

Business and the Great Commission

Why the marketplace is the future environment for spiritual formation

A. In a nutshell

Just as starting a church won't get you into heaven, starting a company won't send you to hell!
Running a church or a company is spiritually always a matter of purpose!

B. The need for a new approach

In the past, the relationships between business and mission agencies/churches were primarily defined by the provision of financial resources from companies for missionary activities of churches and corresponding organizations.

In recent years the so-called "Business as Mission"-model has been frequently discussed. In this model, the company is considered as a platform for evangelism, discipleship and Christian mission and is used in a much broader sense.

This is desperately needed. The fact is very simple and widely accepted, that the traditional church has lost a huge amount of members and many local churches have had to be closed during the past decade. The churches in the United States currently lose in the age group of 18-24-year-olds almost 75% of its members. Even the Southern Baptists have lost one fourth of their missionary force internationally in the last year. They are, for the first time in history, decreasing in size and number of baptisms. And in Germany just last year more than 400,000 people have left the evangelical church. Currently the institutionalized church is facing difficult times.

A strategic approach to reverse this development is now to train the 97 % of Christians working in the marketplace.

The Canadian theologian Paul Stevens wrote in a recent article:

"There are enormous implications for the marketplace, which is now seen as not merely a place to evangelize but as an arena, if not the most strategic one, for the full-orbed mission of God. [...] The primary locations for spiritual growth are not church services. [...] The marketplace is the most significant area of spiritual formation."

If we define the traditional church as the only primary arena of spiritual formation and as the only place using and developing spiritual gifts, the 97% of Christians working in the marketplace can't make their calling "fit" within the walls of churches and may become dormant and disengaged from church.

Accordingly, the current model of church ministry getting people involved in church meetings and programs has to be changed. Paul wrote to slaves in the pagan workplace: *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."* (Col. 3,23)

This expresses an enhanced meaning of "church service" and emphasizes the relevance of faith 7 days a week no matter where you are positioned

C. More than BAM

The global church of Christ is called to review its theology of work and the extent to which it provides a false dichotomy with the implied separation of clergy and laity. Furthermore it is important that the Christian church gives entrepreneurs and business leaders a role in local and global mission that goes far beyond the provision of financial resources.

The Western hemisphere is still suffering from the legacy of pietism and a dichotomized worldview, in which 'ministry' is confined to full-time paid work within the church i.e. as a pastor, evangelist or missionary.

But believe it or not: God did not invent the church to support the clergy. Rather, God gave pastors and teachers to the church in order to equip the saints. People don't go to church on Sundays to support their pastor in his ministry. Rather, the pastor goes to church to support his people in their ministry – which is outside the walls of the church, in the world, being salt and light also in the marketplace.

A crucial question needed to ask those who seek to follow Jesus in the marketplace is: Do you see your work as nothing more than a necessary evil or only as the context for evangelistic opportunism, or do you see it as a means of glorifying God through participating in his purpose for creation and therefore having intrinsic value?

We need to remember that business itself could glorify God. Business does not need to be “baptized” by poverty alleviation, church planting, marketplace ministry, workplace evangelism or missions. These are all good things from God, but so is business. By itself! Business is a morally good gift from God. It does not need to be justified by any other non-business or clergy activity.

Business is a high and holy calling from God. We do not have to do business in a cross-cultural context to do business to the glory of God. We do not have to call it “BAM (Business as Mission)” to glorify God through business. We can love and honor God in our business itself. Our heart and the way we love people in and through business is infinitely more important than how we label it. Jesus was likely a carpenter. What kind of products did he make? Do we think he made lousy products because he was actually “on a mission”? No! He worked to the glory of God, just as he lived his whole life. Being “on a mission” is no excuse for a poor quality of products or services. It's just the opposite!

If all of our lives are under the Lordship of Christ and lived for God's glory, then why should business be any different? God is using us in his mission for his glory. It's a part of the new identity that we have in Christ. Since mission is a part of our identity in Christ, then (automatically) that shall flow out into our callings to business, education, politics, media, etc. There is no “normal” business or “normal” life for Christians. Our Christian identity is a 24/7 calling integrating everything that we are doing – anywhere and anytime.

D. What Business can achieve

Summarizing the business approach, it is not just about using the workplace for evangelistic purposes, it is not just about getting access to unreached people, it is not just about bridging a dualistic worldview and it is of course not about sanctifying the workplace with additional terminology like “... as mission” or “kingdom ...” etc.

But it is about the business itself!

Marketplace activities from Monday to Friday could intrinsically be an expression of God's creativity, emphasizing a holistic worldview and loving service to people. Especially in times of postmodernity and post-Christendom in the Western world it has the potential to be the future framework for spiritual formation and expression of a “Church at large”.

As a conclusion to this abstract, business itself is able to express various biblical principles:

- **Accountability:** Business reinforces that in all areas of life we are accountable to a higher authority.
- **Trust:** Risk-taking helps learn to step out of the comfort zone.
- **Forgiveness:** In a failed world forgiveness is offered to those who make mistakes.
- **Excellence:** The pursuit of excellence motivates people to do better than they have done in the past, and better than others are used to doing.
- **Responsibility:** Business reinforces that we should work through difficulties to meet obligations and commitments.
- **Progress:** A business environment stimulates progress and encourages exploration to discover a next level.
- **Goodness:** Business is doing good to others providing needed products and services.
- **Love:** Business forces us to show love and respect to all kind of stakeholders.

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