. This competence represents significant promise for theology to offer practical contributions to the challenges innovators and entrepreneurs face in their own dot-connecting efforts. Philip Goodchild's work entitled *Theology of Money* (2009) provides some philosophical fodder, along with the Gospel of Luke's challenge to the propensity of making meaning without value (Luke 19.1-27). The "good soil" Jesus referred to in his parable of the sower (Matthew 13.3-14) offers a robust understanding of the layers of value our consumer society increasingly leaves segregated and delaminated.

#9 *"Coincidence: God's way of staying anonymous"*

The knowing that comes from empirical evidence may not be the only kind of knowing that shapes our observations and directs our choices. This essays looks at other ways of knowing besides the empirical, and why those other ways may be of interest to God and innovating.

Paul Moser's examination of the elusiveness of God, Carl Jung's convictions regarding "synchronicity," Isaiah's wisdom, along with that of Jesus and Paul—wisdom that places loving *before* knowing—all lead this essay to propose that self-interest and cognitive idolatry prevent us from seeing what God would have us see. Theology may be our only and best hope to break through the dominant and too confining assumptions we make about knowing. We must broaden our field of view and deepen our sense of what makes for value if we are to succeed in creating new value for others.

#10 *"Humility: a practical necessity that takes practice"*

More and better sense can be made of change and its new realities when concerns about our own identities are put to rest. This essays looks at humility as a personal competence, an organizational capability and a spare capacity, without which innovators and entrepreneurs are likely to fail, and to fail unproductively.

Theology has much to say about putting identity concerns to rest. When we do, our innovating efforts may prove more productive and aligned with the interests of the company of God.

Getting beyond self-interest and appreciating without judging are not things we can think our way through. Rather, these are attitudes that require practice. Such practice is especially relevant to the diagnostic challenges so central to innovating.

IV. THE COMPANY OF GOD

Innovating is seldom a solo act. While the myth of the lone, heroic entrepreneur is perhaps embedded in our cultural narrative, its reality is superficial if not vacuous. Innovating is done in the company of others and any innovation theology should remind us that those "others" include God.

The phrase "the Company of God" not only intends to remind us of God's interest and presence, but also God's purpose, or what the New Testament in particular and especially the synoptic gospels refer to as the kingdom of God on earth.

If a basic premise of innovation theology is that God is actively engaged in both change and our responses to it, then an understanding of how God's Company may be different yet involved is worth investigating. For the same reasons, it is important to look at the role and contribution the church has in the contexts of change and innovation, and what company assets, both tangible and intangible, will be involved when innovating in and with God's Company.

#11 *"This company has no exit strategy"*

More than merely a surrogate expression for the kingdom of God on earth, "the company of God" is offered as an apologetic phrase more difficult for innovators and entrepreneurs to ignore than its monarchial referent ("kingdom").

Biblical scholars agree that the central message of Jesus, and John the Baptist before him, is the proximity of the kingdom of God. This essay looks closely at the "present oriented" references to this kingdom in the gospels especially. From such an examination, the company of God manifests an explicit preference for *persons in need, forgiveness extended, local commitment, participation more than outcomes and serving more than status*. These preferences have much to offer by way of guidance and direction to innovators and entrepreneurs, and together represent a plumb line that might be used to precede calculations of bottom lines—calculations often used to pre-empt innovating efforts to begin with.

#12 "Church as servant subsidiary"

H. Richard Niebuhr referred to culture as the enduring problem of the church in his modern classic *Christ and Culture* (1951). Five years later, in an effort to re-align the goals of theological education in the development of ministers for the church, Niebuhr offered up a re-examination of the purpose of the church (*The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, (1956)). More recently, James Davison Hunter made a well researched and searing critique of the missteps of the North America Church (*To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (2010)).

Each speaks of a persistent challenge for the church to maintain its enduring purpose amidst the constant change of its context. This essay proposes three possible postures for the church to consider today in order to maintain its enduring purpose amidst so much change and innovation. Based largely on the Servant Songs of Isaiah, these postures call the church to embody *pastoral space*, *prophetic sign* and *personal sacrifice* in fulfilling its role as a servant subsidiary to the Company of God.

#13 "Innovating with company assets: Scripture and Spirit"

A company's ability to create new value for others (innovate) depends to a great degree on its willingness to reconfigure its own assets, both tangible and intangible. Assets constrain as well as enable. The role and relevance of the unique assets of the Company of God—its Scripture and Spirit—and their combinations represent a potential to innovating that may be like no other. These assets combined invite us to elevate our innovating to a higher purpose, a deeper meaning and a more responsive faithfulness.

However, our attitudes toward these assets and their combination can either enable or disable their usefulness, particularly in regards to change, innovation and our alignment with the purposes of God. This essay proposes that when texts become more important than contexts and when scripts become more important than Spirit, and even when writing becomes a substitute for speaking and listening, we sub-optimize the very assets God's Company offers us.