Two approaches to business that do not come within the scope of ‘Business as mission’ by any definition are: (1) Fake businesses that are not actually functioning businesses, but exist solely to provide visas for missionaries to enter countries otherwise closed to them. (2) Businesses that purport to have Christian motivations but which operate only for private economic advantage and not for the kingdom of God. Neither do we mean businesses run by Christians with no clear and defined kingdom strategy in place.

**Business as mission pursues...PROFIT**

Business must be financially sustainable, producing goods or services that people are willing to pay for. Sustainability implies that the activity is profitable. Profits are an essential element of all businesses, in all cultures. Without profit the business cannot survive and fulfill its purpose. Accordingly, Business as mission - businesses are real business that genuinely exist to generate wealth and profits. Business as mission does not view profits as inherently evil, bad or unbiblical. Quite the contrary, profits are good, desired and beneficial to God and His purposes, as long as they are not oppressive, or derived from gouging customers or selling products and service that do no honour Christ and His gospel.

Temporary subsidies may be utilised to establish a Business as mission initiative. Permanent subsidies or financial support without expectation of ultimate profitability are closer to charitable or donor-based ministries than Business as mission based ministries.

The business of business is business. And the business of Business as mission is business with a kingdom of God purpose and perspective.

**Business as mission comes in all...SHAPES AND SIZES**

The methodologies, as well as the business and ministry strategies used, will be creatively diverse, just as God created us in infinite variety. Does the size of the business matter? Yes and No! Christian micro-enterprise programmes exist that help provide necessary income for families and individuals resulting in community development, churches being planted and discipleship taking place. In short, Christian micro-enterprise development has been well accepted and is highly effective for the kingdom. A significant body of work already exists dedicated to it. It has a legitimate place in the broader definition and practice of Business as mission.

However, our focus will be on larger scale business, where there has been a comparative lack of attention. If we are to tackle the enormity of the challenge before us we need to think and act bigger, beyond micro to small, medium and large size businesses.

**Business as mission is not about...JOBS AND MONEY – PER SE**

The Russian Mafia also creates jobs and gives people a chance to earn money. Creating jobs and earning money is not an end in itself. Work and business are ordained by God. Work is a human and divine activity providing a means to support our families and to contribute to the positive development of our communities and countries. However, Business as mission is not a Christianised job creation scheme. The goal is not simply about making people materially better off. Business as mission is actively praying and incarnating Jesus’ prayer: “May your kingdom come, may your will be done” even in the marketplace.

The real bottom line of Business as mission is “ad maiorem Dei gloriam”, for the greater glory of God.
2. THE WORD AND THE MISSION

Biblical Foundations for Business as mission

God’s Purpose for Business in the Work of Creation

(a) The Purpose and Nature of God

We cannot understand our purpose and mission in life unless we understand what God’s purpose and mission is. God acts for His glory. He created the cosmos that reflects His glory and goodness (Psalm 8, 19). Although this creation has been marred by sin and its consequences (Genesis 3), God continues a redemptive relationship with creation through ongoing creativity and the sustaining of all things. God the Father, has made men and women in His image (Genesis 1:27). He embraces His children in loving-kindness, and is concerned with our holistic redemption. God the King, is in a kingdom relationship with all humanity as individuals and as nations (peoples). God’s purpose is to receive glory from among every people (nation/ethnic group) by holistically redeeming those who know, love and worship Him (Psalm 64, 1Timothy 1:15-17).

Business as mission keeps four things in mind: a) God is at the centre; b) The scope is global; c) Peoples (nations, ethnic groups) and people (individuals) are the focus; d) His glory is the outcome.

God is Spirit. Yet God’s creative acts are perceived most clearly in physical form. We experience this dramatically in the diversity of the vast stellar expanse to the intimate uniqueness of our own molecular weave of a DNA. God’s nature is inherently creative. He has created all things, physical and spiritual. Thus we read in Scripture that He created heaven and earth, sun and moon, water and trees, animals and human beings. His nature reveals an inherent evaluation, innovation and delight in the creation.

God enjoys His creation. His initial satisfaction is indicated by His repeated appraisal of it as “good.” He walked daily in the garden and met with His people as a sign of His pleasure in His creation. His love for His creation is evident in that He continues to creatively sustain all things.

(b) Human Co-creativity and Work

Theology is inter-related to anthropology. Understanding who God is leads us to a deeper understanding of who we are.

God is continually active in creation, working to bring goodness, enjoying the fruit of His labour and sharing it with others. Created in God’s image, humanity is also capable of creating, unashamedly enjoying, and sharing the fruit of our labours with others. As God delighted in that which He created, so He is concerned for its maintenance and fruitfulness. Man is to co-labour with God in this work as seen in the first blessings and commandments given to Adam and Eve: “be fruitful”, “multiply”, “fill the earth” and “subdue it” (Genesis 1:28).

There is an implicit invitation to enjoy the creation as well as a responsibility for creation’s care and well being. We are to care for God’s creation as beneficent overseers. We have the responsibility to respect and care for each other and the natural ongoing processes of the creation we are stewards of.

God gives us the capacity we need to fulfil the task. Adam and Eve were to be involved in the added value processes that create wealth! Work enables the translation of raw resources into food, goods and services. Work creates wealth (a surplus) and this in turn creates more work (employment).

Work is an act of worship. Remember the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis Chapter 4. Abel’s offering came out of the fruit of his labour. In contrast, Cain’s offering was the result of the natural agricultural process. In other words Cain’s offering was a fruit of the earth and not a fruit of his own labour. The concept in Hebrew culture was that Cain was not fully “involved” in what he was offering to God.
Cain’s offering lacked any redemptive action which would have been the result of his own work.

Work is something that is simultaneously both deeply divine and deeply human. It is a tangible act that reveals a human-divine partnership in creation. Work, is not to be understood as a curse or consequence of the fall. Rather it was a blessing and commandment given to Adam and Eve before the fall. Work is a human activity that flows from God’s delegated mandate of stewardship over creation. God gives us the creative capacity, wisdom and tools (gifts/talents) to do it. God took pleasure in the physical aspect of His creation. We too can delight in creating useful and excellent products and services.

(c) Business and the Cultural Mandate of Stewardship

Economic activity is rooted in the creation story. Business and enterprise form the institution that creates and sustains wealth for a just society. In the same way, government is designed to create and sustain an organised society. Family is designed to create and sustain well-adjusted individuals. This is God’s ordained order.

The Bible has much to say about ethical and fair dealing in work and business. It has instructional texts on what is pleasing to God in relationship to business relationships, employment, trading, using money, lending and so on. In business these can be practically applied in areas such as quality control, fair wages, good working conditions, reasonable return on investments, corporate social responsibility, et cetera.

The biblical idea of stewardship not only encompasses the care of creation, but the responsibility of personal stewardship of both talents and wealth as well. Business provides an opportunity for those talented in enterprise (entrepreneurs) and others (employees) to use their particular gifts in service to others as unto the Lord. In its capacity to provide employment, business sustains not only those who establish enterprises, but also those who are employed or benefit from the goods and/or services provided. Business enables needs to be met and to bless others as a consequence. Business conducted in accord with biblical principles of stewardship offers numerous opportunities to glorify God. For a Christian, business is a vocation, to be conducted in the spirit of the kingdom of God.

“...The biblical worldview provides a framework for work being sacred, for labour having dignity. This concept of work is that it is a vocation—one’s calling. ... This biblical concept understands that God is at work in the world building His Kingdom, and that, among other things, He calls us to participate in the building of His Kingdom through our work.”

Darrow L. Miller - Developing a Biblical Theology of Vocation, 2002

(d) The Fall and it’s Negative Consequences for Business

After sin came into the world, good things were distorted and disrupted (Genesis 3). The fall also affected work and creativity. Work continues to be a divine command to us, but we must now contest with considerable challenges and problems posed by sinful people doing business in a fallen world. As with everything else in the world, the whole process of creativity and work has been affected by sin.

Work and business offer many opportunities for sin. Exploitation of the poor, greed, dishonesty, and idolatry are just a few examples. But this does not mean that Christians should not engage in business. It is equally true that there are also many opportunities to glorify God.

Productive work and co-creation with God confer dignity and purpose to the individual. Lack of work or work that degrades the individual has a dehumanising
effect. The loss of ability to support oneself and to contribute to others (family, community, etc.) represents a loss of dignity and is far from God's original design.

After the fall a focus on community was shattered by selfishness and greed. This resulted in an attitude that says; “This is mine, I made it for me and me alone”. The fall has led to numerous systems whereby people are exploited or enslaved economically while a few have been unjustly made rich.

But God prepared for a restoration of creation, including work and creativity, through Jesus Christ. Our mandate continues to be stewards of creation and of our personal talents and the wealth our talents generate. We are called to play a role in God's restoration process by helping to restore the inherent dignity and value of work. We are to be ambassadors of God's kingdom in the market place, to be salt and light in and through business. As salt and light we are to bless peoples from every culture, through God-honouring business enterprise and the reformation of unjust economic systems.

Before we consider more deeply the redemptive potential of Business as mission, we will briefly explore some examples of business within the history and mission of Israel as well as look at the relevance of business in relation to the message of the New Testament.

**Business and the History and Mission of Israel**

(a) **Joseph the Business Administrator**

One of the clearest examples of God's purpose for business can be seen in the life of Joseph (Genesis 47 to 50). Joseph had experienced the negative side of life having been sold into slavery and later placed in prison in Egypt. Nevertheless God freed him and placed him at the head of Pharaoh's agro-business with authority through government. His management skills are apparent. He knew that seven years of bountiful harvests would be followed by seven years of scarcity. Joseph ordered that a large percentage of the bountiful harvests be set aside for the lean years. Here we see one of God's major purposes for business highlighted: God wants the resources of creation to be harnessed (through business skills) so that all of humanity would have its needs met.

(b) **Israel Models Economic Principles for the Nations**

Four hundred years later the Israelites were still in Egypt, although now as slaves. God saw the horrific conditions of His people and heard their cries (Exodus 1 to 3). He saw that they were not receiving the just reward or fruit of their labours. As He freed His people and led them towards the Promised Land, He established the social and economic (business) conditions necessary for a godly society. God knew that some might want to change the godly vocation of work into an idolatrous pursuit of money and possessions. Therefore, for the wellbeing of His people, the Lord established statutes related to property, work and business (Ezekiel 21 to 23, Leviticus 25). For example, the Israelites were to keep the Sabbath as a special day and to abstain from business pursuits in order to enjoy the rest and restoration that God desired. They were to leave part of their fields un-harvested so that the orphans, widows and foreigners among them might have access to God's goodness by gleaning from the excess of an abundant harvest. They were not to charge undue interest from the poor of their country. In short, they were to honour God in the midst of their labour and fruitfulness, obeying the limits and ordinances He established. In so doing they would continue to be blessed by Him as a testament to the nations (Deuteronomy 26 to 28).
God’s promises to Israel as they left slavery in Egypt were not isolated to blessings of an unseen nature. He promised He would bless them in every area of life including their crops, livestock and business.... What the Bible emphasises for the poor is opportunity versus aid. Aid is reserved for those who have absolutely no way of providing for themselves and will die without assistance. Israel is certainly in this kind of circumstance in the wilderness. And God provides for the Israelites, however…the day they had the feasibility to provide for themselves the manna was withdrawn... God does not want to create a dependent people but a people who drew on the gifts, talents and resources He had given to see them provide for themselves.

(c) The Dynamic of Jubilee

Especially significant to this discussion is the Biblical legislation regarding Jubilee (Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15). In the natural course of life, some people would become richer and some poorer. The poverty of some would lead them to borrow money and acquire devastating debts. Others would even be forced to sell themselves into slavery. God had a radical solution for this poverty. At the end of seven years all debts would be forgiven and the slaves should be set free. Deuteronomy 15 explains in detail how godly values should be practised concerning labour and economics, and how this would offer relief for the poor. God promised Israel that ‘there will be no poor among you’ (15:4) if Israel would publicly and private put into practice God’s principles of Jubilee. God prescribes what must be done ‘If there is a poor man with you’ (15:7-10). This demonstrates that poverty can not be abolished by a sudden intervention of God alone, but by right practice and obedience by God’s people to God’s commands.

More powerful legislation would be enacted every fiftieth year. Some people might become so poor that they would have to sell off their property in order to feed their families. To remedy this extreme poverty, God declared that every fifty years there would be a Jubilee. The land would be returned to the original families and their descendants. Thus each family where given the means to start their own family businesses over again through the reallocation of property. All would have a fresh start. Redemption was to be demonstrated tangibly in the social and economic spheres of life.

(d) The Prophets and a Call to do Business God’s Way

God’s Spirit spoke through the prophet Amos to correct abuses in businesses of his day. Workers had become so undervalued that poor people were sold for a pair of shoes (Amos 2.6). Amos raised his prophetic voice to condemn this abominable practice. We also see the damaging effects of structural sin or indirect sin through unjust systems. Amos directed part of his message to some of the married women of Israel who he denounced as cows of Bashan (Amos 4:1). The women demanded that their husbands provide them with more and more luxuries. The husbands carried out their wives’ wishes. In God’s sight, both husbands and wives were guilty of exploitation and oppression of poor workers. God’s concern with economic justice and business practice is emphasised by the way He addresses them through His prophets, including, for example, Jeremiah (Jeremiah 5:24-29, 6:12-13, 22:13-17), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 18 and 22:12-13), Micah (Micah 2:6,10-15) and Habakkuk (Habakkuk 2:6-9).

(e) The Hebrew Vision of Shalom

The overarching biblical idea of shalom is that of wholeness and peace in our relationship with God, with self, with each other and with creation. Shalom is God’s intention for His creation and is encompassed in our creation mandate to tend the
earth and to one another. It embodied the Hebrew aspiration and vision of peace, wholeness and well-being (1 Kings 4:25, Psalm 85:10-13). Throughout the Old Testament, God’s promise of favour and restoration always included both material and immaterial blessing. Having enough to eat and a secure shelter is to be understood as a direct sign of God’s goodness and affirmation (Deuteronomy 8, Ezekiel 34:25-31, Isaiah 49:60-61).

Justice and righteousness are closely linked to shalom. The primary application of the word justice (or righteousness) in the Bible refers to corporate or social holiness and the relief of oppression. This embraces the whole of creation and is not merely limited to personal responsibility and ethics.

**The Gospel – Good News for Rich and Poor**

(a) The Kingdom of God and the Great Commission

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught believers to pray “Thy kingdom come” and “For Thine is the kingdom” (Matthew 6:10, 13). This prayer compels us to acknowledge that the kingdom of God is both present as well as future. From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry He preached that the kingdom of God had come (“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” Mark 1:15). He also demonstrated that the gospel of the kingdom of God is “good news to the poor.”

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4.18-19, NIV).

The gospel of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ is good news for everyone, rich and poor alike. Without the final work of the cross and spiritual new birth in Jesus we have no hope (John 3:16-17, Romans 6:4-11, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19). The gospel of God’s grace and mercy is very good news for the “poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). But the gospel of the kingdom is intended to be especially good news for the materially and financially poor of this present world. This is because individuals, families, businesses and societies that live by biblical principles of work, stewardship, faithfulness and justice will alleviate most causes of human suffering and poverty.

Jesus proclaimed and brought in His person the rule of God. The promised deliverance had come. Representatives from all nations are invited to come within His realm and under His authority and grace.

The mandate that the King gave to His followers was to “make disciples of all nations,” (Matthew 28:18-20). We are to have a transforming impact in the world. How are we to do this? By taking the gospel, the good news about the Glorious King and His kingdom, to the nations (“baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” 28:19) and teaching them to obey everything He had commanded (28:20). We should understand this “Great Commission” as an incredible responsibility to utterly revolutionise all aspects of life and society. The nations are to reflect His kingdom principles and His glory. But this transformation will only be realised when the nations have been discipled, as a result of His people living out His “Great Commandment” to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ and to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (Matthew 22:36-39, NIV).

(b) The Holistic Gospel in Church History

Only when we understand the enormity of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment together, will we fully appreciate how much we needed to hear Him say, “I am with you in this always!” (Matthew 28:20).

In Luke 4, Jesus clearly defined His mission as evangelism, social holiness and justice. This is Jesus’ holistic mission to a broken world. It is a mix of spiritual, political, social as well as economic objectives. This is a gospel that would have
been more readily grasped by Jesus’ Hebrew audience and the early Church with their built-in understanding of shalom, than by sections of the church today which has been influenced by other worldviews.

The apostle Paul says that we are saved by grace, not by our own effort. (Ephesians 2:8-10) Then he follows up saying that we have been created for good deeds which God had already prepared for us to do. The word translated “deeds” is *ergon* in Greek which means: work, craft, business, art, good work, etc. It is the root of the word *ergate* which means; worker, employee and entrepreneur. There has never been a separation between the grace of God and practical, tangible real actions experienced in the physical realm here on the earth.

Work ethics and social sensitivity were both contributors to early Church growth, providing respect for the Christian community within the greater society at large (Acts 4:32-35). But it was not long before the Church was influenced by Greek philosophy (Gnosticism and Plato), political structures (Constantinian religious nationalism), and a social class system. This negatively influenced the Christian concept of work and wealth in the wider context of society and the gospel.

These and other unbiblical perspectives inherited from outside the biblical worldview have resulted in:

1. Dichotomising life into separate compartments which accommodates a dualistic view putting a divide between the sacred and the secular. This exalts the “spiritual” at the expense of the “physical”, the clergy at the expense of the laity.
2. Spiritualising our faith when we should not. We often spiritualise Jesus’ and the Old Testament’s teaching about wealth, the poor, peace making.
3. Individualising our faith at the expense of thinking corporately and collectively. We emphasise personal holiness and individual transformation rather than social holiness and societal transformation.

The Reformation of the 16th century recovered the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. This included labour as being a Christian calling to glorify God. The great revival movements of the 18th and 19th centuries promoted holiness and Christian service in all areas of life, including business and the work place. The movement of God’s spirit during these last decades has been towards a truer integration of evangelism, social concern, work and faith by evangelicals.

**Application: The Redemptive Potential of Business as mission**

Poverty is holistic in nature and consists of not only economic poverty but social, political and spiritual poverty as well. The solution to holistic poverty must be the holistic and transforming message of shalom. Business as mission is a response both to the mandate of stewardship over creation as well as the mandate of the great commission to all nations. It is a response to the immense spiritual and physical needs of the world and its application is displayed on many levels:

(a) Business Restores Dignity and Empowers

Business restores dignity through creating employment, through righteous and equal treatment in relationships and through empowerment.

God intends that none of His creation be idle (unemployed) and unproductive. To not be able to work, to not be creative and to be unable to help and support oneself and one’s family leads to a loss of dignity as a human being. Businesses that create employment are part of God’s redemptive plan and process. However, employment should not be the sole target. We need to empower people through training, mentorship, personal development, and ownership, so that people can improve themselves, their communities and their societies. This will in turn lead to better jobs and the starting of their own businesses. This is in line with God’s purpose and our mission to restore human dignity, to create jobs, and to start and develop businesses. Christian entrepreneurs from every church, city and nation must be affirmed in this task.
God also expects fair treatment to be modelled in our businesses; He rejects underpayment, harsh treatment and poor working conditions. He rejects unfair wages to workers and exorbitant prices to consumers. God rejects any form of exploitation and unjust treatment of one social group by another and/or one individual by another.

Business can empower and set people free economically, socially and politically: Economic transformation is about people having relative abundance and participating in wealth generation. Social transformation is about having enough income to acquire goods and services through exchange. To have access and adequate means for food, housing, education, water, health, transportation etc. People who are both economically and socially strong in turn tend to be politically stronger. Work and business enables dignity, self-confidence, production, wealth generation and increase which are the keys to social transformation.

(b) Business Provides the Context for Discipleship

Business is about relationships with others: employers and employees, buyers and sellers, producers and consumers, suppliers and distributors. This creates a whole arena where those who know Christ can share their faith and witness to those who do not know Him. Christians in business become ‘salt and light’ to people in their working places since discipleship is demonstrating the ways of God through the course of every day relationships. God is glorified when Christian business people: work as unto the Lord; fearing God; by hating dishonest gain, corruption and nepotism; love and respect others; demonstrate Christian values (showing integrity, stewardship, accountability etc.), by sharing the gospel in word and deed.

Business is a recognised institution in society that brings credibility to relationships with the community as a whole. Thus business brings opportunities to influence and disciple the wider society through the relationships it brings. The individual or company becomes ‘salt and light’ to the community (or nation) in the marketplace.

(c) Business Promotes Environmental Stewardship

Business can also intentionally promote better environmental stewardship. Business continually involves different relationships with nature. Business relates to stewardship through decisions regarding the types and locations of products fabricated and services rendered, of production methods, of types of resources used, and of the disposal of waste.

(d) Business is Able to Reinforce Peace and Community

Businesses contribute to society in three distinct ways: through their primary business activities; their community or social investment activities; and in their participation in public policy discourse. Engaging in any of these three can contribute to community stability and conflict prevention. A business might also promote peace and community by having workers from different backgrounds working together for a common purpose.

The private business community in general is a potential resource that could be enlisted to reduce the incidence, severity, frequency, and effects of conflict. The idea of peace and community should permeate all business activity.

(e) Business Can Strengthen the Church

Business strengthens the Church in general. The more people are engaged in productive work, the more the local church is strengthened to do its work. Increased revenue and organisational capacity enable the church to broaden its role and strengthen its relevance and impact both in the community and globally.

Believers living in poverty or in areas of endemic unemployment especially need businesses. Otherwise they are excluded from economic and social opportunities. They become bereft of influence or the ability to be salt and light in
their community. They become salt that has lost its saltiness, offering little or no good news in societies that are already cold or hostile to Christian faith.

**(f) Business Facilitates Going ‘To All Peoples’**

Christians are welcomed into even hostile or closed communities/countries when they bring the prospect of business and economic advantage. This must be done honestly and not just as an entry strategy to do “real spiritual ministry” or as a clandestine cover for unlawful evangelisation. By being salt and light and ambassadors of the blessings of Christ through business and its positive impact on society, Christian business people will ultimately lead people to seek God.

**The Glory of God through Business as mission**

In his theological reflections on business, Wayne Grudem\(^1\) begins by explaining how business has been neglected as a way to glorify God:

> When people hear the phrase "glorifying God," it probably first implies worship - singing praise to God and giving thanks to him. Then it might suggest evangelism - glorifying God by telling others about him. It might even suggest giving - glorifying God by contributing money to evangelism, to building up the church and to the needs of the poor. Or it might suggest moral living - acting in a way that honours God. Finally, [it] might suggest a life of faith - depending on God in prayer and in our daily attitudes of heart. These five...are certainly appropriate ways to glorify God. But they are not my focus in this book. Instead of these things, I want to look at business in itself - not just the ways business can contribute to work the church is already doing."

Grudem then goes on to highlight how various aspects of business can glorify God, such as ownership, employment, profit, commercial transactions and the effect of business on world poverty.

Our conclusion is that business can glorify God in numerous ways, both directly (of itself), as particularly highlighted by Wayne Grudem, and indirectly, as highlighted in the section above. Our specific task here is to show how business is part of the missio Dei and therefore a full and valid expression of the mission of the Body of Christ to the ends of the earth.

In Jesus’ parable of the talents, the servants were commended for investing their financial “talents” and receiving back an honest return for their Master and His domain (Matthew 25.14-30). Today, Christians with business talents are called to invest their assets and abilities into the kingdom of God. By giving finances to missions and charities, of course; but more so by giving themselves, their experience, their know-how, their business acumen, etc. to establish the kingdom of God both locally in their own region and nation, but also to the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1.8).

Business as mission is an act of co-creation in imitation of God and hence a response to the Creation Mandate. It is Good News in itself and hence an inseparable part of the Great Commission. Kingdom building is about wealth generation and spiritual transformation. As such Business as mission should be viewed not only within the narrow church-mission-business perspective but also within the wider macro perspective of sustainable transformational development consisting of abundance, empowerment, character and service in which people break loose from the shackles of a world bound by abject poverty.