A Global Movement Gathering Momentum

Business as mission does not represent a new paradigm in itself, but is part of a broader paradigm shift that recognises the holistic nature of missio Dei, and affirms all vocations. The evangelical church is learning how to more effectively declare the Gospel in its fullness.

We are recapturing the biblical vision of the Body of Christ, breaking through doctrinal errors and historical barriers which have resulted in the false dichotomies that have stifled the Church’s full impact in society. These dichotomies of the sacred versus the secular and the role of the clergy at the exclusion of the laity are being dismantled. Luther and Calvin helped us understand that every believer’s vocation is means of glorifying God. But it is only in more recent years that we have begun to understand the full potential and value of this doctrine as it relates to cross-cultural mission.

At the Lausanne Congress held in 1974, several emerging world church leaders sounded the cry for the evangelical church to engage in more than mere proclamation of the gospel. They called for a fully-orbed demonstration of the Gospel. Statements from Congresses in Lausanne in 1974 and Pattaya in 1980 reflect this clarion call. By this reckoning we are about one generation into the needed worldview shift. Many activities have gained full acceptance by the evangelical community including relief and development, workplace ministries, micro-finance efforts, business training, and so forth. But these have typically been carried out as non-profit activities.

Since the early 1990’s there has been a growing ‘Business as mission’ movement among the laity which is being expressed in various ways. There have been many international, regional and national Business as mission gatherings. Articles and books are being published, websites have developed and academic institutions are including Business as mission courses in their curricula.

However, for-profit businesses, especially those that are multinational in scope, are still treated with a high degree of ambivalence, scepticism and even hostility within the church at large. This explains why many feel that the Business as mission movement is at the very beginning of a paradigm shift. It is more accurate to say that Business as mission is at the tail end of a broader shift taking place within the church as a fuller understanding of holistic mission matures.

There is obvious potential for business people to play a more active role in taking the gospel cross-culturally. We cannot ignore the global reality and the need to release kingdom business strategies that have power to bring about deep and lasting spiritual, social and economic transformation. We are faced with both significant opportunities as well as challenges.

“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

Opportunities for Business as mission

(a) A World in Need

About 50% of the world’s population lives on less that US$ 2 a day. That represents a staggering number of over 2.8 billion people. Of these, 1.2 billion live on
US$ 1 a day. Imagine a population twice the size of the USA, Canada, Mexico and Brazil combined, where each person exists on $1 a day. In addition to poverty, there are the devastating effects of disease that plague the poorest nations. At the end of 2002, an estimated 42 million people around the world were living with HIV/AIDS. 30 million of these people live in Sub Saharan Africa. This is further aggravated by a disparity whereby the richest 20% of the world’s population own approximately 80% of the world’s wealth; whilst the poorest 20% own approximately 1%. There is a tragic correlation between poverty, disease and unemployment.

There is also a devastating link between lack of jobs and a variety of social ills. Human trafficking stands out as one of the most heinous. Trafficking is the term used for modern-day slavery and describes the act of the enslavement of a man, woman or child. Traffickers use force, fraud or coercion to hold their victims against their will. Women and children are often trafficked being forced into prostitution. A root cause of trafficking is unemployment. Christians in business can and must address this.

30 years ago, the South East Asian countries were economic nobodies. Their economies were based on low priced commodities. Japanese companies started setting up manufacturing plants and were welcomed with open arms by the Asian governments. Why? Because jobs and training were provided for the population and new technologies were shared that allowed these nations to compete at a global level.

Within a few years, enterprising Asians, trained by the Japanese, began starting their own plants. Today the largest chip manufacturers are in Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia and are all locally owned. While Japanese companies did not have a social transformational agenda when they invested in Asia, nevertheless it demonstrates powerfully how enterprise can alleviate poverty.

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I believe the only long-term solution to world poverty is business. That is because businesses produce goods, and businesses produce jobs. And businesses continue producing goods year after year, and continue providing jobs and paying wages year after year. Therefore if we are ever going to see long-term solutions to world poverty, I believe it will come through starting and maintaining productive, profitable business.

Wayne Grudem – Business for the Glory of God, Crossway 2003

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(b) The Limitations of Aid and Development Strategies

Traditionally development agencies have focussed on providing aid to poor countries as a means of tackling poverty. While aid and disaster relief remain important, governments and NGO’s have recognised that aid alone is insufficient to alleviate the problem of endemic poverty. Development projects have an important role to play in education, caring for the vulnerable, skills training and community-based enterprise such as handicraft development and subsistence farming. But these are rarely self-sustaining projects. Many such projects run out of support after a while. One of the problems with aid is the need to keep asking donors for repeated support. In many cases donor fatigue eventually sets in. When funding is withdrawn, the “false market” that the local population depended upon is exposed when it disappears. This is tragic and creates more problems than were solved.

Investing in sustainable businesses creates employment and therefore true economic development for these countries. Real employment gives people dignity and a self determination that can transform their community. This is in contrast to the dependency culture that is often engendered by aid. To alleviate poverty people
need a ‘hand-up not a hand-out’. The poor want real jobs, not subsidised ones. This is the cry for dignity and self-reliance that they deserve.

We should develop a kind of work and production – intellectual or physical – whose aim is “to become profitable” in order to serve human life.

(c) A Holistic Development Approach
There is an increasing recognition of the need for and benefits of a sustainable holistic approach by mission agencies, development agencies and businesses. Christians can participate and should contribute in these arenas. We should set the trends and standards by further developing the concepts and practical applications of Business as mission. We should aim at working with “all people of good will”.

Henry Ford once said: “A business that only makes money is a poor kind of business”. Most businesses exist solely to make a profit for their shareholders. That is what is referred to as the financial bottom line. Business as mission looks beyond a financial bottom line to a ‘multiple bottom line’; taking into account financial, social, spiritual and environmental returns.

Economics is a fundamental sphere in the process of social development and without it human existence could not be feasible. From a scriptural perspective, human life should be orientated by specific values, the values of the kingdom of God. Therefore, any aspect of social life must be evaluated in the light of such criteria.

(d) Globalisation
The world is changing. Our way of being and doing church and missions needs to change as well.

During the past 2000 years, many Christians have sought effective means and opportunities to glorify God among all peoples. During the past 200 years, areas such as health and education have opened doors to serve in various communities. The uniting of business with missions is nothing new. The Nestorians, the Moravians, William Carey, the Basel Mission, various Catholic and monastic orders, have all used business in various ways for the expansion of Christianity; albeit not without complications.

However, due to unprecedented changes resulting from rapid globalisation, business (as in the ‘Business as mission’ concept) is primed to take centre stage in the evangelisation and discipleship of the peoples of the world. Just as the Pax Romana created a favourable environment for the rapid expansion of the early Church, so globalisation has done so today. We need to recognise that globalisation has two sides; it can be used for benevolent economic development, but it can also be used for exploitation.

Business is globalising. It extends from international financial transactions to the availability of real-time information and branded products, anywhere, anytime. We buy American products made in the Philippines. We call a local number and speak to a call centre across the world. Culture is also becoming globalised. You see Coca-Cola bill boards in the jungles of Africa and Latin-America. CNN brings fragmented news-bites to every corner of the world. In a distant corner of Siberia you can watch MTV while drinking Swedish vodka.

The church is also experiencing the effects of globalisation through multidimensional missions; the church from everywhere going to everywhere.

The increasingly easy transfer of, and access to, finance, technology and information offers the Church an unprecedented opportunity to disciple the nations
through starting new businesses. With the collapse of communism, almost all
governments are seeking business development and inward investment since they
are in need of these resources for economic growth.

(e) Business is Welcome
There are many doors that are closed to “professional” Christians, traditional
missionaries and Christian workers, but there is not a single country in the world that
would not welcome business and investment. It meets real needs. It provides job
opportunities as well as training. It helps countries to develop not only economically,
but also in other ways through the development of a middle class, increased tax
revenue, more skilled labour force and so forth. In traditional missions one talks
about “closed countries” and “restricted access countries”, but there are no closed
doors for real business people doing real business. Governments around the world
welcome real business!

(f) Business is Influential
We must not underestimate the power of business. Its potential to have a
major impact both on individuals and communities is huge. This potential can be
positive or negative.

There is a wonderful web of relationships that comes with business and
enterprise. This is a gift that should not be despised. Christians who enter business
have the unique opportunity to positively touch and impact the lives of influential
people who can leverage resources.

A key Christian leader in a major Muslim country said: “The modus operandi
of professional Christians (e.g. missionaries) is not culturally natural and certainly not
sustainable or reproducible. Business as mission is about being real and having
natural relationships, participating in peoples’ lives through work and business, being
salt and light.”

Especially in Muslim countries there is an ever growing suspicion of
foreigners who seem to be “in country” without a legitimate purpose. This makes
building even the most casual relationships strained because of an insufficient
answer to the question, “What do you do?”

Business as mission can be the platform to foster a workplace environment
where Christian principles and ethics can be introduced and demonstrated as the
standard. In Uganda, a management consulting company, founded on biblical
principals and truths, seeks to develop leadership and management skills in the
arenas of both business and government. In the nine years the company has been
in existence, it has established influence with business leaders, not only in Uganda,
but in 12 other African countries.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He said “as you are in the process
of going - disciple”. This grammatical construction implies that as you are in the
process of your normal (business) life, you should naturally disciple the nations. It is
true that a fully devoted businessperson has time constraints but then so do the
people we are seeking to influence.

(g) Business Releases Untapped Resources for Building the Church
The task before us is quite challenging and includes the need to create jobs,
new business start ups, access venture capital, business know-how, access to
markets, and clear business ethics. Drawing on the same existing resources for
traditional missions will not be enough. However, there are thousands of people in
churches world-wide, with the right skill-sets, experiences and contacts that can
make a significant difference cross-culturally through Business as mission.
Mobilising, deploying, equipping and supporting them effectively will release
untapped resources for the mission of the Church.

All countries and cultures have entrepreneurial people. These business
people (or potential ones) hold some of the most critical keys to practically
demonstrate the kingdom of God. This is most essential in areas of the world where the name of Jesus is rarely heard, and if heard often misunderstood. Christians with a calling and gifting for business should be affirmed and encouraged.

Where there is no indigenous church, Business as mission can be a powerful part of the strategic plan for church planting. Church planting and business planting can go together hand in hand.

Kingdom businesses provide the local church and new disciples with models that they can easily understand and replicate. A new believer can relate to and learn from someone who is working out their Christianity in daily work life just like them. To the local church, the principle of empowerment, sustainability and multiplication is modelled rather than dependency. In turn new Christian business people are affirmed, strengthened and released to serve God and His kingdom through business.

**Challenges to Business as mission**

(a) A Slow Paradigm Shift in Worldview Among Christians

We are in the midst of a significant paradigm shift in the thinking of the evangelical Christian community. Paradigm shifts do NOT happen over night, it is a long process, usually taking a generation or more.

The issue of the sacred – secular dichotomy has surfaced again and again in our research and discussions. It is a major internal challenge which the Church and the Business as mission movement must face.

In order to begin to understand the hindrances that may deter the effectiveness of the Business as mission model in Africa, one needs to appreciate the way Christianity was initially introduced to Africa. Early missionaries presented Christianity to Africans as a great dichotomy between the ‘spiritual’ and ‘secular’.

Every paradigm is developed and upheld by a certain terminology. This applies to the thinking behind the sacred – secular dichotomy. It is seen in phrases like “full time ministry” and “real ministry”. It is very easy to profess a belief in a new paradigm (such as a seamlessly integrated holistic worldview) but then continue to use old paradigm language or misapply new terms to an old paradigm.

The word ‘holistic’ may be used, but dichotomised thinking may be the underlying foundation. This results in pseudo-holism. In the bible, we see an integrated holism and not two parts (physical and spiritual) awkwardly tacked together. There is no hierarchy with spiritual things at the top, and physical things at the bottom. They are not separated realms with different values attached.

We do not want to simply add “business” to the social action agenda of the church. We can not simply regard business as a useful tool for meeting people’s physical needs. There is a deeper need for a paradigm shift where the sacred and secular become integrated as in the biblical worldview. Discipleship and transformation should address the whole person seeking practical applications in the market place.

There are already many Christian organisations that are working in the area of community development. In some cases, this has involved establishing programmes of micro finance, co-operative societies, etcetera. All these, without a doubt, contribute significantly to sustainable development in poor communities. However, in a few cases this has become an ‘end’ in itself. The danger is that a reluctance sometimes develops to fully share the Christian faith, and the social activity alone is considered a sufficient testimony of faith. The result can be a successful programme, business or organisation, but one which is not focused on
making the gospel of Christ fully known. We must be aware of similar pitfalls in the practice of business as mission and take steps to avoid them.

(b) The Stigma of Business and the Passivity of the Laity

In many parts of the global church the vocation of business has a real stigma. This is largely a result of the pervasive Christian worldview that elevates the ‘spiritual’ realm above the material realm.

In many church bodies, the Christian business community has been effectively minimised, or even marginalised, by what Dr. R. Paul Stevens has described as the unbiblical spiritual hierarchy of vocations. Diagram 1 represents the pyramid that so many in the church are seeking to climb. Each step of the way supposedly gets you closer to becoming more spiritual. Subconsciously many believe that God is more pleased or satisfied with the service of those in the upper sections, those known as “professional” clergy. Unfortunately, for many, lawyers and politicians don’t seem to even make the chart!

A closely related problem to this ingrained church culture is the underlying assumption that the clergy are the ones that minister and the laity are relatively passive. Pastors may find it difficult to affirm and release (or even relate to!) leaders in other spheres of ‘real’ life.

Many today hold the traditional mission paradigm as sacred because it is the ultimate demonstration of devotion! I mean really, if you are a “missionary” in a remote part of the world you must have made the ultimate sacrifice and your entire life is given to the spiritual pursuit of God and the proclamation of the Gospel. However, when I read about many pioneer missionaries, most believed in a holistic approach and made incredible strides to bring about economic development to the communities where they served. At some point the shift was made and those who were sent to the field only had the background of a Bible school education instead of any other kind of work skills. That instilled into the life of the new convert that the most ‘spiritual’ people were not found in the business world, but rather were full time professional Christians.

This false hierarchy can be reinforced by different cultural factors around the globe. For instance, in some cultures hard work is frequently seen as a punishment from God as a result of the fall. Therefore the underlying theological framework does little to challenge this misconception and there is little effort made to address the value of work, productivity or sustainability.

Diagram 1.

Missionary

Pastor

Caring Professions (teacher, social worker, medical)

Business, Engineering, IT Professionals

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Making a profit or taking an income from business activity is also regarded with widespread suspicion in the mission community and in many churches. Money is seen as a necessary evil and one should not try to make more of it than necessary. As a result, business is often regarded as corrupt and evil at worst and at best, a necessary but distasteful activity (made more acceptable if you are known by the clergy to tithe regularly or to contribute substantially to the building campaign).

**In India the perception towards business is often negative in the Christian community. So when a business person becomes a Christian, often the person quits their job to be considered 'more spiritual'.**

How then will business people be affirmed in their vocation to integrate their faith with their daily working life? How will they believe that their gifts and experience have potential to make a powerful impact on their communities, nations and to the ends of the earth? This is particularly crucial in nations where Christian entrepreneurs and business people are most needed because of rampant unemployment and the existence of corrupt and unjust cultural systems and institutions in need of reform.

**In Latin America, there is an issue when talking about ascribing the same value for all vocations. I still see a sort of discrimination against those with skill/training in business and management taking leadership within Christian ministries and the Church. For instance, the seminaries are reluctant to accept those with MBAs to take leadership posts in administration. We still see theologians doing that. It reminds me of the time the pastors wouldn't accept a Christian psychologist to serve in Christian counselling. Praise the Lord, those years are gone, and now we need to accept that those skilled in business and management should lead and use their gifts in ministries of every kind.**

(c) **Tensions in Coupling Business and Mission**

There are inherent tensions when you couple together business goals and ‘mission’ goals. Some of these we will explore in later chapters. However, it is worth mentioning that historic examples exist where enterprise has been closely associated with the advancement of the gospel but has resulted in confusion and exploitation. These are reasons why some express mistrust and reservation.

We need to have a healthy critique of past and present practices, without discarding the fact that business has potential power for good. We need to recognise the dangers and pitfalls and examine how to avoid them.

(d) **Protectionism**

We must not be naïve regarding the drawbacks of globalisation and the flip side of unrestricted capitalism. Trade barriers set up by the US, EU and Japan (to name but a few) represent major hindrances for fair and free trade. The West professes free trade but practises a form of protectionism. Examples of this can be seen in the form of the farm subsidies of the EU and Canada, as well as steel tariffs of the USA. A level playing field in the area of international trade is a mirage. Business as mission does not operate in a vacuum and there is a need for Christians in law and politics, as well as business, to address these issues.

(e) **Lack of Affirmation and Equipping**

It is doubtful if a reform of international trading laws on its own will automatically stimulate fair and free trade. Unless local people are effectively trained, encouraged and supported to get into business, they will be unable to benefit from the immense potential that domestic and foreign trade has to offer. One of the
biggest needs is to impart the Business as mission vision with practical support and training.

In some regions there may be a lack of involvement in business by Christians, or at best hesitant involvement, due to the stigma attached to business already described. However, there are often other reasons why people fail to be involved. These include: the lack of good models, lack of a business driven mind within the culture, inadequate awareness of sound business principles, lack of professional proposals for the development of viable projects, lack of access to adequate capital and investment, lack of good networks and support and so on.

One of the reasons for these factors is the immaturity of the Business as mission movement. There is a felt need for developing support networks, disseminating good models, learning and moving on from past failures, making good business training available, developing funding, accountability and mentoring mechanisms and in general enabling the entrepreneurs in each nation.

(f) Spiritual Opposition

Business people should not automatically blame their failure on Satan if they have neglected to apply sound business practice or failed to factor in the normal vagaries of business life. One hindrance to starting sustainable kingdom businesses has been the over-spiritualization of business operations so that good business principles are too often ignored.

From personal experience and from the experience of about ten other Business as mission - business owners I work with on a regular basis, we know that the spiritual warfare is serious. We know that the redemption of souls and resources at the same time is something the enemy will not allow to happen without trying to deal a few serious blows.

We should not ignore that any disciple walking in his or her true calling walks into battle on a spiritual plane. The full armour of God and a spiritual alertness 'with all prayer and petition' (Ephesians 6:18) are basic requirements for the kingdom business person.

(g) Difficult Conditions for Business

Many countries that are in the greatest need of transformation also represent hostile environments for business. Corruption, intimidation and economic or political instability make it challenging for any business to survive.

Most business investors would normally not invest in some of the places that Jesus has called us to venture. That is why it is even more important that we provide those called to start businesses in these difficult places with the support that they need. We need to look at creative solutions to the fact that low returns on investment are inherent in these difficult places. To create a better business environment in these challenging locations, it is crucial that we work with those called to transform legal, political, educational spheres and with those relief and development entities that form the vanguard.

It takes time to lay a solid Business as mission foundation, but its importance must not be neglected. There is a tremendous opportunity to reach into hostile or “closed countries” and to minister to those most in need through Business as mission. It requires more than simply sending skilled, equipped and devoted businessmen and women to these places. It requires more than simply affirming national entrepreneurs that God will use to transform their communities. It will require on-going partnering, support and encouragement until there is a sustainable and profitable business venture. Even then, our ‘kingdom goal’ is not simply that these new businesses grow, become profitable and reproduce; but that they have a
lasting impact on the social, spiritual, material and environmental aspects of their society.