

Business and Mission as Partners?

A look at the issues

Business people are playing a tremendous role in world mission today. According to George Verwer, 'Without business people, missions would not happen!' But since business people who are helping missions do not often blow their own trumpets, their stories may not be widely known.

One obvious way for business people to support missions is by sponsoring mission work done by others. However, business people are helping the cause of world mission in several other ways. For example, some are actually going to unreached areas and are planting churches as well as engaging in business. One Christian worker who manages to combine being a good businessman with church planting (CP) work in East Asia says, 'It is easier to teach business people to plant churches than to teach church planters to do business!'

Business people, farmers and artisans in history

Go to Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa today and you will see millions of Muslims actively practicing their faith. Many of the ancestors of these were won to Islam through Muslim traders in the market place. As these traders kept the fast and rolled out their prayer mats to say their prayers in public, they drew the attention of animists or even nominal Christians to their faith.

The history of the Christian Church provides examples of Christian businessmen and traders who have been used of God to win many to Christ. Here are a few:

1) **The Moravians** - A hundred and fifty years before Hudson Taylor first landed in China, Leonard Dober (a potter) and David Nitschmann (a carpenter) arrived in the West Indies. Over the next 150 years, more than 2000 Moravians went out as missionary farmers and artisans to various parts of the world.

2) **William Carey** - Often described as 'The father of modern missions', Carey funded most of his work in India through his and his team's own efforts. They opened boarding schools for rich local people and expatriates and used the proceeds from those to print copies of the scriptures in different languages.

3) **Sir John Laing** - The building magnate who founded the Laing construction company gave much of his fortune to Christian work and to world mission. The Trusts he set up are still helping to fund mission work today.

4) **R J Le Tourneau** - He founded a company in the USA which produced earth moving machines and gave 90% of his profits to world mission.

Just as they did in the past, business people are helping world missions today. Their contribution is more important than ever before because of certain pressing issues.

Issues in world missions today

1) **People** – Many more workers are needed to take the gospel to the vast unreached blocs of Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. In the past thirty years, thousands of unreached peoples have been identified. As these have few or no indigenous churches among them, it will take thousands of Christians from all over the world to start new believing communities.

2) **Pounds** - It now costs between £15,000 and £40,000 a year to keep a missionary couple on the field. If, say, one thousand new missionary couples were to be sent out from Britain, the church would need to find between £15 and £40 million pounds to fund them.

3) **Permits** - Most unreached peoples are in countries which are closed to traditional missionary work. How then will indigenous church planting movements be started among them? We need to find ways to enable potential CP teams to stay in these countries long enough to establish a CP work and one obvious way is through business.

Business as vocation

Unfortunately in the past and even today many Christians have seen business as somehow 'tainted', and not a high status activity for Christians. This type of attitude is unbiblical. The Bible sees work itself as a consequence of our creation in God's image. In Genesis 1, God Himself is represented as a worker. He enjoyed perfect job satisfaction after His creative activity. When He created human beings in His own image, He gave them some of His dominion over the earth and told them to exercise their creative gifts in subduing it.

In his 'Issues Facing Christians Today', John Stott identifies three elements in a biblical view of work:¹

- a) Work is intended for the fulfilment of the worker.
- b) Work is intended for the benefit of the community.
- c) Work is intended for the glory of God, that through it His purpose should be revealed and fulfilled.

Making things and distributing them for the benefit of other human beings is a very God given activity. So we see that business is a very good and noble Christian vocation and may be seen as a legitimate mission vocation in its own right.

The Quaker George Cadbury who helped to develop the Cadbury chocolate business in Birmingham saw his business activities as being for the benefit of his workers and their communities. He said, 'I have for many years given practically the whole of my income for charitable purposes, except what is spent upon my family. Nearly all my money is invested in businesses in which I believe I can truly say the first thought is the welfare of the work people employed.'

Presence or persuasion evangelism?

Evangelism and mission may be seen as lying on a spectrum. At one end is presence evangelism and at the other is persuasion evangelism. Presence evangelism is when people show the love of Christ through the work they do. For example a Christian doctor in Afghanistan shows the love of Christ by the operations he does and the care that he shows for the people. If he has an opportunity to tell the Good News, it would be a plus. At the other end of the spectrum are those who feel their primary calling is to persuade others of the saving nature of the gospel.

All Christian business people will be wanting to show the life of Christ and His values through their business and the way they conduct it. For some, this is their primary vocation. However others are more at the other end of the spectrum with their primary vocation being to do business which combines persuasion or helping others to do the persuading.

Similarities between business and mission

The table below compares different elements. One business friend said that he thought more faith was exercised sometimes by business people in new business ventures than by many missionaries in the course of their ministry!

BUSINESS AND MISSION COMPARED		
	Business	Mission
Product offered	Goods and services	Good News of new life in Christ.
Primary goals	To make a living through generating a profit, increasing market share, and serving the public.	To increase 'market share' by making mature and reproducing disciples of Christ.
Primary area	Economic sphere of life, 'for profit' sector of life	Whole of life, especially spiritual dimension.
Main motivation	Meeting of individual's and community's physical needs, other desires such as desire for status.	Supernatural love for those in spiritual and/or physical need.
Activity	Production and distribution of goods and services	Distribution of Good News of Christ, making disciples, demonstration of Christ's love through meeting physical needs.
Main result	Enables people and their communities to make a living	Empowers people to live spiritually, frees them to love and serve their Creator and to better their situation.
Authority	Visible authority over most people	Invisible obligation for all Christians.

	in employment.	
Vocation	Legitimate calling for some Christians.	Divine calling for all Christians, legitimate full time calling for some Christians.
Basis	<p>Good relationships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) within business organisations b) with customers - contractual agreements for profit, so integrity and accountability needed. c) with employees and suppliers 	<p>Good relationships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) between loving, holy and empowered Kingdom communities and 'sent out' ones, so integrity and accountability needed. b) between 'sent out' ones and those to whom they are sent.
Requirements for expansion	<p>Vision - the ability to see new possibilities</p> <p>Readiness to take risks: faith</p> <p>Good product and presentation</p> <p>Financial resources</p> <p>Personnel resources</p> <p>Business plan</p> <p>Good marketing</p> <p>Good demonstration of product</p> <p>Identifying with lifestyle and needs of potential customers</p> <p>Integrity.</p> <p>Good customer service to maintain positive relationships with customers</p> <p>Maintaining good relationships with employees and suppliers</p> <p>(Prayer backing)</p>	<p>Vision - the ability to see how spiritual needs can be met</p> <p>Readiness to take risks: faith</p> <p>Product always good</p> <p>Financial resources</p> <p>Personnel resources - appropriate gifting</p> <p>Good planning/strategy - keeping in step with the Spirit</p> <p>Good marketing</p> <p>Good demonstration of product by powerful living</p> <p>Identifying with lifestyle and felt needs of spiritually needy</p> <p>Integrity and holy way of life</p> <p>Good discipling relationship and instilling of 'expansion' mentality</p> <p>Maintaining good relationships with co-workers</p> <p>Prayer backing</p>

Of course, the similarities increase if a business person sees that God is the real owner of his business and that he is merely a 'steward' of His assets. If

God is the primary shareholder, increasing shareholder value will not only involve maximising financial value but will also involve pleasing Him by holding to His values.

How can business people get involved in world mission?

A By helping to reach the unreached

Business people who want to get involved in cross-cultural outreach would do well to study the 'market' and see where the real spiritual needs are. Some have met a Christian from another country and gone over there to help and have then found there is already a well established national church. By contrast, countries like Turkey have perhaps 3,500 believers in a population of 70 million.

1) **Through going themselves** – some business people have a real gift of evangelism and as part of a CP team can help to start a church where none exists. Such business people are at the 'persuasion' end of the calling spectrum with a definite calling to CP.

2) **Through being 'enablers' on someone else's church planting team** – they employ other members of the CP team, though do not do much of the CP work themselves.

3) **Through helping get Christian workers into creative access countries.**

a) By taking them on and training them as reps for these countries - one UK businessman took on a CP worker to sell his electronic testing equipment in the Middle East.

b) By coaching them to start new businesses in these countries.

4) **Through making money to fund the sending of workers to creative access countries** – they act purely as sponsors. For example, many Filipinos in one agency are wonderful at CP but as the value of the peso outside the Philippines is low, they find it is hard to get sufficient financial support.

B By helping Christians/new converts:

1) **By providing skills and training** – this can be both on a short term or long term basis.

2) **Through helping them to set up small businesses** – through financing and mentoring. It can also include extending micro-credit and advice to the poor to help them set up simple cottage industries.

3) **Through providing outlets for goods** – in Britain one example would be fair trade schemes..

There are, of course, dangers in these areas such as paternalism,

fostering dependency and increasing the temptations of the well off towards materialism and pride.

C By helping indigenous mission agencies and churches:

- 1) **Through helping them to set up businesses** to provide money for 'traditional' missionary activity, or else to enable entry into creative access countries.
- 2) **Through providing outlets in other countries** for goods made in the indigenous mission's country.

D By going and modelling God's values

At one end of the spectrum, a business person can simply go to a country and model in his workplace such things as:

- 1) **Honesty and integrity.**
- 2) **The fair treatment of workers.**
- 3) **Good environmental responsibility.**

He will normally want his workers (and often customers) to know he is a committed Christian. This is sometimes described as 'Business as Mission'. Such business people are at the 'presence' end of the calling spectrum with a calling to show and share the love of Christ but with no real calling to CP.

Business people and world mission

There is a great deal business people can do in the area of world mission, whether on the front lines themselves or as back-up for others! This outline has merely scratched the surface of what is an expanding field. One great model in the New Testament is, of course, Lydia, a businesswoman who welcomed Paul and his apostolic band to Philippi, opened her home to them and bound up their wounds (Acts 16). May many more follow her lead in the coming days.