

Business as Mission: A Threefold Mandate

Business is more than making money, at least it should be. According to the “father of capitalism” **Adam Smith**, businesses exist to serve the general welfare.

The computer pioneer **Dave Packard** said: *“Many people assume, wrongly, that a company exists simply to make money. While this is an important result of a company’s existence, we have to go deeper and find the real reasons for our being. People get together and exist as a company so that they are able to accomplish something collectively that they could not accomplish separately - they make a contribution to society.”*

In the last 12 – 18 months we have been able to witness the effects of a global economic crisis. **Mahatma Gandhi’s** list of seven deadly social sins seems to be an accurate diagnosis for some of the causes of this crisis. It has been too much...

1. politics without principle
2. wealth without work
3. commerce without morality
4. pleasure without conscience
5. education without character
6. science without humanity
7. worship without sacrifice

The Christian social activist **Jim Wallis** wrote about the economic crisis: *“How will this crisis change us? How will it change the way we think, act, and decide things - how we live, and how we do business? Yes, this is a structural crisis, and one that clearly calls for new social regulation. But it is also a spiritual crisis, and one that calls for new self-regulation. We seem to have lost some things and forgotten some things — such as our values.”*

We cannot, and must not, go on assuming and practicing business as usual; neither the extreme Wall Street way, nor the centrally planned socially engineered way.

Business is multi-faceted. It is about profit and values, about wealth creation and social concern, about value added products and services and creation care, about markets and caring for people. But Business as Mission, BAM, is more than just Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it is more than job creation and entrepreneurship. BAM, is about being a follower of Jesus in the market place. BAM businesses also want to see Christ revealed and God glorified among all peoples and nations.

For Business as Mission rests on three distinct Biblical mandates:

1. The **creation mandate** is to *“till, care for, exercise stewardship, multiply, work, prosper”*. This is about being creative; create good things for ourselves and others – also in and through business. This also means being good stewards of our talents, resources and callings, but also caring for creation and people. It is also acknowledging and affirming the gifts and calling of entrepreneurs.

2. The **great commandment mandate** is to “*love your neighbor as yourself*”. We know that business can and should serve people and meet various needs. For example: Unemployment is a major underlying cause to malnourishment and starvation, homelessness, disease and limited access to medical treatment, as well as to debt and crime. Providing people with jobs is alleviating and preventing these dire conditions.
3. The **great commission mandate** is to “*make disciples of all nations*”. As followers of Jesus we have a global mission – to all peoples. BAM has a missional and global intent. BAM takes B and M seriously: real business and intentional mission, especially to areas with dire spiritual, economical and social needs. BAM businesses want to see Christ revealed and God glorified, in and through business, among all peoples and nations.

These three mandates must be at the forefront when we plan and run BAM businesses. It is equally important that these three serve as a context as we continuously evaluate our practical BAM mission. We must be aware of the risk of mission drift. One may start out with high hopes and ambitions regarding all three mandates, but eventually end up just operating a CSR business, only fulfilling the creation mandate and the great commandment mandate. As good as that may be for various stakeholders, it is nevertheless a shortcoming. Our unique contribution and responsibility as BAMers rests on the threefold mandate.

Just doing business for maximization of profit is also a mission drift. That limited understanding and praxis of business contributed towards the global recession. Mahatma Gandhi’s observations are important as we seek the general welfare of society. Finally, as Christians in the market place we strive to do business as unto the Lord, being accountable to Him and to fellow followers of Jesus.

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