



A Christian Vision of the Marketplace

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Abstract

This article focuses on the relationship between Christian faith and the marketplace and the impact of Christian leadership. Generally, the purpose of this study is to observe this relationship in an American context. In order to achieve the objective, a review of seminal and current literature has been evaluated as well as the inclusion of the author's first-hand experience integrating faith into the business concepts of learning and application.

There has been awareness, or perhaps an awakening, of the need for Christians to stand up in the workplace. It is time to stop compartmentalizing their lives and leaving their beliefs at home or church to only be used on Sundays. It is true that as business people, it is frowned upon to talk about religion at work. However, talking about religion and living out one's faith are entirely different. Christians cannot step back and not "go into all the world and make disciples" as they are instructed to do in the Bible in Matthew 28:19-20, rather they are to find ways of living out their faith and integrating that faith into the marketplace as they drive the culture of organizations as leaders.

Many religions take their place proudly in the marketplace seemingly driving the organizational climate. Ethics violations take place every day and morality seems to be lacking. Where are the Christians? Is my question. This article argues that Christians can make a positive impact on the market. They can do so as leaders who embrace and model characteristics of Christ.

Keywords: Business, Faith, Christianity, Integration, Missions, Marketplace Ministry, Ethics

Introduction

Over the past several years, there has been a trend amongst Christian business authors towards ensuring that Christian business people understand that the business world is there calling or invocation. These authors seek to help Christian business people learn how to integrate their values into the business world. In fact, recently studies on the topic of instructing Christians how to integrate their faith into the workplace have been published. Dr. Jeff Duzer (2010) postulated that business matters to God in his book, *"Why Business Matters to God."* He points out that business is honorable work and the businessperson has a two-fold mission in the marketplace; to provide meaningful and creative work for others to be able to fulfill their God-given abilities by providing goods and services that help others flourish and thrive. Business is the vehicle, he offers, to help capitalist economies grow. Kenman Wong (2011) is another researcher that argues in

favor of Christians in the marketplace. He posits that for the Christian business leader, the marketplace is a venue that is right for service.

There is awareness, or perhaps an awakening, of the need for Christians to stop compartmentalizing their lives and leaving their beliefs at home or church to only be used on Sundays. It is true that as business people, it is frowned upon to talk about religion at work. However talking about religion and living out one's faith are entirely different. Christians cannot step back and not "go into all the world and make disciples" as they are instructed to do in the Bible in Matthew 28:19-20, rather they are to find ways of living out their faith and integrating that faith into the marketplace as they set the culture of organizations as the leaders.

The marketplace is vast in comparison to the populations in churches. Moreover, the people who are to be evangelized are not within those walls; they are beyond the doors of the church and many are in marketplace. It may be argued that faith or religion should not be embraced in the workplace. This paper argues that it should be embraced by Christians and brought to the marketplace thereby enhancing people and organizations alike.

Faith in Christ and those who live true Christian values bring an array of benefits to organizations. Such benefits are fairness, equity, social responsibility and the idea that work is good. Faith should call Christian leaders to do all they can to build community within and outside their organizations and to empower employees with honorable work. (Duzer, 2010). Leadership plays an important role in how individuals react and handle themselves in different situations (Daft, 2005). Therefore, Christian leaders are key in setting the standards and establishing the climate that emphasizes Christian values. Bringing the Christian faith to the workplace should enhance values of honesty, integrity and trust. All of which establishes organizational culture and ultimately economic performance (Covey, 1989; Heskett, Sasser and Hart 1990).

Christian values are associated with the concept of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Shirin (2014) posits that the concept was not derived from Mr. Greenleaf's association with a Christian organization or the Christian Bible; I would disagree since Greenleaf grew up as a Quaker and embrace those Christian values. We can agree that the concepts of Servant Leadership are descriptive of those demonstrated by Jesus in the New Testament. Boyum (2006) posits that Servant leadership has the potential to offer organizations a leadership approach grounded in values, ethics, morals, and empowerment of others.

Miller et. al(2010) postulates that many American businesses no longer asks "if" religious values have an impact on employees and companies the make up the 21st century economy, "the question for many today is "in what ways" and "how does one measure the impact of religious values on organizations?"

Da Silver (2013) posits that Christian businesses and their leaders are needed in the workplace. I agree and would propose that Christian values have a specific purpose and can have a significant impact in the secular organization and on people. In fact, Miller et.al. (2007) states that religious values continue to have impact on the economy and in the workplace.

Leaders such as Jeff Van Duzer (2010), C. Gene Wilkes (1998), and Kenman Wong (2011) are a few individuals who have brought the importance of business and faith to Christian business leaders today. In addition, these authors have aided Christians in business to look beyond mere profit and to see that business can be an honorable vocation,

just like their pastoral counterparts.

Christian Vision for Business

Christians in modern societies have a specific purpose and role to play in influencing people and ultimately in influencing organizations. In an article written by Nathan McLellan (n.d.) in *Business and Economy*, titled "What is a Christian Vision for Business?" he states the following:

In modern societies a range of institutions, including the family, churches, other civil organizations, and the state, is required for humans to live in obedience to the cultural mandate and to find their fulfillment in relationships with God, other humans, and the rest of creation. In modern societies, however, businesses have a particular role to play in cultivating the gift of creation in order to make material provision for humanity. This task must not be separated from a Christian understanding of the human person and society. (n.d.)

In concert with seminal researchers, a challenge is presented to Christian Business people to ask themselves, is business just a way to make money? Or can the marketplace be a venue for service to others? I ask these leaders to think about what implications does the Christian story have for the vision, mission or sense of purpose that shapes business engagement?

To embrace the ideal of Christianity in business is not hard to imagine. James McGregor Burns (1978) introduced the transformational leadership model. In this model, the leader invests in the employee and they share values that are positive and create change for the better in organizations. The transformational leader enhances motivation and morale. I would argue that in light of transformational leadership, Christian leadership extends beyond shared values and positive change; it is deep commitment and as such, that commitment drives motivation and morale.

Wong (2011) asked what parts of business can be affirmed and practiced "as is" and what parts need to be rejected or transformed? What challenges exist as attempts are made to live out Christian ideals in a broken world characterized by tight margins, fierce competition and short-term investor pressures? Finally, ask, how are Christian values used to inform and change areas of business? The answer to these questions is tied to the commitment that the Christian has to their faith. Do we act "Christian" only on Sundays and not when we enter the workplace? Do we allow our values to be driven by fierce competition, tight margins and investor pressures? I would suggest that if we do, we are not fulfilling the purpose God called us into the marketplace to do.

Compartmentalizing in the Workplace

Many Christian businesspeople know of no other pattern but to split their vocation into two separate worlds: "Christian" and "businessperson." They are somewhat forced to do so because their vocation isn't valued as an opportunity for ministry as it is valued with their pastoral counterparts. In fact, many in Christian circles view business people as just that, business people who happen to be Christian. These people are seen as the ones who supply the money needed to build a building or to purchase a piece of land, but they are

called to be ministers also; just in a different way. The church must begin to recognize the true value these business people in their congregations bring to the table. If they don't, they may lose them. Pastoral leadership should be training business leaders in ways that they can minister in the marketplace effectively, not ignore them or see them as a means to supply money. This in itself is a problem and maybe one of the reasons for Christian leaders propensity to compartmentalize their faith. I would argue that value of the Christian leader has to begin in the church by having Pastors address the value of the people in their congregation and speaking to the issue of business being an invocation and a call to ministry in the world.

Brian Dodd (2015) point out the following:

When I look at any congregation in America I see businessmen and women. Specifically, I see the following six types of people:

1. Businessmen and women.
2. People married to businessmen and women.
3. People studying to be businessmen and women.
4. Children of businessmen and women.
5. Retired businessmen and women.
6. Or people transitioning from one of these groups to another.

Dodd stated that the churches are missing a great opportunity that might be sitting on the front row of their pews. He postulates that if Pastors are not equipping those in their church to be successful in that which they do more of than anything else while away from church, Pastors are not doing everything they could.

The literature of scholars interested in the subject of the integration of faith in the marketplace provide a vast array of practical insight and theologically informed application to bridge these two worlds in the workplace.

If one lives a life that separates their Christian faith from other areas of their lives, integrating beliefs or faith into work can be difficult. Nevertheless, if no difference is seen with what is done at church on Sunday or Wednesday and all the other days of the week, it becomes easy and takes no effort at all. If anything, it will take restraint.

One Action at a Time

A Christian vision of the marketplace is all about discovering how each Christian leader or business person can be used in the marketplace to serve God through serving others, through providing opportunities for growth for others and through preaching the gospel through their actions in the office, the division and the boardroom. The same as the preacher who stands behind the pulpit or on the church steps, business people stand in the halls of government, in boardrooms, town hall meetings and any forum they are afforded to make a difference for Christ and that's how a change in the market place begins, one action at a time with all focus on promoting our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

Business Ethics and Transformational Leadership versus Christian Leadership

One might argue that business ethics are in place and guide right or wrong decisions within organizations. I would argue the opposite. One does not have to look far to find that business ethics does not drive right or wrong choices in organizations. Recent scandals at

Volkswagen depict willing deceit (2015). Researchers Danon-Leva, Cavico and Mujtaba (2010) support this proposition by stating that business ethics is in every company, but our definition of ethics differs.

Although business ethics has a significant role in developing the climate of the organization, leaders who embrace a Christian perspective in the workplace must recognize the possible advantages and disadvantages this may bring. Mautz & Sharaf (1961) posit that leaders have a responsibility for instituting standards of ethical conduct and morality in organizations. However, after the scandals of the early 2000's, it could be argued that the ethical standards in place during the time of the many of those scandals did not work. Thus the need for a guiding principle that would create a changed heart and a deeply rooted belief system that goes far beyond basic ethics.

Grojean, M.W., Resick, C.J., Dickson, M.W., Smith, D.B. (2004) posit that organizational leaders set the tone of the organization which includes the values and the climate. As such, I believe leaders without an internal compass may not set the ethical standards that a committed Christian leader might set.

D'Souza (1993) and Greenleaf (1977), both Christian leaders, not only researched, but also implied in their research that Jesus' approach to leadership was to serve others as well as develop them. As such, Jesus had a purpose and He cared about people, thus Christian leaders should desire to emulate the same purpose that Jesus embraced. In fact, D'Souza stated that one of the characteristics of the Christian leader is to be purposeful, pursuing the same goals as Jesus; to help others be all that they were designed to be. For Greenleaf, (1977) who was a Quaker, believed that the Christian ideal of Servant leadership modeled by Jesus was the most superior form of leadership. He posited that this kind of leader was close to where the action is in organizations; they are connected with the people therefore they are trusted by the people.

Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) both experts in the area of transformational leadership, argued that this form of leadership caused leaders to raise the levels of motivation and morality of others and Bass extended the concept to include charisma. The problem with any of these tacit approaches to leadership is that they are not always guided by a deeply spiritual commitment to God nor are the leaders motivated by God. In fact, charisma in leadership can be dangerous (Silva, 2014, Yukl, 1999). Thus, what is real is the value that committed Christians have to Jesus Christ and that commitment carried over into the marketplace.

Conclusion

The conclusions that can be drawn from the literature is that committed Christian Leaders bring value to organizations. More than the transformational or charismatic leader, Christian leaders answer to a higher calling. As such, their dedication to people and ultimately to the organization is driven by their relationship with God.

When Christian leaders emulate the behaviors of Jesus Christ, their impact on people in particular, as well as the organization as a whole, will cause them to think, pray and act ethically and purposefully when decisions are being made and actions are being taken. The traits of greed, selfishness and power are over-powered by the characteristics of servant-hood, selflessness, and purpose. These leaders recognize that profits are important and necessary for success in business; however, they also recognize that when following Christ's mandate of caring for others, others will take care of the business.

Finally, I would argue that the committed Christian leader is focused on doing what is right in the face and easiness of doing what is expedient. A Christian vision of the marketplace sets God before self and that vision causes the leader to look at what they do as a means of influencing society to higher level of ethics. This is due to their belief in a higher call and because they are to live out Christ-like principles in the marketplace. Business codes of ethics are not to be eliminated; they are good starting points. However, they lack one important element, they are not influenced by a personal call and do not drive commitment. These codes can drive compliance, but Christian ethics drive commitment due to the Christian's commitment to Jesus Christ.

In the end, the Christian leader can mold the values of a society. With a world that is going awry with violence, bitterness, hatred and corruption, where are the Christians? We need to be in organizations and at the helm of organizations, making decisions that are Christ-led. We need to reshape what is happening in the marketplace and make an impact for Christ.

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