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THE CHRISTIAN CALLING TO BUSINESS LIFE

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IN SEARCH OF VOCATION

In 1925, Bruce Barton, an advertising executive, portrayed Jesus as the biblical prototype for everyone who wants to be a business success. Jesus was described as the dutiful and responsible executive, an insightful team leader, an astute politician, and a gracious upper-middle-class dinner guest. Barton sold over a quarter-million books to those eager to weave business and Christian calling together.¹

Barton's story is one of many such business journeys during the twentieth century. Russell Herman Conwell, Barton's contemporary, preached direct connections between the blessing of God and the development of business wealth in his bestseller, *Acre of Diamonds*.² In the 1940s, James Finney Lincoln built Lincoln Electric on the golden rule and employee profit-sharing to create basic wealth, social influence, and contribute to a Christian America.³ During the 1970s, the Amway Corporation taught its distributors that God wants people to achieve great material abundance, the blessings of the American Way.⁴ By the 1980s, Mary Kay Ash offered pink Cadillacs, signature sales rewards for purveyors of her cosmetics, as part of a system purporting to honor God while celebrating others.⁵

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¹Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1925).

²Russell Herman Conwell, *Acre of Diamonds* (New York: Harper, 1915).

³For a compilation of his thinking, see James Finney Lincoln's three books: *Lincoln's Incentive System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946), *Incentive Management* (Cleveland: Lincoln Electric, 1951), and *A New Approach to Industrial Economics* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1961).

⁴Richard M. DeVos, *Believe* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1975). By 1993, when Richard M. DeVos wrote another book, *Compassionate Capitalism* (New York: Dutton, 1993), some of his faith-based perspectives on business and economic systems had developed into a broader and deeper frame. The Amway Corporation has now officially changed its name to Alticor.

⁵Mary Kay Ash, *Mary Kay Ash* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

These twentieth-century stories illustrate the ongoing vocational search of Christian businesspeople. These entrepreneurs wanted their faith to bring meaning to their daily work of providing material goods. All of these stories expressed Christian values of the blessings of creation, duties to employees, and diligence in serving customers. Yet, in most cases, the homemade blends of Christian faith and American business these entrepreneurs proposed have been easy for trained pastors and theologians to dissect and critique. Proponents of these vocational views had neither a holistic approach to Scripture nor critical distance from their business environments. Their search for vocation was often distorted by tunnel vision about the biblical message and the blinders of American culture. These quests for meaningful business callings were blends of Christian theology and American myth that blurred Ben Franklin, Horatio Alger, the Wild West, and the material girl with the Christian way.

These stories developed in an era when the vocation of the businessperson was not a topic on which the institutional church developed a substantial voice. As a result, many of those working in market economies to produce goods and services did not find their identity and vocation affirmed or even explored in the thinking and writing of the Christian church. Therefore, one task facing the church and its business community in the twenty-first century is the recovery and development of a Christian sense of calling for those in business. Business Christians need the church to find meaning in their daily work; and the church needs its business members to shape the tremendous powers of a global economy. This essay explores biblical and theological foundations for business as a Christian calling, reviews some reasons why the church's understanding of this calling has ebbed and flowed over past centuries, and explores reasons and resources to redevelop a deep spiritual relationship between the church and its business members in the years to come.

FOUNDATIONS FOR A CHRISTIAN CALLING IN BUSINESS

Deepening the idea of business as a Christian calling requires understanding the nature of Christian vocation from both biblical and theological sources. By rerooting such perspectives in the central messages of Scripture about creation, sin, and renewal, the vocation of business can be more fully grasped.

The word *vocation* itself is rooted in the Latin *vocare*: to call. *Vocation* implies a relationship to the one who calls us. Biblically, that caller is the triune God, the author of creation, redemption, and renewal. This trinitarian caller asks each person to respond to the voice of God, as Scripture illuminates it through the story of creation, the experience of Israel, the work of Jesus, and the history of the church.

What can be learned about business as a Christian calling from the Bible? First, the purposes of business are based in the creation narratives, which describe the creation of human beings in the image of God, as those

who will fill and subdue the physical world. Genesis expresses God's thoughts about the trinitarian plan for humanity, saying (1:26–28):

“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.”

This first divine blessing on humanity includes a related divinely imposed duty to “fill the earth and subdue it.” Thus, from the beginning, God intended both men and women to take responsibility for the development of creation. Humanity is described as ruling over the fish, birds, cattle, wild animals and creeping things. Genesis 1 continues with a charge to use the plants and trees to yield food. Therefore, before the fall into sin, there is an explicit and good expectation that human life will involve the development of creation in its provision for humanity.

This image of “filling” is not a picture of scarcity, hunger, and poverty. Rather, it depicts robust health when the earth is cultivated properly to meet human needs. Genesis presents a dynamic creation where God expects ingenious humans to turn over its soil, pick its fruit, and manage its animals. Once the earth was created, God clearly gave men and women principal responsibility for its filling as divinely appointed agents on earth. In its purest form, this appointment is the purpose of business: through the use of human talents, to provide the means by which humanity can cultivate the dynamic potential of creation and match its resources with healthy human desire. Thus, the existence of economic activity is rooted in creation.

Genesis's charge to fill the creation has two parts. The second creation account describes that charge with a different nuance. As Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden, this first human creature is told to “till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). In this account, the tilling and filling of the earth is balanced with a charge to “keep” it, to care for creation. These dual duties were given to every human person as represented in Adam, the first human creature. Those who fill the garden, including those in business, also share these two vocational responsibilities.

Thus, the calling of those in business (as in every human activity) originates in God's good purposes for humans and the material world of which we are a part. The responsibilities of business are rooted in a divine mandate to fill and care for the garden. These duties were and are honorable callings to organize the talents of humanity in relation to both its resources and its needs. God intends creation to flourish and to create delightful abundance.⁶ Therefore, a business calling always carries the

⁶See John Schneider, *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

potential for good, a potential rooted in the purposes and promises of our creating God.

Sadly, the fall into sin severely damaged our ability to connect imaginative and energetic work with the cultivation of creation. The perfect balance of joyous work and creation abundance is destroyed through original human disobedience. The filling of the garden is replaced with the tilling of a coarse, weed-filled world and with the curse that “by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gen 3:19). Efforts to cultivate and create become stained by corrupted talents and impure motivations; the desires that match these damaged gifts are distorted; the process of exchange is fraught with ethical challenges.

Now, even when we produce, the rewards for our half-baked match between imperfect products and questionable wants are unjustly distributed. To manage inequities in the distribution of resources that had cumulative effects over time, God commanded that the Israelites honor each fiftieth year as one of Jubilee, a year that restores balance between the ownership of property and the freedom of laborers (Lev 25:8–55). Yet, over the centuries, Israel allowed economic inequities to fester. The judgment of Amos that Israel will “sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—they . . . trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth” (Amos 2:6–7) is also a commentary on our times. Mechanisms comparable to the year of Jubilee do not exist in most cultures.

Business professionals must deal with competing values and ethical ambiguities at every turn.

The good Christian calling to conduct the business of creation now groans, as do all callings, under the effects of the fall. Society flounders because of injustice in the distribution of material resources, and it also experiences sin through hyperdemanding customers, slothful employees, selfish managers, and greedy stockholders. Business now provides a structure and haven for those of evil inclination and corrupted desire. Profit can become an end in itself, instead of a means of contributing to the general welfare. Products and services can be harmful, and exchange processes can be dishonest. Those who make, buy, and sell AK-47s to underaged teens can find a home in business. University sweatshirts can be divorced from the sweatshop wages that produced them. Don’t-tell diamond dealers can exchange African gems with don’t-ask buyers even when the price of extraction includes the limb of a West African child. All of these evils are rooted in the fall.

Even for well-intentioned businesspeople in North America, it is hard to create a virtuous mission and an honorable process. In a sinful world,

business professionals must deal with competing values and ethical ambiguities at every turn. The independent grocer is pressed to buy and carry magazines as a set, including the sleazy ones she would rather not sell. An American auto-manufacturer wonders if the company can implement pollution controls and shift to alternative fuels if global competitors are not similarly constrained. The clothing designer wishes wage equity was more easily determined than seems possible when income expectations and living costs are so globally diverse. The boundary between unflinching principle and appropriate compromise is often blurred.

In other parts of the world, it is even more difficult for businesspeople of good intent. Without the constraints of law and governmental policy to which western democracies are accustomed, how does a Christian business owner survive? In Russia, it is estimated that over seventy-five percent of small businesses give protection payments to a shadowy underworld. Are such payments appropriate insurance for Christians when municipal police are ineffective? To remain price competitive in China, where there is little sense of international copyright, should a Christian retailer sell videos and CDs bought from obscure Chinese wholesalers? In places where the formal rules of market exchange are less developed, the challenge to Christian faith while doing business is even greater.⁷

While the calling to business may be rooted in the divine mandate of the original creation, sin now pervades business culture. Business, however, has no corner on sin. Corruption, mixed motives, and ambiguous choices are woven through every sphere of life. Remembering the pervasive nature of corruption is crucial, since it prevents everyone from ignoring the log in their own eye (Luke 6:41). This can ameliorate both excessive praise and unwarranted damnation for the place of business in a given culture.

Yet, for Christians, the calling to business as a vocation is restored in Christ's redemption. Paul writes that Christ, the image of the invisible God, has come because "through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). The saving power of Christ also extends throughout creation. The cross and resurrection affect any person whose calling is rooted in creation. If, indeed, the calling to business is rooted in creation, then it is also delivered from sin by Christ's victory. Once again it is possible to claim that material development and economic exchange, the daily work of so many, can be renewed.

Consumers, producers, and sellers can act redemptively if they aspire and learn to do so, while also excelling at their crafts. Imagine the re-creation that could be achieved if production, distribution, management, and marketing were redeemed callings! Hybrid cars with limited gasoline consumption would be readily affordable and highly desirable. Newly manufactured electronics could have a zero defect-rate. DVDs

⁷Information gleaned from East-West Church & Ministry Report in 1996–97 as well as personal visits to Russia in 1992, 1995, and 1997 and China in 1996, 2000, and 2002.

would all be products with healthy values and gorgeous aesthetics. The Honduran seamstress would earn wages that allow her children to be well kept, while she herself has time to work, worship, and walk in the park. The disclosure statement on used cars would be complete and honest. Stockholders would value the companies in which they invest for their products and people as well as their profits. All these things could exist in the redeemed business world of the new creation.

HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF BUSINESS AS A VOCATION

Given these biblical themes, why have the communications about business as a Christian calling ebbed and flowed over the centuries? Although Scripture teaches the good of cultivating creation, theology has not created a context conducive to this message; and, since the late-twentieth century, the Christian church has had to work once again to recover this message of Christian calling to business.

During the early centuries, the church lived in the Greco-Roman world, in which Greek perspectives on work dominated. The Greeks built a hierarchy of work in which material needs were considered to derive from base, animal instincts. While eating, sleeping, being clothed, and doing household tasks were necessary, these were lesser matters of bodily maintenance, distinct from the more exalted needs of the soul. The more contemplative lives of philosophers, mathematicians, and rhetoricians were more valued by the Greeks as a development of the true self that intertwined Greek minds with the intellect of their gods. In this dualistic framework valorizing intellect over body, meeting material needs was deemed unworthy of reputable Greeks and thus was relegated to women, slaves, and other non-citizens.⁸

These assumptions about work lasted well into the European Middle Ages, affecting the whole of western Christendom. In many ways, the organization of monastic communities grew from these earlier assumptions. It was considered best to separate the holy callings of the monk and the nun, vocations close to God, from everyday maintenance in medieval fiefdoms. In some monasteries, religious work was defined as tending the soul by contemplating God. Meanwhile, the serfs provided for society's material needs. In such a framework, the church easily positioned the tenant farmer, baker, merchant, and banker as those devoid of God's call.⁹

Still, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74) believed that there should be greater justice in economic transactions and more virtue in ordinary society. He supported commutative justice in economic exchange and the biblical prohibition on stealing in the process. His message tempered some of medieval culture's separation of faith from economic transactions. Yet the

⁸Lee Hardy, "Work: Divine Prerogative or the Burden of the Beast?" in *The Fabric of This World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 6–16.

⁹*Ibid.*, 16–26.

world was still seen as being outside the kingdom of God, the realm reserved for those with religious callings.¹⁰

Martin Luther and John Calvin revolutionized the church's view of a Christian calling for those in economic roles. Luther wrote about the broad scope of God's grace and the believer's response to it as one that can encompass material roles in life. According to Luther, the Christian task includes both loving God in the kingdom of heaven and loving our neighbors on earth. Luther wrote that work, whether as pastors, burghers, or farmers, "should be done freely and for no reward, to the benefit and advantage of our neighbor, just as the work of Christ was done freely for us and for no reward."¹¹ Accordingly, Christians involved in providing for material needs as business owners, customers, and employees had a new framework for understanding their lives. To be a baker, manufacturer, or merchant could be *within* one's Christian vocation, since business life is a social station through which one can serve one's neighbors. While downplaying Luther's two-kingdom theology, John Calvin still agreed with Luther's understanding that Christian vocation is exercised, in part, through a host of material occupations. Calvin added the caution that sin can infect an occupation and its structure; yet he too believed that Christians in practical occupations can exercise love of God through daily work as well as worship. With these ideas, ordinary occupations and financial structures blossomed as ways to glorify God and love one's neighbor.¹²

Sadly, Luther's and Calvin's vision for economic activity lost primacy in the centuries that followed. Even while the work habits they instilled continued, the theological basis for vocation in daily life was less understood. The reasons for this ebb are complex, involving shifts in European perspectives with the Enlightenment and changing economic structures with the rise of industrial capitalism.

The concept of a "career," now so commonly used in business, may have done some of the damage. The word itself had Latin and Italian origins meaning either a cart for the road or a course for chariots. However, its use expanded when the word was absorbed into French. By 1549, French usage for *carrière* meant "giving the horse its head"; by 1611, it meant to provide an open field in which the horse could run freely. Over the next century, the word came to mean a course of human work, freely chosen, and providing continuous progress through a series of experiences. Gradually, French "careers" became self-chosen occupations for which people trained and progressed on their own initiative. Career became analogous to the sense applied earlier to those French horses with space to run and room for their own headiness. The concept developed as

¹⁰Thomas Aquinas, "Of Justice: First Article," in Max L. Stackhouse, Dennis P. McCann, and Shirley J. Roels, eds., *On Moral Business* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 159–60.

¹¹Hardy, 53.

¹²*Ibid.*, 45–54, 63–7.

one far different from that of a divinely derived vocation, undercutting the idea of a Christian calling in business.¹³

In the following centuries, a highly structured system of slavery polluted European, African, and American understandings of business callings as potentially Christian. Through slavery, many basic economic functions were still performed by those legally considered to be non-persons. Like the ancient Greeks, slave societies degraded work that provided for its basic material needs. The excesses and cruelty of the nineteenth-century industrial revolution also discouraged seeing the new industrial business owner as a person of Christian calling. These problems were exacerbated by wage injustices experienced with waves of American immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, creating another divide between labor and capital.¹⁴ In these eras, the church focused on those who suffered from massive economic injustice and social disruption, not on the callings of those in business, who were often the economic catalysts for such change.

The church was occupied with questions of economic justice during much of the twentieth century but did little to develop the vocations of those who organized, led, and functioned *within* it. Silence about Christian vocation within the economic system continued until the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example, in the early part of the last century, the mainline church focused on the conversation between Shailer Mathews and Walter Rauschenbusch about the underlying Christian sociology that should inform community life, but it did not then direct attention to the purposes of business within communities.¹⁵ Then, from the 1930s through the mid 1980s, the Christian church was most engaged in comparing the merits of state socialism with those of market capitalism. During these decades, theologians as diverse as Reinhold Niebuhr and Gustavo Gutierrez pondered economic systems and the distribution of economic wealth.¹⁶ While these were important and valuable discussions, they provided little aid to those *within* the business community in their search for meaningful Christian vocations. With little theological influence, business Christians created their own frameworks for calling, many of which left much to be desired.

¹³*Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française* (Paris: Robert, 1995).

¹⁴There was great concern for workers caught in changing economic conditions at the end of the nineteenth century. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* [The Condition of Labor] (1891) addressed workers whose loyalties to socialist parties were becoming greater than their loyalties to the church. At approximately the same time, Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper wrote *The Problem of Poverty* to address the similar plight of workers. James W. Skillen, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

¹⁵For a further discussion of Rauschenbusch's approach to the social gospel in relationship to economic activity, see Max L. Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

¹⁶Reinhold Niebuhr, "Marx, Barth, and Israel's Prophets," and Gustavo Gutierrez, "Liberation and Development," in Max L. Stackhouse et al., eds., *On Moral Business*, 302, 332.

THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH AND ITS BUSINESS MEMBERS

The gap in reflection on the Christian calling to business life within an economic system must be filled in the twenty-first century. Business Christians need the church's ear to help them hear, interpret, and follow God's voice; and, more than ever, the church needs business feet to be active and entrepreneurial for God.

What should the church do to embrace and enlarge the business calling of Christians while coming to grips with the residual effects of sin on its perspectives and practices? How should pastors now understand the businesspeople in their churches and the work lives that they lead, when we live between the resurrection and the consummation, a world of hope but one that is not yet a new heaven and earth?

First, the church should build perspectives about its business members on the creation mandate to fill the garden. By doing so, pastors can embrace them as a vital part of the Christian community, overcoming the marginality they often sense. Businesspeople still sometimes hear sermons on money as the root of evil that become diatribes against involvement in business. A message that decries the corporate scandals of Enron, Worldcom, and Arthur Andersen must be careful to avoid the sense that *all* business parishioners are guilty by distant association. Stories about such sermons abound from Reformed, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Mennonite businesspeople who have written about their struggles.¹⁷ While sinful motivations and ethical collapse should not be ignored, they are not a strong foundation for building a positive sense of Christian calling among business parishioners. Apart from any particular social or economic role, Christian business men and women are members of the body of Christ. The church is meant to be an inviting, hospitable place for those in a host of occupational roles. Jesus, for example, invited fishermen and tax collectors to join his way. Paul, a small businessman as well as evangelist, welcomed Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, into the baptized fellowship of believers (Acts 16:14). Paul was quite adamant that, "there are varieties of services, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Cor 12:5–6). Those in business should sense the church's embrace. If businesspeople are first enfolded as agents of creation, this welcome will generate a more accepting environment in which to discuss their challenges.

One of the best strategies for enfolding business members involves understanding their daily business experiences. When a pastor shadows the banker in the congregation at her job, joins the coffee break at the local parishioner's manufacturing plant, visits the retailer at her clothing bou-

¹⁷See Max Stackhouse et al., eds., *On Moral Business*, 667–81; Max DePree, *Leadership Is an Art* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1987); William E. Diehl, *Thank God It's Monday* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); Carl Krieder, *The Christian Entrepreneur* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1980).

tique, or rides the route with the congregation's FedEx driver, the daily work of those in business becomes concrete. These visits both convey curiosity and validate these parishioners' garden efforts.

While enfolded business members, pastors and theologians also can help practitioners to move beyond the perspectives of the earlier twentieth century to deepen their grasp of business as a Christian vocation. Since the 1980s, new resources have been developing the discussion of business calling in both Catholic and Protestant circles. The U.S. Catholics Bishops' Pastoral Letter of 1986, "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," sparked a new conversation about business and encouraged related statements from Protestant groups as well as Pope John Paul II.¹⁸ The Pope's 1991 discussion of economic systems and the vocation of those in business is exceptionally valuable for all who seek faith-based perspectives on business.¹⁹ During that same time, individual Christian authors also began to reflect on business as a Christian vocation. Lutheran William Diehl wrote several books exploring how Christians should learn to thank God for Monday as well as Sunday. Alexander Hill explored themes of holiness, justice, and applied ethics from a Wesleyan perspective. Michael Novak pondered both economic systems and the vocation of business Christians through thoughtful scholarship and elegant prose. Laura Nash contributed solid qualitative research on the goals and faith connections of evangelical business leaders. Max Stackhouse, Dennis McCann, and others edited a broad anthology to bring together classical and contemporary resources on Christian vocation in economic life. Experienced business leaders such as Max DePree of the Herman Miller Corporation and C. William Pollard of the ServiceMaster Corporation wrote thoughtful books about business mission and vocational responsibility.²⁰

With these resources, the church is now more effectively positioned to develop the Christian vocation of its business members. Recent biblical exegesis, theological interpretation, and business stories now abound, so that the church has new conceptual tools both to support and challenge business as a Christian calling. The task is to use these resources to frame the meaning and practice of business theologically. With a concrete understanding of real business locations and resources to guide the conversation, it will be much easier to discuss the place in which business

¹⁸See Max L. Stackhouse et al., eds., *On Moral Business*, 429–84 (excerpts from these church statements).

¹⁹John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum: Centesimus Annus* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1991).

²⁰For works by these authors, see William E. Diehl, *The Monday Connection* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); Alexander Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997); Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Laura Nash, *Believers in Business* (Nashville: Nelson, 1994); Laura Nash with Scotty McLennan, *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); Max DePree, *Leadership Jazz* (New York: Doubleday, 1992); C. William Pollard, *The Soul of the Firm* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996).

Christians find themselves as servants of God and the promise of what they can achieve for the kingdom.

Second, while acknowledging that the fall leads us to flee accountability as well as to experience frustration at working in webs interwoven with sin, the church can better recognize the specific challenges Christians face in business. Business members should be encouraged to form faith-based accountability groups that talk about their callings and challenges.²¹ As the alcoholic often needs AA, the businessperson needs Christian support to control the drive for personal career success, the temptations of personal greed, the lure of profit maximization, the demoralizing effect of organizational cultures of back-scratching and back-biting, the insidious corporate lie, and intoxication with work itself.

Accountability groups cannot answer all the complex business questions. Yet business participants, acknowledging divine authority over economic life and scriptural principles for business ethics, can ameliorate the temptations that confront business Christians. It is often when Christian leaders become isolated that they commit the greatest sins. At such times, their capacities for self-deception are high, and the resources to withstand ethical pressures low. Might the questions and interests of a small faith-based accountability group have guided the CEO of Enron in another direction—or perhaps have guided his chief accountant, external auditor, hedgefund consultant, or investment banker? If even a few of them had had accountability groups, what might have been?

The church needs to treat businesses as catalysts developing talents, teaching values, and providing income.

Third, the church must preach and teach knowledgeably about the redemptive possibilities of business in the new creation. It needs to treat businesses as catalysts for developing talents, teaching values, and providing basic income. These major factors fuel the engine of daily social justice as North American social expectations change and the global landscape evolves. In addition to providing basic material goods, these are the roles business Christians can fill in re-creation.

Without organizations providing employment, many would find limited engagements for their gifts. This is often the case where the quest for survival in underdeveloped economies regularly quashes human creativity.

²¹For examples of such groups, see Laura Nash, *Believers in Business*, 187, 237. See also Shirley J. Roels, *Business through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 256. For a recent description of such groups, see also Regina Wolfe and Shirley Roels, "Roman Catholic and Protestant Perspectives on Business as a Calling: Managerial Leadership in the Corporate Sphere," a paper presented at the Fifth International Symposium on Catholic Social Thought and Management Education in Bilbao, Spain (July 2003).

Businesses can provide contexts in which human creativity can flourish and expand. Through their assessments of human skills, knowledge, and training programs, businesses can expand the joy and meaning of work.

Businesses can also train and cultivate moral sensibilities. Most people spend more waking hours each week at places of paid employment than they do in any other location. How could the businesses in which they work *not* influence their values? The church needs the business community to teach what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39), particularly when other social ties are strained. What is taught through business culture may determine whether a society communicates commitments to solid families, healthy lifestyles, appropriate relationships, boundaries on ownership, honest exchanges, and shared resources. Is this not what honoring the spirit of the Ten Commandments, particularly its second table, is about in our Christian lives? Is this not also part of “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you?” (Matt 28:19–20).

Society also relies on business to coordinate tasks and provide income as part of the new creation. It is difficult to develop a just society without the daily structure of work and compensation. Everyone needs an organized economic life, and few people today have the range of knowledge and skills required to be economically self-sufficient. Now, more than ever, society expects business to provide for the working poor, new immigrants, single-parent families, the disabled, and exoffenders. With the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 and the Charitable Choice Act of 2001, the paradigm for supporting the disenfranchised has been recreated. Policy shifts presume that central government is simply too abstracted from daily life to change destructive life patterns or to respond with the supports required for orderly, meaningful, and productive existence. The expectation is that local faith-based groups, businesses, and community nonprofits, will together develop support and meaning for local people. The church needs businesses as prominent partners in this joint provision for hope and human opportunity and to see such work as a calling.

Finally, the church needs its business members to share its global mission field. Transnational managers are among the first to see grinding poverty, bungled economic development, currency disasters, and the curse of global epidemics. Business, like never before, has the potential to be the church’s partner in global evangelism and ministries of compassion. As businesses hire employees and serve customers around the world, they are positioned not only to intersect with other world religions but also to see Central American sweatshops, failing Brazilian ecosystems, and new global viruses. In Islamic territories that are legally closed to Christian missions, business relationships provide one of the few legitimate channels through which the good news of the gospel can quietly flow; and in countries that fall from the foreign-aid radar screens, business managers can provide countervailing messages about ongoing economic needs. Shouldn’t the church use recently acquired experience, insight, and connections from its business members to promote the global ministry of the Christian faith in word and deed?

As part of the Christian calling to business, the church can use business member knowledge and skill to serve business Christians in the developing world. Many North American businesspeople have been deeply changed by beginning a revolving business loan fund in Kenya, teaching a Haitian grocer about inventory systems, or introducing more productive methods to Central American fish farms. When Christians become partners with emerging faith-based businesses in the developing world, they are energized by the faith and the hope of these budding entrepreneurs. When these business Christians experience the Holy Spirit at work in their business counterparts elsewhere, their sense of Christian vocation grows richer and their North American businesses often develop deeper purposes.²² Luther's vocational idea of loving God through serving one's neighbor can take on new meaning as business Christians rediscover local social needs and global neighbors firsthand.

CONCLUSION

Like every calling, a Christian vocation in business is a mix of creation goodness, fallen brokenness, and resurrection hope; and the church's message about vocation in business has varied over the centuries. Yet, biblically, the church should embrace the business men and women in its congregations as creation gardeners. They are tillers who must identify and destroy weeds of the fall as they cultivate. The church can help them see how Christ is seeking to make all things new—including them and the businesses they serve. In the meantime, the quality of their business contributions to the coming kingdom depends on whether the church and its business members recognize and act on their interdependence. Together they can renew and extend the discussion about business as a Christian calling.

ABSTRACT

The biblical foundation for business activity is rooted in the goodness of creation and in God's appointment of human beings as its agents of development. While the fall has severely damaged all human activity—including economic activity—the call into business offers restoration made possible through Christ's victory over sin. Given this hope, the church should take up the challenge to renew and deepen the vocation of its business members, sorting through several centuries of confusion and neglect regarding a calling into business. Over the last quarter-century, a renewed exploration of Christian callings within business life has provided the church with stronger resources for addressing these questions of business vocation. The opportunity for creative partnerships with its business members in serving the kingdom of God can and must be renewed in the twenty-first century.

²²For information about Partners for Christian Development, the source of these examples, see <http://www.pcd.org>.