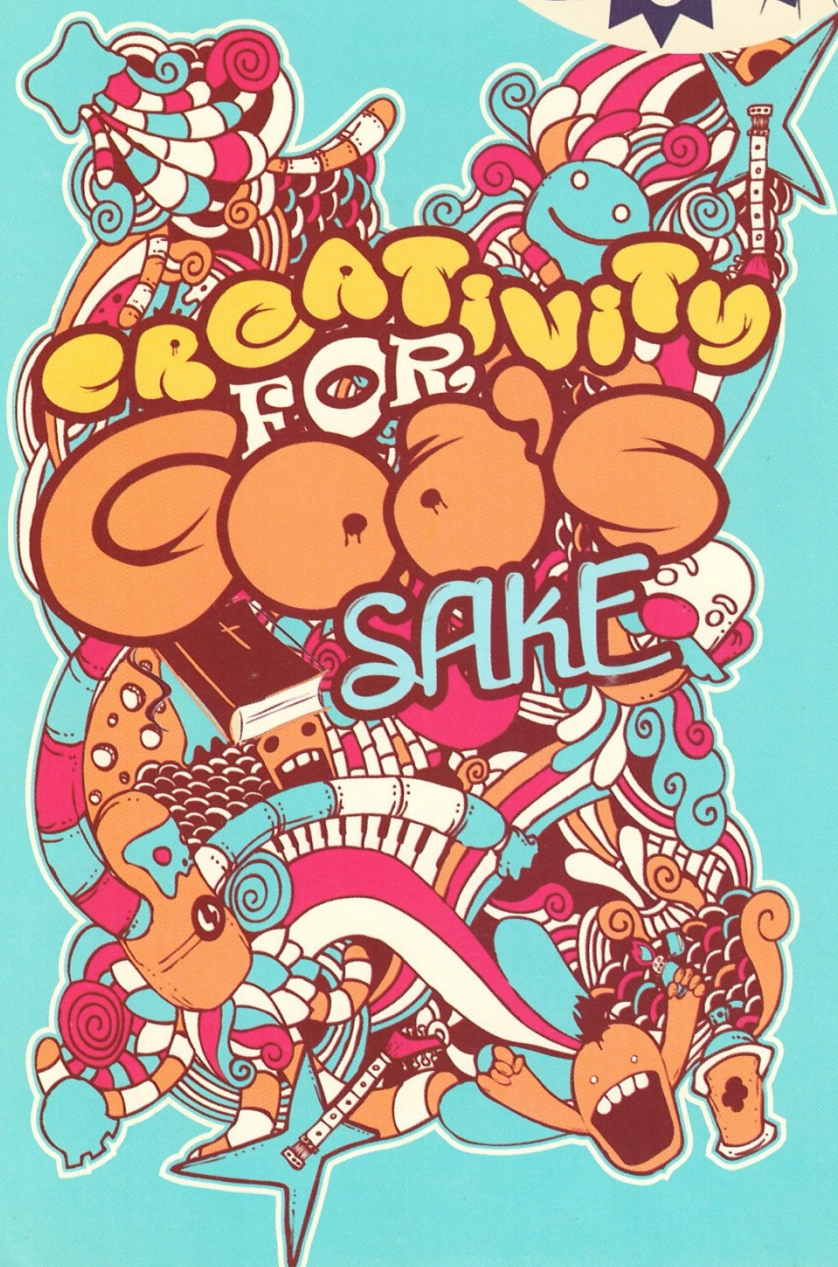


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Creativity, for God's Sake

A lot is done in the name of creativity in Christian ministry; we need to ask the right questions: Why creativity? At what cost? Is it bordering on gimmicks, when the Gospel that we are commissioned to proclaim is incredibly simplified in the life, teachings and sacrifice of Lord Jesus on the cross.

Context and Creativity: In the context of campus ministry, we do annually encounter a fresh generation of students, with better technologies at their disposal and ethical questions and lifestyle challenges. Now, to move with the changing times, do we quickly invent a 'calf' as Aaron made to represent God for the Israelites? Do we tattoo our hands as we lift them up in holiness for worship or do we alter the lighting of the hall according to the gaiety or sobriety of the song? Do we download from 'i-cloud' mobile apps of digital Bible and embed them inside the heads of audience as chips, instead of thundering like Ol'time preachers "how many of you

have brought your Bibles?" When confronted with the temptation to colour-up the Gospel, Paul's reminds that everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. (1 Cor 14:40)

Choice Vs Creativity: A Rich young man came to Jesus (Matthew 19) wanting to know how he can inherit eternal life. He was at the right stage of life to begin life on his own terms. He came to the right Person. He asked the right question. He also got the right answers. Sadly, he didn't make the right choice to follow the advice of Jesus. Was there somewhere a strategy failure?

If creativity could have produced faith and repentance in that young man, Jesus could have asked beautiful Mary Magdalene to do the announcements; Jesus could have called an angelic choir to sing some heavenly songs (accompanied by spectacular celestial displays, thunder and mesmerizing voices from above). Or Jesus could have arranged a stunning choreography

by the daughters of Jerusalem at the roof top ambience of hanging gardens, for the rich young man, to cherish and ponder. And made a young Lazarus to share a testimony and then stage a skit by His twelve disciples, with Herod in attendance, followed by barbecue by the poolside at Bethesda, served by Manna Caterers, supervised by royal host Chuza, with corporate sponsorship of Judas Bank.

He who created heaven and earth could have done one or all of the above (quite thoughtfully!) But Jesus added repeatedly at the end of His teaching, 'He who has ears, let him hear!' (This means: it is up to the listener to hear what is being said and decide for himself to choose his own destiny).

Entertainment vs Enlightenment: In order to convey to a contemporary generation, we need to also ask, what can solve their predicament of being faced with a number of temptations, addictions, and bondage. Therefore, it is not how wild can ideas run riot to get across the Message and how far can we tweak the 'genre' of evangelism, but what is the Answer to their questions concerning life and eternity. We need to also check if we are equipped enough with the Word of God before we can reach out to them. The Lord says, 'My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the

law of your God, I also will ignore your children. (Hos. 4:6) Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, 'The Scripture is our inexhaustible textbook, the Lord Jesus our boundless subject and the Holy Spirit our divine infinite helper.' Can we give the fizzing out bubbles of entertainment that can't quench their soul's deepest yearnings and fill their sense of emptiness?

Comforts and Creativity: Has God's Word, instead of being sweeter than honey, turned a bitter gal? Do matters that are holy no longer evoke reverence? Does soul winning sound a hilarious enterprise? These days are probably like how Jesus described, like how it was in the days of Noah and Lot . . . People ate and drank, married and were given in marriage . . . bought and sold, planted and built (pre-occupation with life's comfort zones). For such any creativity is just another fleeting entertainment, leaving their soul untouched, minds unenlightened and heart aches unaddressed. When Paul was writing to Timothy saying in essence 'my time is nearly over; you must carry on,' he wrote this warning: *For the time is coming when men will not tolerate wholesome teaching. They will want something to tickle their own fancies, and they will collect teachers who will pander to their own desires. They will no longer listen to the truth, but will wander off after man-made fictions.* (2 Tim. 4:3-4 JBP) The problem is not with creativity, as much as

with people who seek comforts . . . reclining in the scarlet couch of sin, stolen pleasures and tuned in to Plasma TV, iPad and the like, to escape from the real world or their own sense of guilt.

Familiarity vs Creativity: Is our cry for creativity due to our habitual engagement within the Fold (Abraham Singh, Isaac Raj, Jacobson, Gerry Gujjarlapudi, Kevin Kondappalli, Esther Ku ...) who have heard of the garden and the apple a thousand times already? Are we shouting for creativity, because the Gospel as such no longer sounds credible, to familiar ears? Are we demanding creativity, so that some entertainment, some titillation, some kick, can get our attention for 20 life-taking minutes? Young Stephen moved out of his comfort zone and stood before a motley crowd of ungodly strangers and proclaimed the Lord's message, even to his own earthly peril, that they grit their teeth in intolerance and stoned him to death. Terrible times, rough terrains, hostile audiences and lack of basic resources are daily realities that accompany soul winning endeavours.

Urgency vs Creativity: Some people prefer to come to Christ after their retirement in order not to lose what the world has to offer them. Many reject and walk their own way and many others may never get to hear the Gospel even once. A 2005 report of US Public Library

of Science tells us that 60 million people die every year in the world out of which 9.5 million in India. That means every passing hour 1084 people pass away in India. Suppose a hundred children are held hostage by a mad gunman in a neighbourhood school and you happen to get the news, you will instantly find the shortest way to reach the local police as swiftly as you can and convey the message as bluntly as you can to alert them and the neighbourhood. You don't form a skit team, discuss the ideas of how creatively to convey this message, buy some school uniforms, recruit some child models, buy a toy gun and a mask, and practice the hostage drama (with due breaks for tea, cakes, fun and banter) and then present the skit in front of the police, as a scientific, historic and authentic proof that some 100 children are under siege. Alternatively, you don't also try reaching Stephen Spielberg and know if he can produce a film (in 3D or should we say 4D) on the "crisis" situation, and also contact AR Rahman for apt musical effects, so that you can present the matter in all its accuracy, with cultural sensitivity, and congenial connectivity to the police force and the world, and convince them into extending help, for the rescue of young souls under impending doom.


If the message is urgent, mere spoken words blessed by God, can do. 'And the LORD answered me:

"Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it." (Hab. 2:2). Paul said, 'my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit.' (1 Cor. 2:4)

Calling vs Creativity: In order to edify the Church, the Lord appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Each of them has a place in Christian ministry. We are all creative beings, but most of us in our own sphere of life or fields of calling. But when we cross disciplines, it could be a bit challenging or a predictable fiasco to be creative, even a burden. Therefore, we all need one another in complementing one another's weaknesses with our strengths for fulfilling the Great Commission. Jesus said, 'you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me ... to the end of the earth.' (Act 1:8) Are we filled with the Holy Spirit and are directed by Him in our ministry? When the sons of Sceva tried to exorcise the demons, the demon possessed man confronted, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15) Therefore, the assurance of a powerful calling should be our pre-occupation and thirst than the mumbo jumbo of creativity.

Lives that Creatively Speak: The question should not be how

to score brownie points for creatively conveying the Gospel, but how earnestly and honestly can you convey it (telling the truth, yet with love), backed by your own example of faith, tearful prayers and genuine care, which doesn't diminish even if you go on in life to be blessed with several children, and a high office with frequent tours abroad or retired with grandchildren. St Augustine said, 'Preach the Gospel, if necessary use words.' In fact, it is our transformed lives that God uses as His strategy of creativity to authenticate the living Gospel. Lives transformed by the Holy Spirit will speak volumes better than printed pages or audible bytes or lighted bulbs or colourful pixels or hi-fi gadgets or picturesque locations or nature's demonstrations.

Let us proclaim the Gospel with urgency, despite criticisms, opposition and rejection by the people. Let our lives speak as loud as the words that we proclaim. Don't you want to be men and women for God's sake? 

Anand David



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