Christian Family Businesses: Opportunities for Future Research

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ABSTRACT: Family businesses dominate the business landscape around the world. Traditionally, research has concentrated on understanding the complex processes that underpin the creation, development, and survival of family businesses. To date, however, a Christian perspective on family business research has been largely overlooked. The aim of this paper is to explore the connections between a Christian perspective and the most prevalent business form worldwide. This paper contributes by reviewing relevant literature in the family business field and by suggesting future research paths.

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of family businesses around the world is unequivocal. The family firm is considered the dominant business form worldwide (IFERA, 2003). It is estimated that in most countries, family businesses represent two thirds or more of all businesses (Howorth et al., 2010). The spectrum of family businesses comprises old to new, local to international, artisan to high tech businesses. They are represented through global companies such as Ford, Samsung, and Tata and also through small- and medium-sized firms that proliferate across regions, cities, and towns around the world.

Family businesses provide ample room for family emotional factors and business objectives to intermingle (Fletcher, 2002; Craig et al., 2009). Family dynamics in business creation, leadership, and intergenerational succession make them an important subject of study (Howorth et al., 2014). Interestingly, while family businesses are ubiquitous and significant, it is only recently that researchers have begun to study them (Bird et al., 2002). Further understanding of the complex interaction between family and firm; the forces underlying family values; and the way these shape business culture, resources, and continuity is needed (Wright & Kellermanns, 2011).

Centuries ago, Christian language, beliefs, and values permeated the general culture, including business activities (Woodhead, 2004). In the western world, the influence of Christianity in the free enterprise system can be observed at various points in history (Spector, 2006; Campbell, 1957). Said differently, Christianity does not deny the importance of business activity or shy away from enterprise (Porter, 1998; Rossouw, 1994; Smith & Wheeler, 1999). The influence of Christian principles and beliefs at the individual and firm level of analysis is clear (Chewning, 2001; Lee et al., 2003; Ibrahim & Angelidis, 2005; Werner, 2008). Furthermore, research has established that family *per se* has influenced the development of Christian identities. These identities can transpire into any activity, including business (Woodhead, 2004; Moxnes, 1997a). Christian values and beliefs influence decisions and practices of everyday business (Cafferky, 2012).

The Bible provides powerful insights into our understanding of where family and business can overlap. Through the Bible, we are aware of our responsibility towards family (Psalms 17:14; Proverbs 1:22)[1], the impact of conflicts and family feuds when family members work together (Genesis), and the relevance of succession (Ecclesiastes 3:15). The theme of succession is constant throughout the Bible from the book of Genesis to Jesus himself following the trade of his earthly caretaker, Joseph (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3). Furthermore, the Bible extends our understanding by challenging some of the myths in the family business field. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we appreciate a distinctive view of "family" and priorities in our relationships (Mark 3: 31-35; Matthew 22: 36-39). In essence, a Christian perspective can illuminate the family business field (Hebrews 4:12).

Family businesses led by Christian principles and values have been around for a long period of time (Cafferky, 2012; Seibert, 2011) with some becoming major corporations (Redmer, 2007, 2008, 2010). Yet questions arise about the different degrees by which owner-managers integrate their Christian faith into business (Cafferky, 2005; Nash & McLennan, 2001; Solomon, 2004). Research into this has mainly focused on individual Christian owner/managers or self-labelled "Christian" businesses. This misrepresents the reality that Christian family businesses may be much less about a single individual or a brick-and-mortar building and more often about several individuals, related by kin and faith, controlling and developing family enterprises while embracing and integrating their Christian beliefs.

The main argument of this paper is that a Christian perspective brings light into the understanding of the family business. This study opens up the world of family businesses as a research context for integration of Christian principles and beliefs in business. It contributes to knowledge by identifying research opportunities in terms of concepts, typologies, themes, theories, and methods. In the following pages, first the impact of the biblical family into the study of family businesses is explored. Then a typology of Christian family businesses is presented. Mainstream research themes in the family business field, such as definitions and succession are discussed. Finally, theories, contexts, and methods to study Christian family businesses are examined.

THE GENESIS OF CHRISTIAN FAMILY BUSINESSES

For centuries family members have worked together in business. There are long-established businesses, passed down from one generation of a family to another, still running today (Salkeld, 2011; Gittleson, 2012). Yet, it is in the Bible that we encounter the first forms of family businesses, the emergence of the Christian family and its influence for contemporary Christian family businesses.

Family businesses are not found as such in the Bible.* What we meet in the Bible are the households (*oikos*): "A group of people bound together by close kinship, who live together and make a living together" (Moxnes, 1997b, p. 23). This kinship group was very different to the modern concept of the nuclear "family" (Brattgard, 1963; Moxnes, 1997a). Moxnes (1997b) argues that the *oikos* household underscored a family as a co-resident group that performed various tasks such as production, distribution, transmission, reproduction, and worship. Marriage and inheritance were basic social functions. Inheritance, that is the transmission of wealth (land in particular), and passing on existing trades to subsequent generations was critical to the *oikos* (Moxnes, 1997b, p. 30). Therefore, what we encounter in the Gospel is not the family as we know it but rather a group that lives and works together, the *Oikos*. This was an early form of economically active organizations that are concerned about the transmission of wealth through generations.

Based on archaeological data, Guijarro (1997) provides evidence of social and economic activities carried out by *oikos* households. Guijarro illustrates early family businesses in the form of farmhouses and houses with adjacent shops in Galilee. Based on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, he depicts various types of families and their association to land ownership and business activities (e.g., agriculture, fisheries, and commerce). In such activities, mutual support, solidarity, and exchange of favors were expected from the household. Households were marked by economic, social, legal, and cultural disparities, such as differences in age, gender, class, and ethnicity (Elliott, 2003, p. 204). The household appears in the Scripture as a world that tends to look after its own autonomous position, running its own affairs (e.g., purchase of fields or oxen) and focusing on its internal life (Destro & Pesce, 2003, p. 229). Furthermore, households would make calculative decisions, using land and resources gathered through its members to advance familial interests and as instruments of alliance with other households. Yet the relevance of the *oikos* transcends economic activities.

From its origin, the *oikos* household was the focus and locus of Christianity. Elliott (2003) states that "a key feature of the Christian movement was its household orientation: its mission focused not on individuals but household groups; believers assembled in houses for worship; and the household or family (*oikos*) provided a chief metaphor, for characterizing relations and responsibilities within and among the believing communities" (p. 188). Jesus addressed the households with counter-cultural challenges (Destro & Pesce, 2003; Elliott, 2003). First, discipleship (Gospels of Mark and Luke) challenged the common assumption of family solidarity and loyalty of members of the *oikos* ((Destro & Pesce, 2003; Barclay, 1997, p. 73). Discipleship created conflict because new believers would often split off from the household. The Bible tells us that households often had mixed structures and beliefs, which challenged new Christian members (1 Corinthians 7: 12-16).

Secondly, Jesus denounced the calculative behaviour of households and their exchange mechanisms and demanded that homes offer hospitality distanced from the reciprocity and social compensation common between households (Destro & Pesce, 2003). Elliott (2003) argues that these challenges show the importance of the *oikos*-fellowship, which was based on the gathering of Christian communities within households, essential for the survival and growth of Christianity. Through Paul, we hear strong words for those who neglect the household (1Timothy 5:8). Thus, the household, through which the first notions of family business were encountered, becomes a crucial harbour for the growth and spread of the early Christian church.

Jesus turned to the *oikos* to demand a counter-cultural view of family — with lasting effects. The household provided "a root metaphor for communal identity, unity, intimacy, and loyalty of the believers in relation to God, Jesus Christ, and one another" (Elliott, 2003, p. 205). Elser (1997) suggests that the family house atmosphere was where the Christian identity was developed and adopted the language of kinship. The Christian message embraced individuals who were bound together in a new metaphorical family as brothers and sisters in Christ (Elser, 1997). This is shown throughout the New Testament by the employment of familial terminology (e.g., "brothers," "sisters," "brotherhood," "children of God," "father/son," etc.) to describe the community of believers and the closeness of their relationships (Elliott, 2003).

The family language employed by Jesus and the Apostles cemented basic principles of the Christian faith: that the main relationship we have is with our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, that one's closest allies and supporters were "brothers" and "sisters" in the faith, and that one's ultimate familial loyalty was to none but the heavenly Father, his resurrected child, and one's fellow siblings in the faith (Elliott, 2003). Loyalty to God was above family ties, and hence believers should forge surrogate kinship relationships with fellow believers outside the family circle (Barclay, 1997, p. 74). The brotherhood-type nature of Christian fellowship was embedded in the household structure (Sandness, 1997), which Paul associates with binding characteristics of kinship groups (Fatum, 1997). This includes the communal existence and work, property, and power that bind kin (Destro & Pesce, 2003). The implication is that Christians who would automatically trust blood relatives should also extend such trust to members of the surrogate Christian family. Fictive brothers and sisters are trusted and assigned roles and statuses appropriate to their capabilities and gifts (Elliot, 2003).

The New Testament underscores that Christianity became distinctive in the structure of family through household codes, or instructions, and these became the pillars of Christian identity (Elser, 1997; Standhartinger, 2001; Elliott, 2003). The household codes encouraged order within the community and challenged preconceptions in the oikos (Standhartinger, 2001). For example, Elliott (2003) argues that in the case of 1 Peter, the concept of the household of God served as the core symbol of Christian communal identity. Christians are urged to resist external pressures calling for conformity and assimilation. Paul's letter to the Galatians testifies to the internal and external pressures that encourage congregations to adopt a model of enduring group identity (Elser, 1997, p. 144). These codes were not only developed to help Christians resist the cultural requirements of society at the time (i.e., claims of the Roman emperor to be considered the father of the early Christian Church) or to minimize the perception of Christianity as a counter-cultural movement, but also contributed to the need for internal communal order in the early house churches (Elliott, 2003). Thus, the distinctiveness and growth of Christianity was achieved and sustained through the *oikos* — the earliest form of a Christian family business.

In summary, the Bible says a great deal about the *oikos*, and much of it challenges conventional thinking about family businesses. Jesus himself provided the basis and metaphor for Christian community. This has an impact on the traditional view of family businesses, as will be discussed on the next section.

It is important to note that as centuries passed, the household evolved from being perceived as a large and undifferentiated extended kin group to smaller, specialized, and nuclear groups (Hammel, 1984). This progressive change was considered cross-culturally valid for conducting research. Hammel suggests that it was only with the rise of private property and monogamous marriage that the family as a nuclear unit composed of husband, wife and children became, for the first time, the economic unit of society. From that point onwards, attention centered on direct descendants that entered into property ownership and saw the family as individuals who contributed to production, reproduction, and sustenance of family assets (Netting et al., 1984). This perspective is echoed in the modern study of family businesses.

The Role of Love and Trust in Christian Family Businesses

Love for, and trust in, family members, tends to be the main advantages of family businesses. The success of family businesses is often attributed to familial ties (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). Family business ties are supposed to be stronger and more enduring than those found in other organizations because they are based on sentiments and emotions (Dyer, 2003; Hoffman et al., 2006). The key to these ties is trust.

Familial trust allows family members to come together in starting or acquiring a venture (Discua Cruz et al., 2013) and in delegating functions and responsibilities within the business (Sundaramurthy, 2008). Trust among family members provides advantages related to emotional encouragement, provision and transfer of resources (e.g. information, financial funds), support in times of crisis, and unity with trusted individuals in alien and hostile environments (Kaslow, 1993). These factors have explained the resilience of family businesses in turbulent environments and economic downturns (Colli et al., 2003).

While trust is theorized to underpin family business development (Chua et al., 2003), it does not guarantee technical or managerial expertise (Granovetter, 1995). Some studies suggest that involvement of family members in a business was relevant in the initial steps of development but later turned into a liability that hindered growth (Church, 1993). Emotional liabilities have been found to be a prevalence of nepotism and altruism, entrenched management, inflexibility, and utility maximization by the family to the detriment of the business and stakeholders (Allio, 2004). Tensions derived from sibling rivalry, emotionally charged interpersonal clashes between generations, and perceptions of unfairness and long-term negative affective relationships have also been associated with business disruption and failure (Davis & Harveston, 2001). When negative emotional aspects replace sound business logic, it becomes difficult for any business to survive over generations.

While research underscores the advantages and disadvantages of family business related to family ties, members of a Christian family place their primary loyalty in God through Christ. The Bible shows us, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, a new approach to relate to God and to others. Love towards others, imprinted from the early Christian *oikos*, challenge loyalty towards family ties, a hallmark in the stereotypical family business. Under a Christian perspective, calculative and opportunistic ways of behaving when conducting business activities are replaced with a new role for love and trust towards others. Trust, a crucial element in family businesses, is then extended to the surrogate kinship relationships with fellow believers outside the closely held family circle. As trust becomes embedded in a community of believers, critical questions for research in the family business are raised.

The Bible is clear about the importance of healthy relationships with those with whom we band together to make a living (Proverbs 11:29; Ephesians 6: 1-3). As Christians, we are called to love others in Christ and embrace those of the Christian family. The Bible calls us to avoid negative emotions towards others (John 13: 34-35; Luke 6:31). Hence traditional advantages and vices may not necessarily apply in Christian family businesses as trust may not no longer reside only in family ties. Studies that elucidate the role of love and trust in Christian family businesses and that explore whether traditional advantages and disadvantages hold in Christian family businesses are needed. Furthermore, recent economic turmoil worldwide raises critical questions around trust in others. How resilient in economic downturns are Christian family businesses compared to their non-Christian counterparts? Christian family businesses may offer a contrast to the perceived advantages and vices of love and trust in business.

DEFINING AND CHARACTERIZING CHRISTIAN FAMILY BUSINESSES

Currently, the relevance and challenges of family businesses across the globe is clear. A large majority of businesses are created or acquired by individuals, supported by family members (Discua Cruz et al., 2013; Steier, 2007). Family firms are possibly more complex than other types of firms because they showcase an overlap between family and business objectives that are often hard to separate. It is a context in which business objectives often compete with family emotions and dynamics and where family objectives are often legitimised. While defining a family business is an ongoing debate (Howorth et al., 2010) it is widely agreed that the overlap between management, ownership, and family dimensions characterizes a family business (Astrachan, 2003). Some firms showcase such interrelated and overlapping dimensions as soon as they are founded; others may gradually integrate the family dimension over time (Chua et al., 2004). Traditional processes in the family business relate to the intention for intergenerational succession, perpetuation of family values in business, and complex family dynamics in management and ownership (Howorth et al., 2013).

The advance of knowledge in the family business field has been complicated by the lack of an agreed definition (Chrisman et al., 2005). Earlier definitions have served different research purposes (Astrachan et al., 2002), and have emphasized diverse criteria such as percentage of family ownership, percentage/number of family managers/employees, family controlling interest, succession to family members, family intentions, and family objectives (Howorth et al., 2006). Because of the variations of findings, warnings have been raised about using too wide or narrow definitions (Westhead & Cowling, 1998).

However, finding an appropriate definition facilitates the study of family businesses, allows theorizing about them, and makes comparisons within and between countries less difficult. In a comprehensive review, Howorth et al., (2006) defined a family business as "one where a family owns enough of the equity to be able to exert control over strategy and is involved in top management positions" (p. 229). This definition, though it may not capture all family businesses, provides a foundation for further studies that highlight the impact of family in overlapping dimensions.

Attempts to define Christian businesses have been made; yet a definition of a Christian family business is also missing. Such a definition needs to include ways Christianity is integrated into the business as well as the overlapping family dimensions (Lynn & Wallace, 2001; Cafferky, 2012). One of the more comprehensive definitions of Christian business is those that "declare their belief in, and active pursuit of, the successful merging of biblical principles with business activities" (Ibrahim & Angelidis, 2005, p. 187). Ibrahim and Angelidis point out varying degrees of Christian integration in the business, from displaying Christian Scripture on premises to orally communicating Christian values within the company. Christian owner-managers are found to frame their identity around one, or several, different concepts, such as calling, stewardship, witness, holiness, and general Christian tenets (Werner, 2008). These concepts have been explored by biblical scholars (e.g., Lynn & Wallace, 2001) and may allow those in control of a family business to frame practices in an idiosyncratic way. Hence, Christian owner/managers have a range of distinct principles and values which may guide their business approach and that are clearly distinct from non-Christians.

Based on the previous discussion, a Christian family business can be broadly defined as a business where members of one or more families who profess the Christian faith control the strategy of the firm and participate in its ownership and management. This broad definition acknowledges influence and participation of family members who are Christian believers in overlapping dimensions and includes the influence of biblical values and principles to varying degrees. The definition acknowledges that adherence to the Christian faith influences the way business owner/managers make sense of their business practices. While this definition may not comprise all Christian family businesses, it is a starting point from which to theorize and conduct comparative studies.

Further studies of Christian family businesses may concentrate on the characteristics or factors relevant for Christian business leaders when defining the business. Christian principles and values shape business leadership because of deeply held personal values that affect an individual's approach to managerial decision-making and challenges (Delbecq, 1999; Rodgers & Gago, 2006; Van Buren III & Agle, 1998). Many Christians intertwine their values with the economic activities they undertake. This impacts the definition. Therefore, factors deemed relevant by Christian family business owners and leaders may provide a sharp contrast to existing definitions.

Heterogeneity of Christian Family Businesses

Is there a stereotypical Christian family business? Prior research suggests that family businesses are not a homogeneous group and therefore should not be oversimplified (Discua Cruz & Howorth, 2008). The variation between family businesses originates in the overlap between a sentimental- and emotional-based system (family) with an objective- and task-based system (business) where myriads of values coexist (Dyer, 2003; Miller et al., 2003). A fruitful avenue for future research is the identification of different "types" of family businesses (Sharma, 2006; Westhead & Howorth, 2007). Most notably, Westhead and Howorth (2007) illustrate that distinct "types" of family businesses can be conceptually and empirically identified. Their study places family businesses within a continuum of financial-oriented objectives and family/non-financial objectives affected by ownership and management dimensions. These findings suggest that we may also expect variations in the behavior of Christian family businesses.

Business founders that interweave their Christian faith into the business may engage in diverse forms of integration.* There is evidence that businesses that label themselves as "Christian" exhibit levels of variation (Ibrahim et al., 2005), and that tensions surface when integrating Christian faith in business (Nash, 1994; Nash & McLennan, 2001). For example, in a study of the practices and values of 85 evangelical Christian CEOs, Nash (1994) found tensions such as "love of God vs. profit," "family and work," "charity and wealth", and "humility and ego." Further work by Nash & McLennan (2001) argues that communication voids and conflicts among those in business and religious communities accentuate these tensions. Such tensions portray different types of business leaders and the varying degrees by which they incorporate Christian values into the workplace. Similarly, while some family business owners/managers may showcase a Christian faith in every aspect of their business life, others may act more as secret agents. There are also non-Christian family firms that may follow biblical principles in their management (e.g., not opening on Sunday, acknowledging Easter and Christmas). This suggests that there is a great potential for conceptual and empirical studies exploring "types" of Christian family businesses.

A conceptual framework by Richard Niebuhr (1951) identified five different ways of how Christians balance religious and cultural values: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture. The typology expresses a continuum between Christ and culture, where Christ "exists rather as the focusing point in the continuous alteration of movements from God to man and man to God" (p. 29). It has revealed pressures that Christians face when handling business issues (e.g., Siker, 1989; Lee et al., 2003; Les & Harry, 2005; Thaut, 2009). Thus, Niebuhr's typology is well suited to serve as a device for proposing a typology of Christian family businesses from a theoretical perspective.

Christ Against Family Business

The first of Niebuhr's types poses an antagonistic view of the relationship between Christ and family businesses — a sectarian separation. Under this view Christ is seen as presenting a challenge of an "either-or" decision to those involved in family business (Niebuhr, 1951, p. 40). A dichotomy between fellowship of believers and a hostile and evil secular world is underscored. From this perspective, any culture external to that of the church should be observed with suspicion and so Christians must avoid it. Such view is rooted in the assumption that family businesses are a realm of sin and idolatry (e.g., greed), a realm that must be avoided or destroyed, rather than changed. Overall, this is the anti-type of any family business. It denies the validity of the family business discipline because it denies the legitimacy of anything that resembles a business enterprise. It is the sort of debate that asks: What does Christ have to do with family businesses?

Niebuhr (1951) believed that this type provides a necessary emphasis but, in the end, was inadequate as no one really escapes culture. He notes, "In his effort to be obedient to Christ, [the sectarian] ... reintroduces ideas and rules from non-Christian culture in two areas: in the government of the withdrawn Christian community, and in the regulation of Christian conduct toward the world outside" (p. 82). Niebuhr (1951) provides examples of religious communities that seek to separate from society and represent this position. Communities such as the Amish and Quakers approximate a sectarian response to society. Yet we find evidence of an affinity with family business practices within these communities such as family involvement and the expectation of family succession in business (Kraybill & Nolt, 1995; Prior & Kirby, 1993). Hence, while this type promotes withdrawal from society, at the same time in order to exist, it may adopt family business practices.

The Christ of Family Business

In contrast to the separatism stressed in the first type, the Christ of family business type represents the opposite extreme — accommodation. In this view the distinction between Christianity and society is practically erased. Christian principles and values are fundamentally aligned with practices of family businesses. Christians who adhere to this type would "understand Christ through culture, selecting from his teaching and action as well as from the Christian doctrine about him such points as seem to agree with what is best in civilization" (Niehbur, 1951, p. 83). Christian communities that embrace this position resolve tensions between Christianity and society by equating and accommodating the values of society and Christian beliefs to reach a fit. Niebuhr (1951) suggested it motivated people to "work in the moral communities of family and economic, national, and political life..." (p. 97). From this perspective, it would be almost impossible to separate Christianity from the family business. Thus, Christians may serve in and through them to help improve the world. This position asks the question: What does Christ not have to do with family business?

Under this view, instead of separating from family businesses, Christians must serve Christ by participating in them and engaging in their practices. From this perspective, Christian family businesses will conduct their affairs through practices used by secular counterparts (e.g., succession, corporate governance). Christians are then at ease with practices or processes that characterize family businesses. This view, however, may equate family businesses to a context for spirituality, aiming to overcome sacred and secular barriers (Neal & Vallejo, 2008). Examples include family businesses that acknowledge Christian but also other multi-faith expressions (Redmer, 2008). Pitfalls relate to turning family businesses into accommodating contexts in which Christianity is diluted to what is best in culture.

Christ Above Family Business

Compared to separation or accommodation, this view advocates a synthesis of Christ and culture. In this synthesis, Christ and culture are not equal partners; there is a hierarchical division. Christians adhering to this type promote a "both-and" response to family businesses. Niebuhr (1951) poses: "The synthesist maintains the distinction, and with it the paradoxical conviction, that Jesus, his Lord, is both God and man, one person with two 'natures' that are neither to be confused nor separated" (p. 127). In this view, Christ is a Christ of family businesses, but he is also above family business because his values are above the values of the world. Therefore, Christians should accept family businesses as an important entity; yet it could never reach the sublime understanding of Christ. From this hierarchical view, Christianity offers standards to which family business should be made to conform. This type asks the question: Can family businesses ever reach the sublime nature of Christ?

This view assumes that family businesses should be shaped until they resemble a Christian organization. This occurs when those who place Christ above family business will attempt to endorse and build up distinctive approaches that reflect the Christian faith in every sphere of action within family businesses (e.g., governance, succession). From this perspective, the family business can serve Christ while engaging with common practices — both to the glory of God (Niebuhr, 1951, p. 147). Family businesses embracing this perspective will engage in business activities while retaining the distinctiveness of Christian faith in their businesses. This is a process that will be guided by human discernment and, ultimately, Christ. The main concern for Niehbur was that this view would reduce Christ for business.

Christ and Family Business as Paradox

Those who view Christ and culture in paradoxical relationship see Christianity and family businesses in constant conflict without hope for transformation. From this dualist perspective, Christians experience living as an uneasy coexistence of two realms. The existence of family businesses and the sovereignty of God are acknowledged; yet they cannot integrate. Escaping or isolating from family businesses is impossible, and hence Christians must participate in it, even though such participation involves activities of a sinful world. Under this view, Christians leading family businesses are citizens of two worlds that are at odds with each other and hence must separate between the things of God and the things of the world as these "spheres" have different demands and operate in different ways (Niebhur, 1951, p. 46). It asks the question: Why should Christ and family business integrate?

In this perspective, Christians are in the world of family businesses, but they are not of it. They cannot separate from this world; yet they must not embrace it. This view will comprise businesses with demands and practices of society that may force them to act in ungodly ways. For example, some family businesses face the decision to remain open seven days a week. Under this view, Christians leading family business express their love for Christ and neighbors by conducting business activities for everyone, not just fellow believers. Yet dualists have to privatize their faith and compartmentalise their life. Whatever they do and adhere to at Church does not apply to or influence their family business.

Christ the Transformer of Family Businesses

The fifth and last type is "Christ the transformer of family business," Christ is viewed as a transformer or redeemer of family businesses. In this perspective, Christians acknowledge the sinful culture of family businesses just as dualists do, yet advocate that Christ can redeem or restore such culture. This perspective acknowledges the power of Christ in every Christian to transform organizations (Niebuhr, 1951, p. 193). Under this view, Christians are most concerned with the renewal of family business through a process that brings them into alignment with Christian principles and values. From this perspective, Christians in family businesses would be successful at "interweaving strains of faith in Christ and reasoning performance of duty in society" (Niebuhr, 1951, p. 230). It asks the question: How can Christ not transform family businesses?

In this perspective, Christ is an agent of transformation within the culture of family businesses. Thus Christ redeems the original sinful culture and restores the businesses. For example, Seibert (2001) shows that Christians can be simultaneously transformational (i.e., working to redeem secular systems) and countercultural (i.e., offering an alternative to the prevailing secular model). Family businesses upholding this view will engage in activities with the world, aiming to gradually redeem it through the power of Christ. Such businesses are more likely to engage in practices that display Christian beliefs and actions in their contact with diverse stakeholders (e.g., placing Scripture in their products) aiming to gradually transform the way family business practices are conducted.

A summary of a typology for Christian family businesses is presented in Table 1, which shows that while some family businesses can be perceived as a vehicle by Christians to serve God and spread the Gospel in others, they highlight a struggle between a relationship with God and business.

The Need for Taxonomies of Christian Family Businesses

Empirically derived taxonomies of Christian family businesses are necessary to research them properly. Prior studies argue that family business heterogeneity is related to values of founders or incumbents (Aronoff, 2004; García-Álvarez & López-Sintas, 2001). In newly created or acquired family firms, the inclusion of founder's values is often very palpable and visible, and since founders often stay in the firm for a substantial part of their life, they have a great chance of shaping and transmitting their values in the businesses (García-Álvarez & López-Sintas, 2006). However, subsequent generations may choose to uphold, complement, or divest these instilled values (Discua Cruz et al., 2012). Thus, values and managerial styles are relevant for taxonomies of family businesses.

Recent work by Solomon (2004) analysed six family businesses from a corporate governance approach and focused on how Christianity influenced their legal and environmental compliance, products/services, employee satisfaction, and charitable giving. Solomon suggested that faith integration can be sustained over time and have a positive influence in organizations. He found three orientations in the executives leading these firms: a) a low-key approach in which Christian life and business spheres are separated, b) a preacher style in which Christian values are weaved into business, aiming for stakeholders (non-believers) to embrace Christianity, and c) a servant-stewardship style in which executives placed stakeholders first in their approach to business.

While Solomon's taxonomy is illustrative, it is problematic because it concentrates largely on the CEOs and overlooks other members of the Christian family that were either involved or expected to be involved in the firm as owners, managers, or both. Moreover, corporate governance principles may apply only in certain contexts (Steier, 2009) and particular cases may to not be sufficient to illustrate all Christian businesses (Cafferky, 2005).

Furthermore, non-family Christian managers may influence the decisions family owners take, shaping the strategy of an organization. Also, non-Christian family businesses that draw insights from the Bible in business activities, through managers or influential stakeholders, may also experience a transformation in the values that guide the organization. Christian principles and values may weave their way into a non-Christian business unconsciously through new believers (e.g., Christian successors or appointed CEOs) changing the way biblical integration in business happens. Conversely, some family businesses that were founded with a strong Christian background may eventually be transformed into secular organizations by those who control or manage the firm. These changes can be better understood when we study the relationships between those involved in the business. Thus, we should be concerned with how and why values and beliefs in Christian family businesses come to be shared and taken for granted and how they affect the business (Schein, 2004).

Further attention needs to be paid to those that lead, or aim to lead, family businesses — that is, founders, incumbents, and those who may succeed them. A starting point to untangle the role that both Christian and non-Christians have on a family firm may be to utilize accepted models of family businesses. The three circles model (Tagiuri & Davis, 1992) remains the most accepted and popular graphical representation of family businesses (Gimeno et al., 2010). It portrays three overlapping and interdependent groups: the family members, the owners of the business, and those who manage the business (Figure 1). The model is used to understand the source of interpersonal conflicts, role dilemmas, priorities, and boundaries. It shows the influence that individual roles and objectives may have in a family business at a particular point in time. Hence, it may help one understand the influence of Christian actors in the overlapping dimensions when, for example, decisions are made about integrating biblical principles in business. Other widely accepted models can help one understand the influence of time in overlapping dimensions (e.g., Gersick et al., 1997) and the complexity that family firms face over time (Gimeno et al., 2010).

Further studies are needed to elucidate the process by which Christian values become taken for granted and integrated in family businesses. Researchers can begin

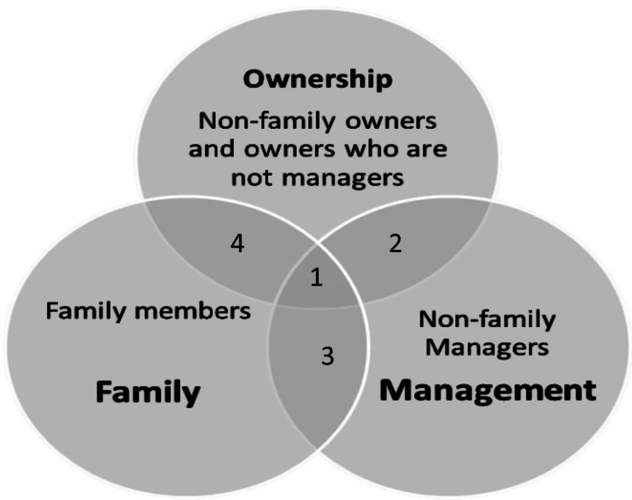
Table 1: Christ and Family Business Typologies

Niebhur type	Main View	View of Family Businesses	Christian Approach to Family Businesses
Christ Against Family Businesses	Separation	Family businesses represent sin and corruption of the world.	Christians should remain loyal to Christ, conduct activities only with believers and decline engaging in family business practices.
Christ and Family Businesses in Paradox	Dualism	There is a dual track, a divide between family businesses, which belong to a sinful world, and Christian values and principles.	Christians can engage in family businesses practices without embracing them. A clear separation between business practices and Christian values must be kept.
Christ Above Family Businesses	Synthesis	Family businesses are a result of culture of a sinful world. Family businesses should be made to conform to Christ and can serve as instruments to show Christian values and principles but they can never reach the sublime nature of Christ.	Christians can attempt to develop mechanisms that show Christian values in practices such as succession and governance. Family businesses may be shaped to reflect Christian values and principles.
Christ Transformer of Family Businesses	Restoration	Family businesses are part of a sinful world, yet they are God's creation. Family businesses are an area that can be transformed to glorify Christ and uphold Christian values and principles.	Christians must participate in family businesses as such businesses can be transformed through their engagement. Christians can engage in a process to change the nature of family businesses.
Christ of Family Businesses	Accommodation	Family businesses are an expression of God's creation, there is no need to criticize or change their practices. Family businesses can accommodate practices that align with Christian values and principles.	Christians should participate in the family business system and engage on its practices. Family businesses practices are accommodated or become part of the culture of the business.

by asking: What are the patterns of behavior that differentiate Christian family businesses? How do diverse Christian actors shape the way family businesses evolve? Are patterns of behavior the same in global contexts?*. By recognizing and utilizing "types" and "taxonomies," fresh and contextualized insights of Christian family businesses can be developed.

SUCCESSION IN CHRISTIAN FAMILY BUSINESSES

Figure 1: Three Circles Model, adapted from Tagiuri and Davis, 1992



1. Owners, managers, family members
2. Non-family owner, manager
3. Family managers
4. Family owners

The whole sense of the biblical narrative is about succession. The promises to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David are about succession. In fact, the Jewish nation is a distinct group of people because of this future orientation*. Therefore, it makes sense that households would have the same orientation towards succession. The Bible is clear about our finite existence and how meaningless pursuits are when there are no successors to take them forward (Ecclesiastes 4: 7-8). We see, through the accounts of characters in the Bible such as Joseph, Joshua, and David, how transitions and expectations impact the Jewish nation. Through the Bible, we appreciate how offspring succeed their parents in leadership positions. There are too many accounts to explore them all in this paper; yet we can appreciate the relevance of a Christian perspective of succession in the family business.

Intergenerational succession is a core aspect of family business research. Succession is a process, not an event, and one that both Christian and non-Christian family businesses must eventually face and cope with. Compared to non-family firms, succession in family businesses is a process that reflects the intention, shared by family members, to transfer business ownership, leadership, and management from one generation to the next (Davis & Harveston, 1998). It highlights the expectation, or realization, of family succession in business (Brockhaus, 2004; Miller et al., 2003). Compared to the formalized routines and detailed procedures found in most non-family firms, succession in family businesses favors a more personal, direct approach focused on relationships (Cabrera-Suárez et al., 2001). It is a complex undertaking that involves multiple family members (Lansberg, 1999) and diverse stakeholders (Fox et al., 1997). Intergenerational succession is relevant not only to nations but to individual firms (Johannisson et al., 2007).

Traditionally, succession in family businesses is not straightforward. It is often perceived as a challenge because family objectives might not coincide with business objectives over time. For example, the absence of heirs, life stage incompatibilities, death, misaligned objectives from incumbents and successors (e.g., lack of interest by successors, resistance to relinquish control by founders), successor incompetence, gender and family feuds (e.g., sibling rivalry) complicate the process (Discua Cruz et al., 2010; Vera & Dean, 2005; Brockhaus, 2004; Handler, 1994). Such tensions may lead to business failure or to a business no longer being controlled by family (Haveman & Khaire, 2004). To dissipate conflict, succession can result in the fragmentation of the original business, the creation of a new one (Rosa et al, 2014), or the pruning of family members from the business (Lambrecht et al., 2008). Thus, succession in family businesses has considerable potential to be disruptive (Fox et al., 1997).

The success of this fragile process is mostly associated with the preparation of incoming generations, positive relationships between incumbents and successors, and timing (Morris et al., 1997; Dyck et al., 2002). Such complexity suggests that every family in business may approach succession in a different manner involving emotions, family ties, and interaction (Handler, 1990). Yet while most family businesses undergo similar emotional processes during succession, the outcome may be completely different from what was originally expected (Dunn, 1999).

The aim of business founders or incumbents through succession is often the perpetuation of values, idiosyncratic approaches to business, or a long-term intention for a family to remain in business. Traditionally, the succession process is aimed to build knowledge about how things are done and for potential successors to understand the values and principles of founders (Steier, 2001). Family business founders or owner-managers may concentrate on a lengthy and often informal socialization or interaction processes to pass down deep firm-related tacit knowledge and values (Cabrera-Suárez et al., 2001; Discua Cruz et al., 2012). The intention is to allow commonly held values to establish a sense of identity, guide decisions, and facilitate commitment to the organization (Duh et al., 2010). Hence founders have a crucial impact in the values that a business, and those involved in its operation, will uphold over time.

The Bible makes clear the importance of transmitting the Christian faith to those closest to us. As Christians, we have a responsibility to share the Gospel with our family (1 Timothy 5), and we know the importance of family worship (Deuteronomy 22: 12; 18). We are called to teach our children biblical values and principles (Deuteronomy 11: 19-20; Ephesians 6: 4). Proverbs 22:6 is authoritative on the impact such transmission has. Parents and grandparents can instill a faithful identity in children through teaching and by example (Genesis 5: 26: 7-11; 2 Timothy 1: 5), by sharing about spiritual blessings (Exodus 10:2) and by guiding relationships at home (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Through the life of Daniel, we appreciate how such upbringing can benefit a business and even a nation for generations. Furthermore, the Bible tells us the impact that role modelling has (1 Kings 15-16). Even when mixed beliefs exist within a household, faithful parents impact the values instilled in the children (Acts 16:1). Later documents of the New Testament show how branches of early Christianity invested in the socialization of Christian children (Barclay, 1997). In essence, the Bible points out the importance of instilling Christian values and beliefs so that those close to us become part of the body of faith.

Therefore, Christianity has an impact on family business succession. We know that Christians in business aspire to leave a legacy (Nash, 2004); therefore founders may consider Christianity as an important determinant in succession (Dunn, 1999). The Christian faith was designed to be transmitted through role models and mentorship (Mays & Mason, 2010), and these are strengthened by the close level of interaction in family business. Several studies address the process of socialization in Christian family businesses (Solomon, 2004; Cafferky, 2012; Redmer 2010, 2008, 2007). These studies pose that Christian values may become taken for granted over time through communal activities and rituals, sermons, worship, teaching, sharing, and communion both at home and at work (e.g., R. W. Beckett Corporation: Redmer, 2007). Socialization into Christian values impacts stakeholders within the organization also and may challenge those who intend to change the *status quo.* Conversely, while some family businesses may uphold a set of Christian values for a time, change may occur from family and business dynamics. Discua Cruz et al. (2012) show that a continuity of patterns instilled by founders will be ultimately shaped by the objectives of incoming generations. Therefore, Christian values might be challenged by incoming generations and result in organizations losing their sense of being (e.g., In-and-Out case: Cafferky, 2012). The continuity of the values, beliefs, and goals of founder generations are at the discretion of those taking over the family business (Mitchell et al., 2009). While Christianity may influence the process of succession, there is no guarantee that Christian values instilled by the founders will be continued by subsequent generations.

Further studies are needed to explore the factors that influence the succession process in Christian family firms (De Massis et al., 2008). This research could draw upon succession models (e.g., Handler, 1990; Dyck et al., 2002) and explore their validity and relevance in Christian family businesses. Relevant questions to explore are: How is succession approached in different types of Christian family businesses? Do traditional succession models hold? What are the key factors that influence succession in diverse types of Christian family businesses? How are successors chosen in diverse types of Christian family businesses? What biblical knowledge is transmitted in the succession process of different types of Christian family businesses and for what purpose?

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN CHRISTIAN FAMILY BUSINESS RESEARCH

Christian family businesses need to be explored through a variety of theoretical lenses. Chua et al. (2003), for example, suggest drawing on theories from outside the family business field, such as economics, history, management, psychology, sociology, and so forth. Yet many current theories of management are not applied, and this may surface weaknesses in current theories and give rise to more relevant ones (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005). Either ground-breaking advances or incremental theoretical contributions are possible (Reay & Whetten, 2011). In this paper, we will illustrate this by reviewing two theories that have received attention in family business studies through a Christian perspective: agency theory and stewardship theory (Chrisman et al., 2010).

Agency Theory

Agency theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Jensen & Meckling, 1976) is useful in understanding the relationships and interaction between owners and managers of family businesses (Chua et al., 2003). Under this view, managers follow self-interests that are often distinct from those of owners. Agency problems arise from the notion that managers of other people's money or assets cannot be expected to watch over them with the same interest as they would watch their own (Smith, 1776). Agency theory "assumes self-interested, boundedly rational actors, information asymmetry and goal conflict to motivate principals (i.e., FB owners) to devise mechanisms to monitor and control agents' actions (i.e. non-family managers)" (Sapienza et al., 2000, p. 336). In order to align objectives and monitor behavior, control mechanisms such as rewards and sanctions are introduced. These remedy conflicts and disagreements at the expense of organizational costs.

While the common perception may be that agency theory emerged largely from socioeconomic developments, the relationships between agency principles and the Bible are quite complementary. Cafferky (2009) points out that the basic ideas of agency theory can be found in the Bible and traced to the ancient Hebrew and Roman concepts of employer-employee relationship. The close relationship between agency principles and the Bible mirrors, in many ways, the description of the relationship between God and mankind as described in the Scriptures (Proffitt, 2000, p. 16). Agency, as a social relationship, is a relationship to Creation (Cafferky, 2009, p. 9). The Bible provides ample evidence of the way agency relationships are created (either implicitly or explicitly), agency powers exercised, and agency relationships terminated (Barlow & Ursey, 2000). We are agents for our brothers and sisters in Christ (Barlow & Ursey, 2000, p. 8). In an analogy to a family business, Barlow & Ursey (2000) state that "God has taken his children into the family firm; we have been made associates in the family business....we are ambassadors for Christ, in terms related to business, we are his agents" (p. 6). In essence, we work as agents and as signs of God's redemptive work, becoming clear expressions of his influence.

Yet, we are reminded in Romans 3:10 of our sinful nature that abuses such relationships. Jesus exemplifies the principal/agent relationship with his disciples and grounds a fundamental perspective on agency relationships (Matthew 22: 37-39). The parables provided by Jesus, which proclaim the Kingdom of God, also allow us to appreciate agency problems (e.g., the Parables of the Servants and the Talents in Luke 19: 11-26 and Matthew 25:14-28 and the Parable of the Shrewd Manager in Luke 16: 1-9). Based on biblical texts, Cafferky (2009) underscores that self-interested agents and self-interested principals are willing to use asymmetrical knowledge and deception to gain an advantage over each other (p. 9). Human nature makes us naturally selfish and followers of self-interests, and hence the biblical teaching goes in line with the theory which premises that humans naturally seek their own good (Cafferky, 2012). Therefore the complementary nature of agency principles and the Bible can transpire to the study of relationships between owners and managers in Christian family businesses.

Christian owner-managers are called to view relationships with agents through a different perspective. Those who control family businesses are accountable first to God and also to employees, suppliers, customers, and the community (Cafferky, 2012). Family business owners face agency costs when dealing with theft, motivation, salary compensation, benefit provisions, and ethics (Cohn & Friedman, 2002). Thus, rewards and sanctions have to be designed and enforced, even when activities and their outcomes are not observable. Owners and managers may be constantly called to decide whether to trust people or not in doing their job (Johnson, 1957). Rather than designing intricate monitoring mechanisms, they should make it a norm to trust and treat employees well, to be fair and straightforward, and to compensate or sanction appropriately (Cohn & Friedman, 2002). While disagreements may occur, a basic confidence in agents is needed, coupled with a continued effort to judge where competencies lie — without neglecting appropriate sanctions if necessary (Johnson, 1957). The optimal solution is when participants can be trusted, particularly moral standards for employer-employee relationships extracted from the Scriptures are adhered to (Cohn & Friedman, 2002, p. 955). Biblical obligations, such as welfare and compensation, often beyond legal expectations, must be a concern for those who aim for business continuity. Owners and managers should monitor and correct in patience, gentleness, love, humility, and wisdom but not with harshness (Cafferky, 2012, p. 455). Thus we may find a different perspective in those controlling Christian family businesses as employers.

The Bible is clear about the duties that employees have, as agents, in the agency relationship. Based on biblical texts and examples, Hill (1991) highlights tensions between Christians and their employers. Based on Matthew 22:37-39, Hill argues that Christian employees must simultaneously be cognizant of responsibilities to three entities: God, employers, and neighbor (which includes customers, creditors, suppliers, community, and even competitors). Most notably, Hill presented two paradigms: the submissive and the purist model. In the former, agents place a strong emphasis on loyalty and obedience to their principals, accommodating mandates which often compromises their Christian values. In the latter, agents refuse to compromise their Christian values to accommodate employers, confronting rather than yielding to what they perceive as immoral. Yet even within the purist model, there are variations that show the diverse responses that Christians may have towards employers. Thus we may find diverse employee types (Chan et al., 2010) in family businesses.

Ideal agents in the Bible are aware that agency is communal; they look after a community of stakeholders when they work diligently and faithfully when they care for the employers' assets as if they were their own and report honestly on their status (Cafferky, 2012). Employees, as agents, not acting faithfully undermine not only the image and character of God, they also undermine the community order created by God (Cafferky, 2009, p. 9). Employees that have been in family businesses for long "must not slack off and find ways to minimize their productivity" (Cohn & Friedman, 2002, p. 961). Hill (1991) suggests that transposed to our time, Peter first taught that Christian agents ought not to compromise their ethical standards to benefit principals; like Christ they should attempt to love God and their neighbors, expect harassment for upholding their values, avoid retaliation, and seek vindication from God.

The Bible shows that while family bonds are strong and a reliable resource, they do not necessarily guarantee fair play or unchallenged loyalty in business (Gen 25-27; Gen 29:1- 20; Gen 30:25-43; Gen 31:1-19). The narrative of Laban and Jacob, shows that while some close family members may fulfil many agreements for the welfare of family and business, others aim to take advantage in business. Cafferky (2009, 2012), based on biblical texts, highlights the expectation of care, loyalty, and duty expected of family members to look after wealth building assets for their families; yet at the same time warns of agency problems. Hence, while we may automatically expect that family members in business may equate to higher trust and thus the elimination of agency costs compared to non-family members, we cannot expect "silence" of agency issues, even in the most closely-held Christian family firm.

A Christian perspective in family business does not suggest that there will be no agency issues. Rather it is the approach to agency issues by both principals and agents that is expected to be different. Both family business owners and employees are responsible for what is being entrusted because of the legitimacy and authority of God (Cafferky, 2012). Seibert (2001) suggests that owners and managers sharing the Christian faith would help minimize agency costs as they are intrinsically not challenging each other's views. There is evidence that those behind "Christian" firms aim for good relationships with employees (Ibrahim & Angelidis, 2005). Further studies addressing the principal-agent relationship can help us understand how different types of Christian family businesses operate. For example: Do rewards, incentives, and sanctions differ in different types of Christian family businesses compared to their secular counterparts? Based on the previous discussion, the following proposition is presented:

> P1. Agency problems in Christian family businesses are more likely to be minimized when principal (owners) and agents (managers, employees) share the Christian faith.

Stewardship Theory

Stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997; Donaldson & Davis, 1991) assumes a relationship-based system with a focus on non-financial objectives in contrast to a self-centered and opportunistic behavior highlighted in agency theory. Under this perspective individuals are "stewards" of a firm, prone to pursuing collective goals and relying on trust as a control mechanism (Davis et al., 1997). Thus, managers (either family members or not) act as stewards — seeking to protect the assets of the family business rather than pursuing interests that maximize their own personal gain. This perspective highlights that motivation is based on intrinsic and intangible rewards and that, when individuals have high levels of organizational identification, managers will not experience goal conflict (Lee & O'Neill, 2003, p. 214). Stewardship theory has proven helpful in explaining organization-serving behavior in family firms (Corbetta & Salvato, 2004). Reduced agency costs and stewardship attitudes may explain why some family businesses outperform their non-family counterparts (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2006). Stewardship of the family assets helps fulfil the needs of the business and family over time (Discua Cruz et al., 2013). Yet a Christian perspective on stewardship theory cannot be overlooked.

The principles of stewardship theory have implications for both secular and Christian-lead organizations (Jeavons, 1994; McCuddy & Pirie, 2007). From a limited secular perspective, this theory reflects the accountability of owner/managers and employees to the shareholders for preserving and enhancing the value of the company's assets (McCuddy & Pirie, 2007). Jeavons (1994) argues that the idea of stewardship in the contemporary era is narrow, concentrating on economic efficiency. The traditional view of stewardship in family businesses shares more ground with an economic perspective of stewardship which focuses on financial assets, physical facilities, products and services, systems, and processes to benefit several generations (McCuddy & Pirie, 2007, p. 962).

Yet the biblical roots of stewardship principles call for more than just economic prudence. While we have been made agents of God on this earth through the Great Commission, we do not find the word "agents" in the Bible. What we find are servants, stewards, messengers, ambassadors, rules, elders, and bishops (Cafferky, 2012, p. 455). God made the whole earth so it's all his, and we are the caretakers of all he has created (Deuteronomy 10:14; 1 Chronicles 29:1; Psalm 24:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:26; Psalm 95:3-5). The stewardship concept in Christian literature reflects the "balancing of interests" of responsibility to God and to fellow man (Rossouw, 1994). The Bible highlights accountability, which is communal and relational in nature (Cafferky, 2012). As Cafferky (2012) advocates, Christians are stewards of committed resources by the legitimacy and authority of God.

Under a Christian perspective, the role of stewards in family businesses implies a more proactive role — perhaps even risks — in cultivating resources such as human, social, and financial capital for more than just an organization (Jeavons, 1994, p. 115). Liang (2011) successfully shows that managers acting as stewards appear to capitalize on resource management when a) serving the owner's best interests in the long haul, b) seeking to maximize the real (vs. nominal) worth of the resources in trust, c) saving strategically for a better, albeit uncertain, future, and d) investing in relationships and building equity as shrewd counsel and trusted executor for the principal. We are called to make an adequate management and leverage of resources at our disposal (Luke 14:27-32). The story of Joseph provides vivid accounts of a manager with a duty of care, accountability, loyalty, and selflessness when managing an organization, whether it was a business or a country (Genesis, 39; 41; 47). While an owner/manager is given rights and powers to use resources by earthly laws of contract and sales, he/she is responsible to others for the actions and policies of the enterprise (Van Duzer et al., 2006). We may expect the management and enhancement of resources, entrusted by God and aimed for his glory, to reflect interaction with many others.

Recent studies argue that a stewardship perspective in business reflects personal, social, economic, and environmental aspects, which are in tune with Christian principles (McCuddy & Pirie, 2007). These aspects encompass a wider set of relationships — customers, employees, suppliers, and the environment (Ibrahim & Angelidis, 2005). The application of stewardship principles, based in the Bible, is essentially a communal activity (Rossouw, 1994; Cafferky, 2012), only unlocked through interaction. These studies highlight that businesses driven by Christian principles may exhibit organizational relationships typified by trust, which reduces complexity and uncertainty when working together (Smith, 1999). Nevertheless, we cannot assume that all parties will uphold Christian stewardship principles in family businesses.

Future studies are needed to explore whether stewardship values provide distinctiveness to the way resources are accessed and leveraged in diverse types of Christian family businesses over time. Further studies, which may include complementary theoretical lenses, such as the resource based view (Barney, 1996), may provide solid evidence of the true nature of stewardship. Further questions can explore the impact of stewardship in the process of succession in Christian family businesses. Based on the previous discussion, the following proposition is presented:

> P2. Compared to secular counterparts, stewardship principles in Christian family businesses are more likely to be reflected in communal activity and go beyond the efficient management of existing resources over time.

In summary, many of the assumptions of mainstream management theories used in family business research, including agency and stewardship perspectives, can be traced back to the Scriptures. Further studies are needed to elucidate how these theories play out in diverse types of Christian family businesses.*

RESEARCH METHODS

We should never assume that a particular method of research, quantitative or qualitative, is intrinsically better than the other when studying Christian family businesses. The relevance of a particular method depends primarily on the research question and the use of appropriate research design methods (Bryman, 2004). Both qualitative and quantitative studies can contribute strongly to family business research (Reay & Whetten, 2011). On one hand, studies addressing "how" and "why" questions are relevant when untangling the complexities of underlying processes (Dyer, 2003). On the other hand, survey data and statistical methods allow answering the "what" type of questions (Westhead & Cowling, 1998; Sharma, 2006). Both approaches can help study diverse research paths within the family business field (Sharma, 2006). A Christian perspective when conducting research has been illustrated (Beadles III, 1998; Lynn & Wallace, 2001). New and emerging paradigms suggest that both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used at different levels of analysis when researching Christian family businesses (Woodhead, 2009).

Qualitative methods provide a fuller picture about how and why things occur in family businesses, representing the full range of experiences (Carney & Gedajlovic, 2003; Nordqvist et al., 2009). Such methods capture diverse perspectives and provide a more valid explanation of what is going on (Roscoe et al., 2013; Discua Cruz et al., 2012; Rosa, 1998). Studies relying on qualitative methods have detected the relevance of Christianity in family businesses (Dunn, 1999) and help us understand how people apply their faith in everyday activities (Benett, 2011). Further, qualitative studies are needed to provide an in-depth understanding of how and why Christianity influences economic activity (Werner, 2008) and how diverse dynamics in interrelated dimensions unfold when integrating Christianity into family businesses. There is also great potential in conducting ethnographic studies that can showcase diverse types of Christian family businesses. Yet, while testable propositions can be derived from the detailed and in-depth studies of family firms, we must be aware that access to detailed information is often difficult to obtain (Winter et al., 1998; Handler, 1989).

Quantitative studies often face the issue that Christian businesses do not exist, as such, in large databases (Ibrahim et al., 1991). As Ibrahim and colleagues suggest, while some lists may exist, it is hard to determine how representative these lists are. There is not a single estimate of the number of these firms which highlights their newness for researchers. Furthermore, Werner (2008) argues that quantitative studies concentrating on Christian managers have been inconclusive in their results, partly explained by use of different samples and attitudinal measures. This allows research findings to be phrased in only general terms (e.g., negative, positive, weak relationship). Recent reviews suggest that there is a need for fuller reporting of sample characteristics, descriptive statistics, and more sophisticated and stringent statistical analysis techniques (Debicki et al., 2009). Further detailed understanding behind why things occur in quantitative studies is needed (Litz et al., 2012). Nevertheless, new studies highlight the importance of considering more ample databases and diverse contexts to conduct quantitative research (Chan et al., 2010). Measurements guidelines are debated as the field advances (Pearson & Lumpkin, 2011). In essence, both qualitative and quantitative studies can further understanding of Christian family businesses.

THE RELEVANCE OF NATIONAL CONTEXTS

Nowadays, we know the impact of spreading the message of Jesus around the world (Matthew, 28:19; Luke 13:29) when people appreciate Christianity in almost every latitude (Woodhead, 2004). Yet we also know that not all contexts may be supportive or embracing of Christianity. Moreover, Woodhead et al., (2002) pose that the center of gravity of Christianity appears to be shifting: in some contexts its influence is on the decline while in others it is growing. Furthermore, although similarities in Christian beliefs and practices exist (Werner, 2008), strong contrasts are detected even within same country settings and across borders (Woodhead, 2004). Every Christian family business is embedded in a society that is associated with particular sets of values, attitudes, laws, and business practices. This suggests that we will most likely find different types of Christian family businesses across the world that have survived, adapted, or challenged such contexts.

As we may expect, findings that originate in particular contexts might only apply to some family firms and not apply to others as values, goals, and objectives vary even within or across national cultures. A family's (and firm's) external environmental context (that is, cultural, demographic, economic, educational, legal, and social) can shape family firm formation, diversity, and development (Howorth et al., 2010). Family businesses have been found to survive and thrive through the adapting nature of families in diverse contexts throughout time (Colli & Rose, 2008; Gupta & Levenburg, 2010). Thus, as Colli (2003) remarks – "the notion that family businesses remain the same in every place and across time is an incorrect generalisation" (p. 74). The national context may affect the way Christian practices are conceptualised. Werner (2008) found that the legal frameworks and social structures in some countries might lead owner/managers not to consider particular practices because the law or cultural practices already covers them (e.g. trading on Sunday). In some contexts, families sustain a Christian subculture that protects against toxic aspects of popular culture (Woodhead, 2004). Christian principles and values have served as a counteractive force when facing prevalent unethical behavior in some contexts (Wong, 2008). Cross country comparisons may elucidate further the distinctive characteristics of Christian family businesses across contexts. A broad starting point is asking: Do Christian family businesses behave the same around the world?

CONCLUSION

This paper shows that a Christian perspective provides a fertile ground for research in family businesses. It highlights that there is a growing importance of relating the Christian understanding of reality to the reality of family businesses. There are important connections between Christian concepts and family businesses that need to be explored. The focus of analysis in Christian family businesses must go beyond the brick-and-mortar business dwellings and revolve around the main actors behind the business. Christian family businesses are influenced by dynamic processes involving founders, incumbents, stakeholders, and successors.

Ignoring the heterogeneous nature of Christian family businesses can only ever be a partial representation of reality. Further study of Christian family businesses across the world will help illuminate how (whether) the adherence to Christianity hinders or facilitates their development and continuity. By opening up and questioning principles that underpin family business research, we can then address sceptics (Stewart, 2010) and improve our understanding of biblical integration (Smith, 2010) in the most prevalent business form worldwide.

ENDNOTE

1 All Bible references come from the King James Version.

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