



Embodied approaches to management: incarnation as organisation

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Introduction

I wonder if, as you listened to various presentations today you detached your intellectual self from your bodies? I wonder whether you have mastered the art of overcoming your body and residing only in your mind? I suspect as focused as you may be, you still feel the chair beneath you, the pen in your hand, the clothes in your body. You see, bodies matter, there's no way round it, without them we are unable to engage in any community, institution or human relationship. Emma Bell and Daniel King writing in *Management Learning* state that '*The body is thus the surface onto which the culture is inscribed and the vehicle for its reproduction through enabling the interiorisation of ethical values that guide behaviour in situations of face-to-face interaction*'¹ and the radical feminist theologian Carter-Heyward writes that *bodies are the ground of all holiness*.² Yet for centuries, Christianity has had a difficult relationship with bodies. Bodies have often become to the church as mammon – a deity of selfishness and greed as if God didn't look at creation including bodies and declare it as good.

Rather, bodies have become difficult and perhaps an obstacle for the Church and in ministry. For centuries we have faced this Gnostic and Cartesian dualism surrounding the body and soul. Two separate entities, interacting with each other but one which is ultimately superior which is the soul. The Enlightenment led to a less bodily and more intellectual orientation; the dichotomy of sinful flesh and pure souls was set up; for women disembodiment has been particularly stark and the need to overcome the clothing of Eve to aspire to the perceived purity of Mary.

¹ Emma Bell & Daniel King: The Elephant in the room: Critical management studies conferences as a site of body pedagogics: *Management Learning*; August 26, 2010, p.2.

² Heyward, Carter: *Our passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality and Liberation* (The Pilgrim Press; New York; 1984) p.319.

However, really there is no way of escaping the reality that we are embodied people. I want us to rewrite this narrative of disembodied-ness in light of an incarnation theology and I believe our rewriting can be of ultimate value to others. If we were to see flesh as divine and incarnate of God; if the Church were to treat bodies as important sites of holy story with their history, their exclusion, their role and their resurrection I believe it entirely possible that it would be more functionally organisationally astute, more pastorally aware and a more theologically literate Church. Incarnation is at its best the being and becoming of God, therefore taking embodiment seriously is important for the Church. In the same way I argue this could be a useful dialogical avenue for other institutions and organisations of all shapes, sizes and ethical stances.

So let's start by being clear about where this is heading. The **first thing** is that I am talking in a literal sense about bodies – the reality of embodiment; of flesh incarnate and I will draw parallels between the nature of embodiment in the Church and in secular organisations. The **second thing** is that I'm talking about incarnation as embodied praxis. So how would understanding embodiment as holiness in all contexts (Church and 'Other') make for what I have conceived of as organisation as carnival of incarnation, what would the practical implications be? Lastly, throughout the paper if not already, it will become clear that I am coming from a Christological and radical feminist perspective.

Embodiment

So we begin by exploring embodiment in both contexts of Church and management. Susanna Wesley sums up the nature of unhelpful dualism surrounding the body, which was very much of her time and which has shaped societal approaches to the body, she says: *'Whatever increases the authority of the body over the mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may seem in itself.'*

How uncomfortable in every way is this notion of a competing body/soul dualism and yet how deeply programmed? This idea of the rational self or the intellectual self, separated from the body suggests that the body is somehow in the process of being overcome so as to understand self as in perfect state when separate from the body, the desires or functions of the body. The Church has lived with this notion of disembodiment. Working out the separation of the body and the self or the integral nature of both in pursuit of the Divine relates directly to Plato's birth as descent, a becoming embodied which means falling further away from divinity only returning to the divine state and death and Descartes' portrayal of the body as unthinking extension to the mind. Both further reinforce the body as distinguishable and secondary to the mind, soul or self.

Feminist, liberation, black, mujerista theologians have all used embodiment as a way of understanding and articulating the struggles of being and becoming.

They are attempting to redeem the body and therefore redeem incarnation. Seeing the body as central in theological discourse such academic communities has enabled further research around embodiment and disability, sexuality, and identity. Research around embodiment and management, the workplace and organisation has also taken place. Elaine Swan in her paper in *Management Learning* 2005 writes that:

*Management... has been coded as disembodied... feminist management theories have suggested that this imagined disembodied-ness of management has led to women managers' bodies being seen as, 'problematic signifiers' in the work place.*³

When thinking of embodiment in the Church and/or in the workplace we are also thinking of the experiential story of the body, the symbolic and representational role of the body not just it's physical presence in a given time or place, so that for those researching embodiment and management it becomes clear that there are significant cultural and historical challenges written onto the body. Kate Kenny and Emma Ball highlight this in 'The Handbook of Gender, Work and Organisations' when they state that:

*Bodily practices constitute an important means by which the norms, values and beliefs associated with a particular culture are enacted, and proficiency as a cultural member is demonstrated. For women managers this presents a distinct challenge, since their bodies are defined as inherently abnormal from the outset and thus unsuited to managerial cultures.*⁴

It would take more than the remaining time and a great deal of religious, social and political history to unpack why exactly female embodiment has been seen as so problematic in a myriad of contexts, what is significant for us here is understanding that bodies have not always been seen of as worth, worse, bodies have been abused and oppressed and in their very breathing have been seen as wrong, weak, bad or mistaken. When looking at gender and management in Japan, Heidi Gottfried noted that 'The discursive construction of the reproductive body assumes particular importance in *disqualifying* them (women) from authority positions and is continually evoked as the kernel of embodied difference.'⁵ There has been a devaluing and dismissing of embodiment in the Church and in some shapes of organisation based upon embodied gender and difference. An equally difficult by-product of such erosion has been the commodification of the body which as Kenny and Ball write '*the body is treated as an object with a*

³ Elaine Swan; On Bodies, Rhinestones and Pleasures: Women Teaching Managers; *Management Learning*; London: 2005; 36: 317, p.319.

⁴ Kate Kenny and Emma Ball; *The Handbook of Gender, Work and Organisations*; (eds.) Jeannes, E; Martin, P.Y; 2011; J. Wiley & Sons Ltd; Chichester, p.172.

⁵ Heidi Gottfried; *The Temp(t)ing Bodies; Shaping Gender at Work in Japan*; *Sociology*; 2003; 37:257

*marketable value that can be bought and sold is a common theme in feminist and organisational research.*⁶ Joanna Brewis in 1999 explored whether there was even an awareness of embodiment among women managers in the public sector, questioning *'the extent to which women managers in the UK public sector experience their work as embodied subjects: how influential... they see their bodies to be in terms of their working lives? Do they believe their bodies represent obstacles or useful resources to them at work?'*⁷

This is why embodiment matters, disembodiment in any organisation creates a diathesis which leaves open the way for disease and corporate ill-health. In the Church a separation of the corporeal and spirit or mind has led to a lack of wholeness about the corporate body of the Church, which is why you hear some of the Church delighting or not in bishops who are women, or clergy who can marry their same-sex partner, this is why churches get worried about making costly adaptations to building so that those who are differently abled or disabled can participate, this is why clergy suffer so much from physical and mental ill-health, this is why some people still don't agree with maternity leave or working mothers. We are corporately unwell, we are sick in our body, our organisational body is in ill-health as long as we resist embracing the physical bodies of those who make up our organisations.

Incarnation

The solution to such ill-health, I believe, can be found in the focus of the second part of this paper: incarnation and in remembering the discomfort of hypostatic union. In the incarnation we believe that God became flesh, not just that God became human but that God became body – arms, legs, hands, feet. God partakes in a carnival of flesh, and we call it incarnation. God's birthing and being and becoming in human flesh. This matters greatly because if we understand incarnation as a meeting point of flesh and divinity, the shared experience of spiritual or intellectual and corporeal entities, then we can see the role of embodiment within a wider context than just self or other. Carter Heyward's work asserts that an individual's body is not a shell or vessel in which God does or does not dwell, rather it is a member of God's body in the world. The human body is utterly coherent and interdependent with God. Heyward writes *'Knowing that God is in our body and that our cosmic communal and personal bodies are in God (in mutually co-inherent relation) sparks our passion for life, for God, for one another, and for the world.'*⁸

⁶ Kate Kenny and Emma Ball; *The Handbook of Gender, Work and Organisations*; (eds.) Jeannes, E; Martin, P.Y; 2011; J. Wiley & Sons Ltd; Chichester, p.169.

⁷ Joanna Brewis; *Transforming managers: gendering change in the public sector*; (eds) Whiteread, Stephen M, Moodly Roy; 1999; UCL Press;; London.

⁸ Heyward, Carter; *Saving Jesus from those who are right - rethinking what it means to be a Christian*; Augsburg Fortress; Minneapolis; 1999; p. 127

The concept of shared experience, bodily and intellectually or spiritually lies at the heart of incarnation; dismissive of dualistic heresies and holistic in approaching humanity. In any organisation, the Church included, were people to be seen as embodied and incarnational the genuine value experienced by people in that approach would be reproduced into the organisation itself. Bell and King reflect that: 'The body is thus the medium through which socialisation into a culture is achieved through a pedagogic process of teaching and learning.'⁹ I believe that in an incarnational approach to embodiment this is a reversible process, that the experience of the body can achieve organisational culture shift by embodied socialisation of the organisation.

In praxis this approach to embodiment and incarnation in the Church would have a number of outworkings; the first and foremost I believe would be culture shifting as it would lead to a renewed *habitus* which would then go on to inform ministry practices and Church organisation and structures. Such *habitus* would also be concentrated on the well-being of bodies and the corporate body.

One example of what the embodied and incarnational organisation may look like is the United Church of Christ where the model of embodiment is strongest 'within those congregations historically linked to... German Reformed roots.'¹⁰ There is in particular one word, the German word *pastorenkirchen* in this context meaning 'where the pastor is, there the Church is'. This term is helpful in understanding what an embodied incarnational organisation may look like because it assumes a relationship of individual and whole so that the embodied experience of one is the experience of the whole organisation, and vice versa thus forming an embodied socialisation of the organisation. To put this in stark terms if one employee is pregnant then the whole organisation whilst not living that life event in their individuals bodies must live it in the corporate body, there would be adequate maternity leave, crèche facilities, health care and so on because the women's embodied experience is not separate from the lived experience in the organisation. The United Church of Christ claims that:

*'A demand is made upon us. And so we were the first historically white denomination to ordain an African-American, the first to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly gay man, and the first Christian church to affirm the right of same-gender couples to marry. We were in the forefront of the anti-slavery movement and the Civil Rights movement.'*¹¹

⁹ Emma Bell & Daniel King: The Elephant in the room: Critical management studies conferences as a site of body pedagogics: Management Learning; August 26, 2010, p.6.

¹⁰ Zikmund, Barbara Brown; Empowerment & Embodiment: Understanding of Ministry in the United Church of Christ; Theology & Identity (eds) Johnson, D; Hambrick-Stowe C. The Pilgrim Press, 1990 New York.

¹¹ <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/> accessed 27/08/2014

The notion of *pastorenkirchen* expresses embodiment which speaks into incarnation; where our bodies are there God's body is. In the United Church of Christ this has implications for understandings of ordination and presbyteral ministry but also for how the whole organisation functions in the light of an embodied approach to structures. It is my assertion that ridding organisations of dualistic and atomistic tendencies in favour of an holistic approach in which the embodied self has signifying value would create a space of potentiality for the health of the organisation and the realising of embodied capital.

Briefly, to conclude, we live in a time and space where the mortification of the body is seen as normative and this is necessarily problematic. The subduing of and dismissiveness towards the importance of the body can be seen right now in Rochdale where some bodies have been seen as of less worth and value than other bodies, and the response to the embodied victims has been re-victimisation, stigmatization and disembodiment. Imagine for a moment if South Yorkshire police force – and any other involved agency had taken an embodied approach to victims of sexual crime and an altogether different outcome. Where there is organisational ill-health as a result of disembodiedness the most vulnerable suffer and the best outcomes are rarely achieved. Organisations including (and perhaps especially) the Church, have a responsibility fundamental to their identity to develop an embodied, incarnational model and structures of being. Bodies matter for in our bodies lies our experience, in our bodies our relationships are maintained, in our bodies we live and move and have our being, and so does God.