

**Institute for Christian Teaching
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**THE CHRISTIAN IN BUSINESS
CONVEYING CHRISTIAN VALUES IN BUSINESS**

By

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INTRODUCTION

Business is increasingly being called upon to justify its existence. Some of the arguments that have been advanced as justification, include:

- i) Profit maximization: The goal of every business venture is profit maximization. This is achieved by maximizing sales revenues and minimizing costs.
- ii) Existential: With the current intense competition in the market place a commercial enterprise needs to make 'enough' profits to keep on in the same business. The amount of profits needed for existence is 'normal' profit.
- ii) Market Leadership: It views business' goal as controlling the market. This is achieved through predict/brand leadership, keeping off the competition using every means available. Such means would include, intensive advertising, price cutting, extensive promotion, ownership and control of channels of distribution and sources of supply, and in extreme cases, mergers and acquisitions.
- iv) Product Leadership: This is achieved through continuous research and quality improvements, advertising and promotion.
- v) Employment and Income Creation: This is achieved through expansion, existence and profit making. By investing and staying in business, the enterprise becomes a sources of continuous employment and income generation. This means that the enterprise becomes an important source of livelihood by providing goods and services, and the incomes to buy the same.

The question that follows logically from the above is whether business can achieve these objectives ethically and morally.

In order to answer the above question, one needs to understand the basic function of business in society. Business

in its basic definition is a contract between the corporative world and the society. In this contract, there exists a mutuality between the two. Byron (1988 pg. 53) summarizes this view beautifully when he argues that, "the purpose of business is to serve a people on the way to salvation by organizing the material basic of their transition through life"¹ As such business is a social contract with a Divine purpose. Byron (1985) goes on to argue that to be in business is first to be. To be in business is to enhance one's being and the being of others. The purpose of business is therefore, relational. Business defines our relationship with our fellow beings through working with them to advance their welfare. It also defines our relationship with God in the way in which we handle God's creation. It also helps us to discover the character of God in creation and the different ways in which we can combine God's Creation to come up with a need satisfying products and services.

OWNERSHIP OF BUSINESS AND WEALTH

Business activities are relational; the goods and services are a discovery of what exists freely in God's creation. Therefore, business belongs to God. In a normal business we come across the concepts of creation such as ownership of business and wealth. God has placed this ownership with humanity. But humanity is a creature just like the business and the items used to produce a product. How then can a creature be at the sometime a creator? Can the mortal, limited being create?² This places a fundamental question on the rights and privileges of individuals to do as they wish with their business and by extension their products. Since humanity and everything that exist in our planet are creatures, there must be a creator who oversees their well being. Humanity is thus limited as to how far they can combine what exists freely in God's creation.

Limited by what the creator reveals to them from time to time. Since the creator reveals to humanity what exists in His creation and how humanity can use it to improve their well being, humanity cannot claim ownership. Humanity is merely a channel through which the creator fulfills the promise to provide and take care of His creation. Discoveries are God's revelation. All that the business produces belongs to God. Consequently business must seek God's will in using a raw material that goes into every production. In discovering, business partakes of the Divine will, given to our first parents to be in charge and care of all that was created (Gen. 1). In using, business discovers the "hidden" treasures in God's creation and plan of salvation. Since business does not create, what it has is a stewardship right. Ownership right puts accountability on the creator. Since humanity is not a creator and hence not the owner, it only has stewardship rights which puts accountability on a higher authority which is God. Profits are therefore legitimized on the basis of the utilization of the God given abilities to create, and provide goods and services capable of satisfying needs. Besides, the business community makes those goods and services available in the right assortment, place and time, for which society must pay.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ESSAY:

This essay attempts to provide insight into some fundamental areas of conflict that a Christian in business faces. Conflicts arising from the differences in the value systems, the valuing process and the values themselves, and conflicts in the realm of practice. Christian practices are, in most cases at variance with those of the non-Christian, yet business is a common meeting point. Such practices as to what goods and services to provide, whether to advertise or not, how to advertise, what price to

charge, which outlets to use to distribute their products. Such issues are handled differently by the secular world. For example, stocking of alcoholic drinks, and cigarets, may not be a problem to a non Christian business person. While to a Christian it is against the fundamental beliefs, profits not withstanding. At the conceptual level, conflicts arise with concepts such as ownership, creation, wealth, payment of tax and tithing. Given these areas of conflict, this paper argues that in order to resolve them, business must begin by having the right values. With the right values, business' perceptions will change and business will become more responsive and accountable in all its transactions. The paper thus aims at identifying, and passing the Christian values to those who will have the greatest influence on business. These are the business students. Furthermore, this paper hopes to provide a mechanism for monitoring and creating a pool of experience that serves to link the past Christian business graduates and the prospective graduates. This would enable the latter to gain important lesson of experience from their counterparts in the field.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN BUSINESS AND CHRISTIAN VALUES:

It is important to establish whether there is a conflict between Christian values and business values. If there is a conflict, what are the sources of such conflicts and how can they be best resolved. It is necessary to state that there are no suggestion in the scriptures that Christianity is opposed to business. Business is a noble vocation ordained by God to be used to meet the needs of His creation. Adam was placed in charge of all that was created. In naming what was placed under his care , Adam gave creation utility. In taking care of creation, he ensured its propagation. The Scriptures are replete with instances where God called for prudence, economy and above all temperance in utilizing what was created for humanity's good.

If business is given and blessed by God, why is it that business is perceived as evil? The conflict between business and Christian values is part of the "Great Controversy" between good and evil. Satan's attempt is to portray business as evil. In many cases, what is noble in business has become evil. Therefore, the conflict between Christian values and business values is due to the result of sin. Business without Christian foundation, hence business without God, becomes susceptible to sin. Satan fills the void and controls the business, tainting the noble vocation with sin. Business has over the years become overly self centered, the private self gains as the driving motive. This has given rise to vices such as greed, lies, manipulation, exploitation, lack of integrity and above all lack of concern for humanity. This has resulted in business enterprises in which ethics and morality are non existent , unethical and immoral practices become the norms rather than the exception. This led to the conclusion by many, that business is inherently evil. St. Jerome³ echoes the same sentiment, that a merchant can seldom if ever please God. What appears as business values today are maximization of profit by any means. A situation where the means justifies the ends. Hence such 'values' as corruption, cheating, lying, immorality, exploitation, manipulation, ruthlessness, heartlessness and in lack of regards for human well-being.

How then do we resolve the conflict? We have stated above that Christianity and business are not at variance. What is at variance are the practices. Such business practices which are devoid of concern for others and for the prudent use of God's resources portrays wrong values which are not consistent with Christian values. However, business and Christianity originated from God. The same God who, gave humanity religion as a means of spiritual nourishment and business as a means of physical nourishment. Conflict does not arise since the source and

control point are the same. Conflict only arises when business excludes God. In such a case, sin controls business. It is only under such circumstances that conflict arises between business and Christian values. According to Holmes (1975 pg. 14), "sin occurs not when we enjoy created things, but rather when we misuse them. The sin in fact is not valuing as we should the resources of God has made". Since sin is disobedience (rebellion), it leads to distortion in concepts and purpose and results in misuse.

CHRISTIAN VALUES:

Values can broadly be defined as the established ideals of life, that the members of a given society regard as desirable, noble and honorable. They involve such concepts as good, bad, desirable, beautiful and ugly. Values may also be looked at from the ethical perspective. In this, they concern themselves with what is ethical or moral. Christian values therefore fall under the broad definition of values. The problem arises when a distinction is made between "other values" and Christian principles exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The law of God through Moses is a clear testimony of the Christian values. It is a law of love for God, and love for fellow human beings. It details the values we should have for one another and for God. The Scriptures, provide the ideal framework for Christian values.

This paper has defined business as relational. Christian values provide a framework for building the correct relation with God and with others. All Christian values are as such applicable in the business context. We shall now take a look at some of the values commonly experienced in business and try to show how they can be conveyed to the learners. We shall look at the following values: efficiency, equity, stewardship, fairness,

integrity, excellence, trust, patience and love. These values should be practiced in the wider context of the Christian world view, a view, that holds that everything in the world belongs to God. The Scriptures admonishes the Christian that the world will judge them not by what they say, but rather by what they do. In this realm of practice, the Christian conveys certain values. Hence the world will judge them not by the values they profess, but rather by the values they practice. The true reflection of a Christian faith, is in the values they practice. It is not enough just to understand these values and practice them, but rather the Christian in business should understand why these values are important. They should have a process of valuing. Since the above values are important, it would be inappropriate to attempt to rank or order them. Each value has its own unique role to play in a business context. However, all these values should be practiced out of a genuine love for God and for a fellow human being. The order in which these these values are discussed below, in no way suggests a ranking.

Stewardship: The human being was given dominion over all that was created. Adam was charged with the responsibility of managing, naming, and using all that was created. Adam was to manage on God behalf. By extension, humanity is to manage the entire creation on God's behalf. A good steward does not arrogate to himself/herself the power of ownership. A good steward manages as per the instructions of the owner. A good steward uses the resources prudently, thus bringing gains to the master. In the parable of the Master and his three servants, Christ gave an illustration of what a Christian business person should be and what he/she should not be.

Fairness: Since everything belongs to God, a Christian's attitude should be to treat all as equal before God. In their pricing, delivery, advertising, promotion and employment, they

should be seen to be impartial. Such practices as, manipulative and misleading advertising, discriminatory pricing, products which are defective or harmful, convey a distorted image of God as portrayed by the Christian. White (1923 Fundamentals of Christian Education pg.556), summarizes this in these words, "Christian in his business life is to represent to the world the manner in which God would have conducted business enterprises. In every transaction he is to make it manifest that God is the teacher. Those who profess Christ and who deal in an unrighteous manner, are bearing false witness against the character of a holy, just and merciful God". A Christian in business should in every business transaction, represent God to the world as He is.

Efficiency: God requires thrift from every Christian. Resources are in limited supply and are far out-stripped by human wants⁴. In order to meet the human wants, efficiency should prevail. In order to operate efficiently, that is to minimize the resource wastage, there is a need for harmony in all the resources concerned. This harmony is possible when business understands that the work they do is God's work, the resources they use are God's resources, and the people they serve are God's people. This understanding calls for team work, dedication, competence, vision and, above all, tolerance of diversity.

Equity: This refers to a situation where an individual acts in fair and impartial manner in relating to others. The world is today faced with myriad problems of partiality, hatred, jealousy, and wars. In business, partiality shows itself in nepotism, *favouritism*, price and product discrimination. Lack of equity arises from the 'perceived' differences between persons. God created human beings equal, they could have biological differences or colour differences or height differences, but these are functional differences resulting from the need to adapt. It is the breath of life from God that made

the person a living soul. This breath is the same for all. A Christian in business should strive to further this understanding.

Excellence: Excellence refers to the use of God given skills to reach the very highest of our ability. God created human beings with enormous potentials. Limitations come as a result of sin. Hence without sin our abilities are enormous. However, since all are sinners and have fallen short of the glory of God, there is a need to seek the glory of God in all activities including business. When we seek God's guidance, excellence is possible to achieve.

Honesty: It refers to the equality of being truthful, credible, honourable, and morally upright. A Christian in business is required to deal honestly with others at all times and under all circumstance. White (1952 Education pg. 14) summarizes this value in the following words: "The accounts of every business, the details of every transaction, pass the scrutiny of unseen auditors, agents of Him who never compromises with injustice, never overlooks evil, never palliates wrong". Issues of honesty are central in the world's view of business as evil. They touch on such issues as weight and measured, ingredient mix, labelling, advertising, expiry, full disclosure, hoarding and other manipulative business practices, such as 'special offers', grand clearing sales, and special discounts. Which are not genuine but aimed exploiting the unsuspecting client. What the world want," are men who are not greedy for personal gain. Hence they cannot be bought. Honest and true in their heart, who do not fear to point out evil and avoid it, those who will stand for what is right even if the heavens fall", White (1903). Such responsibility calls for total commitment and surrender to the will of God. Business calling is God's calling. As long as it is conducted in accordance with His

will, He is responsible for the results. In Matthew 6:31-33, the Bible tell us ".....seek ye first the kingdom of God and, His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you". These `things' including profit, market share, growth and market leadership.

Love: This is a value that runs a cross all the other values. As such it is difficult to isolate. In embracing the other values, business is in fact showing love for those they serve. Love may appear to go contrary to the very objective of business. Hence a persistent question in this connection would be: how do you love and yet charge for the services/goods? In this context we view love as a strong feeling of friendship. Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians(1 cor.13), states categorically, that even if we do all good things to others but have no love, the deeds remain selfish deeds. If businesses loves the client they serve, they will not exploit, oppress, or harm them.

Services: Business is a social contract between society and the corporate world. In this contract, society surrenders its rights to provide goods and services to the corporation which in turn, expects society to support it. The relationship is that of mutuality between the two. Society gives the right of existence to business with a very specific purpose namely, meeting the needs of society. Business is therefore a `creation' of society. Since its legitimacy is given by society for a specific purpose, business must always strive to serve the interest of society, Archie and Carroll (1996). Business has a social, moral, ethical and religious obligation to society. These obligations call for a responsive and responsible business practices.

Perseverance: This refers to continual steady effort made to achieve a goal. Christ showed this virtue as He worked

diligently in His fathers carpentry shop. The Bible cautions against hasty search for riches, "he that meekest haste to be rich shall not be innocent" Proverbs 28:20⁵. Most of the ills of which business has been accused, result from the need to make profits quickly. Wealth gotten in haste will not last, but diligence produces long lasting wealth.

The values discussed above are in no way exhaustive. The important fact to consider, is the inter-relationship of these values. These values have two things in common: love for God, and love for one another. These values and many others not discussed above are the principles that foster a closer relationship with God and with fellow human beings. In order to fulfill his/her part in the plan of redemption, the Christian business person need to internalize and practice the above values.

The university setting is an ideal setting for interaction with prospective business people, both Christian and non-Christian. The influence on their view of business would be greatest at the university. In order to impart these values to this target group, the paper proposes a simple model as shown below.

MODEL FOR CONVEYING CHRISTIAN VALUES IN BUSINESS TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.

The proposed model attempts to inculcate in a practical way and to monitor the assimilation of the values by the target group. It consists of four stages which need not necessarily follow sequentially.

Stage 1:

General Introduction to Work ethics, activities will include;

i) Introduction to general philosophy of work, skills, values and ethics. This should be done through a compulsory work

experience for all university students.

Stage 2:

Specific and deliberate building up of work values to business students:

Activities will include:

- i) Building the christian values into the courses through case studies and case simulations. The lecturer should be encouraged to build the values into the instructional techniques.
- ii) Getting the students attached to departments or industries within the campus. Here they shall be required to implement under guidance those values they have been introduced to in the previous stage and any other Christian values they may have acquired. They shall at the end write a report on the challenges they faced in implementing the learned values. These reports shall form the basis of the class case studies. This attachment shall be during the Inter quarter breaks for a maximum period of eight weeks.

Stage 3:

Actual Industry application:

For all students who have successfully completed stage 2 above and who are classified as junior or above. The activities shall include;

- i) The application of the learned values and skills in a real business setting outside the university.
- ii) Evaluating the industry factors militating against the application of these values.
- ii) Suggesting ways of overcoming these obstacles.
- iii) The student should be under a professional supervisor for at least eight continuous weeks during which he/she is to be constantly evaluated on the skills, values, and other personal factors necessary to perform the task.

Stage 4: Phase 1 follow up

In this stage, the students should write a detailed report on their experiences in the work place with an emphasis on the challenges faced in the real work environment and how they overcame those challenges. When they come back, the lecturers should concentrate on integrating some of these experiences into case studies and instructional materials. The supervisor should submit a written assessment based on predetermined guidelines.

Phase 2: In this phase, the aim is to build a network with past business graduates. The aim of this network is to serve as a pool of experience and resource persons for career talks and guidance.

EXPECTED RESULTS:

If properly internalized, these values would help to transform the way in which business is conducted. They would effect a change in business' attitude from the primary motive of profit to a belief in the value of service to society. By influencing a few business graduates passing through the university with the correct values and attitudes towards business, this model hopes to make an impression in the long run on the larger corporate world.

In conclusion, the values discussed above are intended to bring accountability and responsiveness of business to society. It will bring the will of God in business by the realization that all things belong to God and that God intended them to be used for His glory. This will place God at the center of business and Christian values as the pillars on which sound business practices are built. Business is a God given calling. It is a call to ministry. In this case, a ministry through the provision of goods and service. Wholesome goods and services at the right place, right price and right promotion. Business is a powerful tool of

witnessing to the providence of God. This will only be achieved when those in business understand, internalize and practice the correct values.

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ENDNOTES

1)The theological basis of business is what Byron 1988, describes as service. He argues that creation sets us apart from the creator. We are creatures gifted with intelligence, talents physical strength, and imagination. We may view ourselves as capable of being "creative", although we know we are unable to create in the basic theological meaning of the word.

2)Creation is here defined from the theological perspective, to "bring life" to a lifeless form. Humanity cannot create in this sense. Since they cannot create, they do not own. Ownership in a theological sense belongs to the creator.

3)See Martin Wagaw,"Teaching business courses for Development in Eastern Africa: A Christian perspective.(No.114-92;7cc:329-348)

4)Sound business practices is based on the economic principle of efficiency. The argument is that, since resources are scarce, they should be used in such a manner that they satisfy human wants.

5)The Bible texts are from the King James version.