# THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION, COGNITIVE FRAMEWORKS AND COMMERCE: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND BUSINESS

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**ABSTRACT**

The intersection of Christianity and business may represent a contemporary paradox forming an agenda for debate, discussion, and theological and ethical explorations. This paper briefly surveys two opposing views on the intersection between Christianity and business, whilst exploring some of the current thinking around the basic tenets of a Christian theology of work and commerce, and finally proposes the possible positive contributions of such a Christian theological perspective of work and commerce on the cognitive framework of managers and business leaders.

## INTRODUCTION

The intersection of Christianity and business may represent a contemporary paradox forming an agenda for debate, discussion, and theological and ethical explorations. The topic has the quality of a paradox because there is evidence that business is badly in need of Christianity to clean up its ethical lapses, bringing much needed humility to corporate suites, and to refocus organizations' attention back to organizational accountability.[1] Many have echoed this call for active Christian faith in the workplace,[2] suggesting that a call to business has always been part of the greater vocation to holiness and piety in both the Hebrew and Christian traditions[3] and that the incarnational character of Christianity demands a faithful presence and ethical response in all spheres of human existence.[4] However, some seem to hold the view that there is scant direct reference to contemporary concepts of commerce in the Christian scriptures, that Christianity and business make conflicting claims on the commitment and behaviors of people, and that since the two have separate desired outcomes, they should best remain distinct and separate from one another.[5] This paper briefly surveys these two opposing views on the intersection between Christianity and business, whilst exploring some of the current thinking around the basic tenets of a Christian theology of work and commerce, and finally proposes the possible positive contributions of such a Christian theological perspective of work and commerce on the cognitive framework of managers and business leaders.

## CHRISTIANITY DISCONNECTED FROM BUSINESS

The arguments for viewing these two areas of thought and action as separate often point to

passages such as the 21st chapter of the Gospel of Matthew (21:12-17) where Jesus drives the moneychangers and merchants out of the temple, claiming that their activities made the temple in the words of the Hebrew prophet (Jeremiah 7:11) a "den of robbers."[6] But reading this reported event within the social and cultural context of the original recipients of the Matthean text proposes an alternate reading.[7] Rather than viewing all commercial retailers as "robbers", Matthew's Jesus seems to be enraged because the presence of these merchants robs the temple of its intended purpose as house of prayer for all nations. This act, however, can be interpreted as Jesus emphasizing the necessity of placing the social interests of all[8] ahead of the material self-interests of the moneychangers and merchants.[9] Indeed, if people are driven in their actions by two possible underlying motives - one termed the self-interest motive; the other the welfare motive - then Christianity advocates focus on the welfare of others, while business concerns advocate focus on self interests. Adam Smith stated that business leaders should follow their self-interests, and the interests of society would benefit automatically from these actions. As Jacob Kamm[10] points out, it is interesting to note that the self-interest notions assumed the dominating position; while the welfare motive was subservient in Smith's eyes. Others point to Jesus' statements in Matthew 19: 24 that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven as evidence of the fundamental conflicts between Christianity and business.[11] Indeed, some suggest that capitalist economies in Western societies are not called to serve any particular social interests, but serve as vehicles for maximizing individual preferences and self-interests efficiently.[12] Their relative success may have engendered a belief that the market will encompass and serve human values without any socially directed agenda. The result has been a general trust in the market for meeting human needs of any kind — including such common social needs as health care and education. Some have noted a rather cynical historical connection between Christianity and business, noting that churches and other benefactors in the US may have conveniently looked the other way when

some of the major wealth generating families such as Rockefeller and McCormick were employing questionable labor practices to develop wealth that was then distributed to denominations and local churches.[13]

Some suggest that there may be a fundamental conflict in the Christian view of man and the free agent style employee needed and valued in the information age workplace.[14] In this case free agency refers to employee independence and willingness to take personal responsibility for managing the terms of their current and future employment. In this context, employees are motivated by their desires and needs for a satisfactory career.[15] Packer[16] also asserts that free agents engage in self-directed learning that is primarily career specific and directed at competencies essential for employability and career success. If employers recognize these qualities in their talented employees, it may enhance a company's competitive position. In these definitions, a primary employee attribute is that of free will. It may be impossible for free agency to emerge, evolve, and flourish without the existence of free will.[17] These perspectives assume that humans can enhance themselves and may be seen from some Christian perspectives as representing secular liberalism where man's autonomous self seeks liberation from moral authority to achieve greater feats of self-actualization and maximize individual preferences.[18] However, Christian theologians tend to highlight that human inclination to do evil is inevitable and that the evil in man is a consequence of his unwillingness to acknowledge his dependence (on God and others), to accept his finiteness and to admit his insecurity. This evil nature is present and inevitable for man. For example, Luke's Gospel (16:15) records that Jesus stated that what is highly valued among men is detestable to God. The Christian belief system, therefore, seems based on a doctrine that although man is created in the "image of God," every human being is inclined to evil. In Christianity, all aspects of human existence, may be defective and are in need of redemption and transformation. Consequently, any treatment or technique to improve human abilities and motivate people may be considered suspect by some Christians.[19] This perspective runs contrary to the

concept that employees have free will and can develop higher levels of abilities and judgment, can work unsupervised, or can be trusted to do things that enhance the value of their employer.

In addition, historical Christianity often tended to emphasize authority figures as the moral source and compass of what is right and what is wrong. The implication seems to have been that free agents need to be accepting of being embedded in traditional, hierarchical command and control management structures. However, employees who are self-directed learners tend to desire greater autonomy and less supervision in part because this increased freedom is tacit recognition that their organization values their

people can focus on higher needs, including their own individual spirituality. Spirituality in this sense has been described as interrelationship of the organization, its employees, its products and processes, and the world at large or a collective humanity in all major spiritual and wisdom traditions.[22] For many of the others who assume workplace spirituality is a collective phenomenon, the qualifier of "in organizations" seems to trigger a change from individual (outside of work) to collective (at work). The following often cited definition suggests that workplace spirituality can be either active or passive and that these supposedly contradictory elements must be blended together in order to define it: "Workplace spirituality is a

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independent efforts. Hanson[20] has suggested that the belief by some Protestant Christian theologians that techniques to improve mankind and the values which underlie them must be treated with suspicion is counterproductive not only to human development but also to contemporary management approaches.

A curious middle ground has recently emerged that asserts it is desirable for business and work to have a spiritual nature, but not contain elements that are explicitly Christian. In other words, spirituality in business and work is good, but religion in either realm is undesirable. Some researchers tend to assume that workplace spirituality is an individual concept, others consider it a collective concept, and a few may describe it as having both facets.[21] Some argue that as companies and individuals become more prosperous,

framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy."[23] This definition attempts to both reconcile and incorporate passive aspects of workplace spirituality such as beliefs and rituals as well as the dynamic aspects such as skills, resources, and capabilities which evolve and develop over time, and interact with the external environment.

Other definitions of workplace spirituality include self-work immersion, which seems to describe bringing one's whole self or one's spirituality to the workplace.[24] Others use terms like holism, wholeness, or core spiritual energy to focus on an employee's inner life related to the soul and accessed through practices such as

meditation, self-reflection and prayer. Workplace spirituality is described by some as interconnectedness, which may be simply the feeling of being part of something bigger than the self. Interconnectedness suggests to some researchers that work organizations are people's most significant community. Therefore, the salient construct of interconnectedness is the depth of relationships at the workplace.[25] Another related approach to defining or visualizing workplace spirituality is self-actualization. Self-actualization has been described as occurring when an employee's spirit meshes with his/her mind via work, resulting in development of the full potential of the individual.[26] There is also evidence that workplace spirituality should be considered a phenomenon that is impacted by teaching. Teachers and organizational leaders appear to be able to take actions that affect spirituality, and workplace spirituality is related with individual development.[27] These perspectives suggest that spirituality originates from the inside of an individual. They clearly separate spirituality in organizations from higher, transcendent powers such as God. Proponents of this view suggest that spirituality is an inner search for meaning or fulfillment that may be undertaken by anyone regardless of religion. Following this perspective far enough has led some to suggest spirituality arises from individual beliefs or connection with a larger concept whether it be family, friends, a work organization, science and technology, or even the Communist Revolution.[28]

While there is wide-spread agreement about the desirability of spirituality, there seems to be substantial concern about the possible connection of spirituality with religions or religious orientation.[29] In part this fear may reflect the effects of social categorization. If a person believes and practices certain approaches to God or a higher power that are different from others, the differences may be emphasized and form the basis for stereotyping and status differentiation. Fear of discussing such differences and in-group/out-group memberships are often seen as wedges between groups in organizations. Hicks[30] argues that the scholars of leadership, possibly in efforts to define away conflict, have failed to acknowledge the religious connection of spirituality. Likewise academics may have adopted the mind-set that if

a practice or belief is controversial, it is probably religious and not spiritual. Others suggest that if spirituality is viewed through the lens of religion, those who do not share in a denominational tradition might be excluded. The avoidance of connecting organizational spirituality with God also may be grounded in fears that adherence to a religious orientation can lead persons in power to assert that a particular company, faith, or even nation is somehow better or worthier than another.[31] Those who advocate a view that spirituality need not include a connection with God point out that people can participate in activities of a religious institution without having a spiritual experience, and that it is possible to have a spiritual experience outside an environment of religion. Fry[32] has suggested that the common bridge between spirituality and religion is altruistic love, or a regard for or devotion to the interests of others. From this perspective, spirituality is necessary for religion but religion is not necessary for spirituality.

While Christianity - or any other religion - may be viewed by some as an undesirable inclusion in considering spirituality in business and working life, it is also clear that religious terms have been appropriated and used symbolically in business organizational communications possibly to build both employee loyalty and consumer confidence.[33] Discussion of organizational culture often describes the essential use of symbols to convey meaning to employees in an effort to build commitment to the organization, not unlike a religious connection.[34] Writers speak of spirituality in work organizations and leadership thereof, noting that employees will be happier and more productive if they see work as a calling, deriving spiritual growth from accomplishing more and better things in business.[35] One view is that the workplace may have replaced the church as a communal and supportive center for many individuals, suggesting therefore that organizations need to offer an environment where workers can bring their whole selves, including both work oriented and spiritual aspects.[36]

This described schism between the Church and business world is not limited to the world of commerce, researchers have shown that this disconnect is also found within the church.[37] Nash

and McLennan[38] propose "three primary tipping points in church culture that are the sources of the business-church estrangement": (a) a history of non-engagement with business, (b) a vague but deep ideological hostility towards capitalism and corporate culture, and finally (c) the traditional practice of locating spirituality in contexts apart from the marketplace. In stark contrast to the described perspectives on the perceived dissonance between Christianity and business stand robust and developed theological traditions of work as worship and the marketplace as a context for the establishment of God's righteous and compassionate reign.[39]

## CHRISTIANITY CONNECTED WITH BUSINESS

The view that Christianity and business are or should be closely linked, includes historic and developed theologies of work and commerce,[40] a call to live out the faith tenets and ethical injunctions of Christianity,[41] a view that not only should Christianity influence business, but that business may also influence stewardship[42] and finally that the marketplace is a context for the evangelical outreach of Christianity.[43]

Most historical theologies of work and business point back to the creation account and the subsequent call of mankind in the Hebrew Scriptures44 as the genesis of a fully integrated view of work and worship.[45] Great care has been taken by theologians to point out the large number of commandments in the Mosaic laws on work and commerce in the Hebrew Scriptures[46] as well as the fact that many of the parables of Jesus in the New Testament describe semi-agrarian work and business context.[47] Even a casual reader of the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew (5-7) cannot help but note the applicability of the ethical injunctions made by Jesus on the world of business. It is thus surprising to note how much the relationship between church and business has ebbed and flowed over time. Roels[48] proposes that the contemporary Greek and Roman dualistic and syncretistic philosophies adopted by the church in the fourth and fifth centuries, where mind and body were separated so that material needs were considered to derive from base, animal instincts,

set the stage for the development right into the Medieval Church era of a cognitive framework where work and worship were no longer considered connected. Roels[49] does point out that many, like Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD), tried to stem the tide of increasing dualistic views and preached a message of Biblical integration in all economic transactions and commerce. Advocating a view of a spiritual connection to work is a vast departure from historical perspectives of the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC), who viewed highest purpose of human life as contemplation. Aristotle conceived of gods as distant minds, in a state of rest, essentially unconcerned with human transactions. In order to become god-like, Aristotle advocated turning away from the demands of work to pursue the contemplative life.[50] This rather degrading view of work has been reinforced in part by an incorrect reading of a passage in the Gospel of Luke (10:38-42), which relates that when Jesus paid a visit to the home of a certain Mary and Martha, Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to all He said, while her sister Martha was frantically busy in the kitchen, making elaborate preparations for the guest of honor. Exasperated, Martha came to Jesus and asked why he did not care that Mary had left all the work to her, only to have Jesus retort that Mary had chosen the better act compared to Martha's toil and worry. The reformer John Calvin (1509-1564 AD) interpreted this passage to mean that since Jesus was satisfied with modest food, it was more important for Martha to listen to what Jesus had to say than to cook and set table. But Martha's busyness prevented her from hearing his words of wisdom - which was why Jesus was there in the first place. Thus, Jesus' admonition to Martha is less about the life of contemplation over work, but more about priorities in the use of time. In short, there is a time to work, and a time to listen.[51] This reading of this Biblical event is surprisingly also supported by the writings and musing of Meister Eckhardt (1260-1328 AD), a Roman Catholic mystic that read this portion to say that we need both Mary and Martha, and that we should aim to have a balance of their approaches. Indeed, Calvin rejected the pagan view of the divine, asserting that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were active and engaged in work. In

Calvin's view, Christians become most Godlike when they engage in action because God is a full-fledged person, actively engaged in the governance and redemption of this world. In this view, when Christians undertake service to others, they express something of God in their lives.[52]

Both Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD) and John Calvin expanded the concept of vocation from a divine call to religious life, to noting that all Christians (not only those called to the monastic or priestly roles) have a vocation. Thus, nearly every type of work performed by Christians, including business, could be seen as a divine calling. Luther did distinguish between the calling of all Christians to enter the kingdom of God and external vocations or God's call to serve fellow human beings in the world.[53] Virtually every type of work can be a vocation, provided that it does not transgress the commandments of God. One practical effect of holding this perspective on work is that in a Christian's daily activities, he/she might find evidence of the kingdom of God, or glimpses of life available through the Holy Spirit. Banks[54] further asserts that workers do not have to undertake meditation or other approaches to freeing up their minds, but should expect a spiritual connection when undertaking every job.

This healthy, integrated approach to faith and business has not been the sole contribution of Protestantism. In 1891 Pope Leo XIII's (1810-1903 AD) encyclical on the relationship between work, business and faith, entitled, *Rerum Novarum*, paved the way for the rejection of Western Catholics of socialism and supported the right to private property. But the last century has seen a marked development and growth in the faith at work movement amongst Protestant Christians.[55] Smith[56] notes that Protestant pastors and ministers, during the last four decades, have increasingly discussed how Scriptural teaching applies to the world of business and commerce and how this contextual preaching and teaching have both challenged and empowered business leaders to greater effectiveness and ethical conduct. This growing and ever-increasing movement, as explored in the work of David Miller,[57] has been described by "Fortune" magazine[58] in the following way:

*Executives are in the vanguard of a diverse, mostly unorganized mass of believers – a counterculture bubbling up all over corporate America – who want to bridge the traditional divide between spirituality and work. Historically, such folk operated below the radar, on their own or in small workplace groups where they prayed or studied the Bible. But now they are getting organized and going public to agitate for change.*

On the other side, business has a greater impact on the church. For example, practices from business frequently are employed to influence the conduct and stewardship of organizations carrying our traditionally Christian missions.[59] There are also very practical examples of some churches borrowing techniques from business such as targeted marketing[60] and development of cell organizations that start to resemble pyramid sales organizations. Vinten[61] even described an enterprising vicar who offered business advertising space on a well known church spire in the quest to raise funds for repair of the spire.

Previous stereotypical assumptions among Christians in the nonprofit world that capitalism means greed or selfishness seem to be vanishing as managers and business leaders move from private sector organizations into significant roles in directing Christian non-profits. These executives bring with them the disciplines and practices proven to increase efficiency and organizational effectiveness in setting and achieving goals. Previously some non-profit managers have viewed using goals to measure progress, a standard practice in the business world, as cold-blooded and materialistic.[62] Some business managers entering non-profits have noted that personnel planning, compensation, and evaluation have been overlooked resulting in over-worked and underpaid staff. As one non-profit executive, newly arrived from business notes "I can't see how that honors God…If people are our greatest asset, then we ought to be cultivating them."[63]

The view that Christianity has influences on business is based on the theological perspective that Christianity is a lived experience and thus must extend beyond the Church into every

sphere of life including the workplace. Kamm[64] noted that those who believe in the Fatherhood of God also believe in the Brotherhood of Man, and these beliefs must be manifest in the business world. Indeed, some suggest that because of the fallen nature of humans, the possibility for sin such as the powerful exploiting of others make it even more pressing that Christians be active in business. As Vinten[65] notes, a contemporary version of a prophet may indeed be the corporate whistleblower.

Those advocating bringing Christianity into an influential role in business tend to express frustration with contemporary churches where relatively few leaders and pastors are reinforcing the legitimacy of a call into secular work, possibly leaving people with significant business influence starving spiritually in their local congregations.[66] Clearly, this view is based in a premise that business and work is an intense emotional and intellectual commitment of Christians and that ignoring the magnitude of this element of life detracts from the legitimacy of messages from the pulpit. Churches avoiding the Christianity-business connections should perhaps pay heed to recent information from David Miller of the Yale Center for Faith, who estimates that 600 to 700 companies in the United States now have paid chaplains for their workers, double the number of five years ago. Miller indicates that most of the chaplain work may not be praying with people, but listening to people, helping them with very human problems.[67]

In considering the connection of Christianity in business, one question that arises is whether there is any evidence that faith makes a difference, and if so, what is the nature of the differences. One view, termed by some as the "success" or "prosperity gospel" is that being a believer leads to financial success.[68] In this view of Christianity, faith in Christ leads to an effective presence in the workplace and this to financial and vocational success. The theme of success emerges in a variety of ways. The first way is by an emphasis on motivation. Drive and determination, churchgoers are told, will lead to success (this is almost the classic "success through a positive mental attitude" approach). It is your own fault if you are not successful and rich. Gifford[69] reports

this theme as prevalent in contemporary African churches, with the message often focused on entrepreneurship. Smith[70] illustrates that a similar development has taken place in American non-denominational churches. The theme of success emerges also in an explicit preaching of a prosperity gospel according to which God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share in Christ's victory over sin, sickness and poverty—blessings which can be obtained by a confession of faith. Additionally the words of Jesus (as in Matthew 5:16) where believers are told to let their light shine before men and thereby praise the heavenly Father is used to support this theological premise. Thus Christian employees and business persons should shine brighter than others. In a similar fashion the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:48, where He admonishes Christians to strive to be perfect, is used to suggest that Christians should strive to do their best and work up to their potential. In this context, organizational approaches to improve performance and relationships within organizations are essential and spiritually sanctioned. So, Christians should work harder than others to develop themselves and Christian business owners and managers should invest more than others in the development of their employees.

While empirical studies of the effects of religion of any kind on business are very limited, there is some evidence that Christianity may have some impacts. For example, a study of 148 self-described Christian companies found that there were significant differences across the industry groups for suppliers, community, and customers. For behaviors toward employees, the similarities among Christian companies were greater than the differences across industries.[71] The most common employee related behaviors (practiced by more than 80% of the companies) were on-site religious services and emphasis on company profitability, and employee productivity.

Other studies suggest that Christianity may impact the way the people carry out business. For example, Longenecker, McKinney, and Moore[72] found in a survey of more than 1,200 business managers and professionals that evangelical Christians showed the highest levels of

ethical judgments. Regardless of religion, those indicating that religious interests were of high or moderate importance to them demonstrated a higher level of ethical judgment (less accepting of unethical decisions) than others. In another study, Lam and Hung[73] found that having higher levels of income increased the likelihood of a person's being ethical for both Christians and those practicing traditional Chinese religion, but reduced the likelihood of ethical behavior for a non-religious group. This study of Hong Kong residents found that the income of Christians is 13% higher than that of the non-religious group. Controlling for other explanatory variables, Christians have an 18.8% higher likelihood of being ethical compared to those who were non-religious and or practiced traditional Chinese religions.[74] These results contradict earlier studies which have argued that religious participation reduces participants' income through its effects on preferences and net earnings potential and that higher incomes may discourage religious participation by encouraging individuals to substitute market work for religious activities.[75]

André Delbecq,[76] in recounting his experiences with numerous business executives indicates that most see spirituality and religious beliefs as tightly connected and have no difficulty with the need to distinguish between religion (dogma, beliefs, ritual, forms of worship) and spirituality (the inner journey of becoming leading to compassionate doing). It is also clear to them that so-called religion needs to be approached with sensitivity because the modern organization is made up of participants from many different traditions. However, many of these managers see trying to separate out religious conceptualization, religious language, and what they term their religious experience as limiting activities. The managers described by Delbecq[77] find the great religious and wisdom traditions have developed rich metaphorical and poetic forms of expressing matters of the heart. So when speaking of spiritual experience, they find trying to invent a new language is artificial. Rather, participants prefer to engage the paradoxes and challenges implicit in the different religious perspectives. They are particularly drawn to reading and reflecting from scriptures (poetic in expression) and the writings

of mystics.[78]

This wider and integrated view of the connection between Christianity and business is supported in the developed theology of work and business of Miroslaf Volf.[79] Volf[80] has suggested that all work, including business, is made possible by the operation of the Spirit of God in a working person. Thus, a Christian believer works in cooperation with God:

> *Charisma is not just a call by which God bids us to perform a particular task, but is also an inspiration and a gifting to accomplish the task. Even when charisma is exercised by using the so-called natural capabilities, it would be incorrect to say that a person is 'enabled' irrespective of God's relation to him. Rather, the enabling depends on the presence and activity of the Spirit. It is impossible to separate the gift of the Spirit from the enabling power of the Spirit.*[81]

The concept of work as cooperation with God is implied in the New Testament view of Christian life (as in Galatians 2:20), when the Apostle Paul states that Christ now lives in him and his earthly existence, "in the flesh" is possible through faith in Jesus. Indeed, some Christian writers note that the divine nature of work is clear from evidence that God and Jesus were both intense workers. God's work did not stop with the creation of the world but continued as he protected, fed, and rescued His people.[82]

**CHRISTIANITY IMPACTING BUSINESS**

Given the vast array of alternative present and historical connections of Christianity with business, we now turn to considerations of how Christianity may impact the conduct of business in the contemporary world. One area in which religious beliefs may impact work activities is through rules and guidelines for human behavior. The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures contain numerous such guides for behavior applicable in contemporary settings.[83] However, adherence to the Mosaic law is not the central focus of the Christian message. Christians are unique in their proclamation of the availability of salva-

tion through faith in Jesus and the hope that is inherent to this concept. A stream of relatively recent research has investigated and focused on understanding the impact of religious faith and personal psychological well-being.[84] These studies have shown that religious goals that are focused on a) approaching or moving toward a desired end such as meaning in life; b) application of religious ideals for personal growth or daily living; and c) autonomous actions toward personally selected ends all had positive effects on psychological well being. Religious goals that focused on avoiding guilt or anxiety, more transcendent ends, and doing things because they "should" be done all had negative relationships with psychological well-being.

A great deal of the discussion above concerning the connections of Christianity and business focuses on the human perspective concerning work and business. That is, executives and theologians seem to join hands in agreeing that viewing work as a divinely inspired vocation, a cooperative venture with God, and for the benefit of fellow neighbors makes a difference in the well-being of managers and workers alike. Indeed, the fundamental and most meaningful impact of Christianity on business may well be directing the way that business leaders and followers think about the work of business.
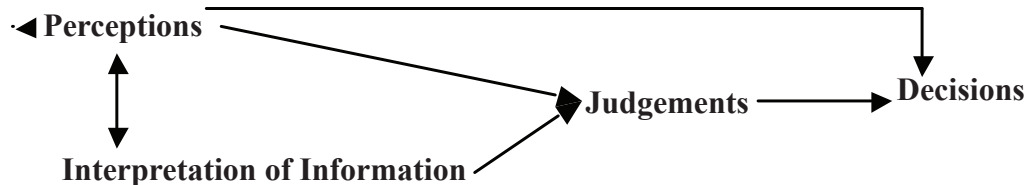
## COGNITIONS IMPACTING BUSINESS

Studies of the organizational management and interactions support the importance of the nature of mental framework with which business decision makers approach the critical tasks of interpreting the business environment and assessing the competitive strengths and weaknesses of a business organization. Business decision-makers must interpret and make sense of ill-defined events and trends. Some of these events and trends represent possible strategic issues for an organization because they are perceived as having the potential to have an effect on achieving organizational objectives.[85] Generally strategic business issues do not appear in prepackaged form; instead, decision-makers selectively pay attention to some information while ignoring other. The meaning of information is not usually obvious. Psychologists tend to agree that meaning is imposed by categories that decision makers use in perceiving an issue or trend. Strategic categories are frequently labeled as either threats or opportunities. Once applied, categories initiate linked perceptual processes that include memory of experiences with or development of images of alternative organizational actions. This model assumes of course that individual cognitions of decision-makers in fact lead to organizational actions. For example, If decision-makers have the required authority, are trusted within the organization, and there is consensus among key organizational members, it is likely that the sense-making process will be tied directly to actions.[86]

An assumption of categorization theory is that decision-makers form cognitive categories based on their observations of the features or attributes of business issues. These cognitive categories are comprised of objects or perceptions with similar attributes to the issues or trends being perceived. If the new perception correlates with a category on a sufficient number of attributes, the category is triggered in the cognitive processes of the business decision-maker. When the category connection is made, a schema may subsequently be employed to understand the significance of the focal perceptions. Schemas are structures of categories in a person's memory that represent knowledge about concepts. For example, a business executive may receive information about new technology employed by a competitor; technology information may be a well-defined category for the manager; past experiences or the manager's perceptual bias may link new technology possessed by a competitor as a threat to the business organization; and the manager as well as colleagues may then employ a schema that defines how the organization should respond to threats. Cognitive and social psychologists have shown that both the categories and related schema can have profound effects upon inferences and behaviors. In some instances these cognitive representations may be employed to fill in missing information - possibly in error. That is, when the information about an issue is incomplete, it is likely that the perceiver will fill gaps with category-consistent information. A simple example of that is when persons hear a de-

## FIGURE 1
## THE INTERPLAY OF COGNITIVE ELEMENTS IN DECISION MAKING



scription of a person pounding in a nail, they may infer the presence of a hammer.[87] The process by which categories and schema are developed and preserved is not well understood. Clearly prior experiences and memories are involved, as are the overall perceptual tendencies of an individual. Thus some people not only exhibit differences in personality affect (tendency to see a glass as half-full as opposed to half empty), but these differences may impact the way that perceptions are attended to and assigned meaning.

A growing realization is that managerial cognition plays a large role in successful design, planning, and implementation of organizational changes in the definition and interpretation of change. Thus, successful design and implementation of significant planned changes requires that managers identify the underlying assumptions they use to interpret and make sense of the organizational world. Well-developed interpretive schemes that have provided order and meaning to the workplace previously may now hinder the management team's visualization of alternatives and limit consideration of new approaches.[88] A general model of the managerial cognition process suggests that perceptions and interpretations of information combine to feed judgments by a decision-maker. These judgments then lead to decisions.[89] At times, the power of perceptions may be significant enough to lead directly to decisions, especially in the case of perceived extreme threats or opportunities. The model is summarized in Figure 1.[90]

Rajogopalan and Spreitzer[91] found that strategic changes occurred when there were substantial changes in the cognitions of top managers. Often declining organizational performance was a trigger for these changes in cognitions, possibly because declines in performance are salient and demand corrective actions. The cognitive frame including the knowledge structures, beliefs, causal maps and schemas of the managerial group in the organization largely determines the interpretive processes for assessing the firm's external environment and internal attributes. When organizations put mechanisms into place to increase information use, changes in managerial cognitions were more likely and managers were more likely to interpret strategic issues in a positive frame. When managers attributed declining performance to internal characteristics or causes, they were more likely to initiate and undertake strategic changes.[92]

Other studies have suggested that successful change may include help for managers in developing the capacity to live with and tolerate ambiguity.[93] This includes remaining content with less than complete knowledge, resisting the impulse to react to pressures that may be associated with uncertainties encountered in planning and carrying out change.[94] Effective change management requires that managers are in touch with what is actually happening as opposed to what was planned. When managers and employees cannot

tolerate the impact of uncertainties, the coping process may be to disperse or race into actions such as breaking problems into manageable bits so that the problems or uncertainties seem to be more bearable. In these instances, individuals and groups close off information, seeking to move in a direction that involves the practiced actions and ways of looking at organizational and operational problems.[95]

Two psychological biases within top management teams affecting the selection and design of needed organizational changes have been identified.[96] The first, prospect theory, predicts that decision makers are risk-averse when performance is perceived to be good and risk-seeking when performance has been poor. In other words, managers in firms with poor performance may be motivated to take greater risks than those in healthier firms. In contrast, the threat-rigidity perspective suggests that poor performance promotes risk-averse responses because threats arouse stress and anxiety in decision-makers.[97] The threat-rigidity perspective predicts that managerial anxiety may cause decision-makers to narrow their range of attention and restrict information seeking and processing. This restricts alternatives considered to those that are consistent with conservative and well-learned interpretive frames. While prospect theory predicts a proactive solution to unfavorable conditions, threat-rigidity suggests the continuance of existing strategic orientations. Both types of decision-making bias have been found in studies of organizations needing to change. Palmer, Danforth, and Clark[98] found, consistent with predictions of prospect theory, lower performing hospitals introduced significantly more innovative, high technology services than did other hospitals. In a separate study of firms with declining resources (both financial and human) D'Aveni[99] found evidence for actions consistent with the threat-rigidity predictions. These actions included focusing on short term fixes while not attending sufficiently to strategic changes; increased centralization of authority within the organization; downsizing by exiting lines of business and liquidating or divesting sub-units; increasing the relative presence of top managers with legal, financial, or accounting expertise as opposed to marketing, R & D

and production backgrounds. These over-arching decision biases may reflect imbedded patterns of managerial cognition that can threaten stakeholder interest in organizations facing the need to change.

## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IMPACTING MANAGERIAL COGNITIONS

A recent study by McCleary and Barro[100] proposes that religious activities and beliefs are exogenous or independent variables in political and economic development. This study further shows that the interactions between religion and political economy generally involve two causal directions: economic and political development affects religiosity and on the other side, religious beliefs and activities influence economic performance. It is the second causal direction between religion and economic development, described above, that supports the developed theologies of work and business in contemporary Evangelical Christianity.

Religious faith, as the core of cultural mechanisms that ensure societal survival,[101] often functions as a legitimizing force that provides the philosophical, theological and cultural foundations for change in societies and organizations that in turn makes economic development and ultimately business possible. Two examples of this legitimizing function of religion serve to illustrate this observation. A study by Kniss and Campbell[102] looking at the relations between variations in religious orientations and the programs and policies of international relief and development organizations shows that one of the major functions of religious orientation in these organizations is to personally and publicly legitimize their mission to their constituency that in turn allows them to effect societal and economic development. An older study[103] comparing the relationship between mass religious conversion, in particular conversion to Christian Protestantism of a Mexican community, and socio-economic development shows a positive correlation between the acceptance of a theology favorable to a work ethic and economic and business development. Both these studies point to the legitimizing
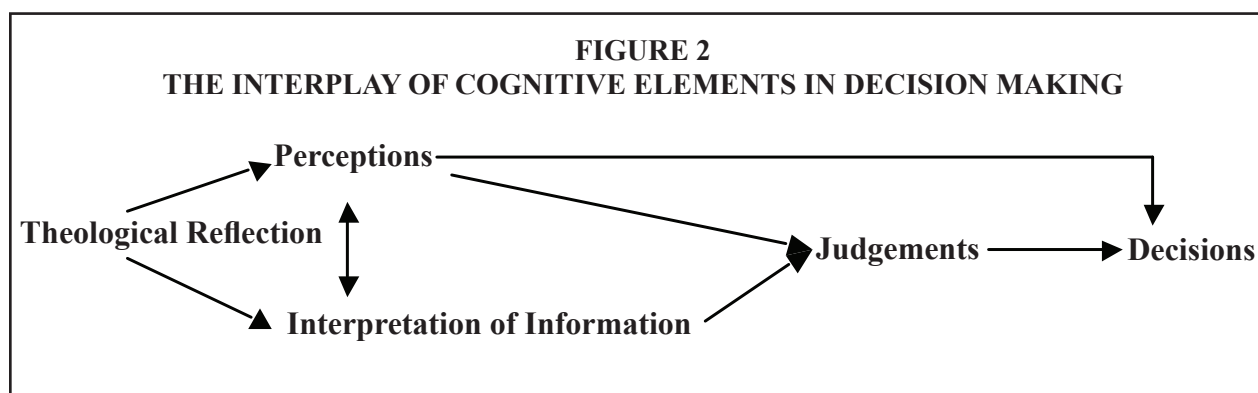
function of religion in economic development in both organizational and societal contexts. One of the ways that religion legitimizes societal and organizational structures is through the reflective processes of theological enquiry. Christianity at its best brings with it the competency of theological reflection. Christian theological reflective competency includes at minimum the following steps:[104] (a) interpreting the meaning of Christian faith, (b) correlating those interpretations with other interpretations, and (c) assessing the adequacy of the interpretations and their correlations. Based on this premise, theological reflection on Christian perspectives on work and business assists the manager or business leader to interpret her deepest inner values and beliefs as it relates to the workplace, correlate those interpretations with the other information gathered through the tolls of management and leading, and finally assess the adequacy of both the theological and business interpretations and correlations. The adjusted model of the interplay between cognitive elements in decision-making to reflect the role of theological reflection in this process is illustrated in Figure 2.

Contemporary Christian theological understandings of work center around the firm belief that work is a divinely inspired vocation, a co-operative venture with God through the complete atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and for the benefit of fellow neighbors who can and should make a difference in the well-being of all. Christian theological reflection on work can assist in the formation of a healthy, integrated and holistic cognitive framework for managers and business leaders and in turn help them to identify and dismantle organizational biases that hinder economic development and growth. Christianity has the power to facilitate the interpretation of truth (including religious, societal and economic truths), empower managers and business leaders to correlate these interpretations within the scope of an increasingly global world and assist them to assess the adequacies of the interpretations and correlations to their own particular and unique contexts.

## CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

The reported higher visibility of religious language and symbols in the workplace may also be accompanied by questions of erroneous and superficial theology. The temptations to remove Biblical truths from business praxis and ethical considerations abound. Many business leaders feel the pressure to limit explorations of spirituality to superficial discussions on the newest self-help fad. But historical and Orthodox Christianity maintains the centrality of the saving faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the core truth of all thought and action, and calls for deep theological reflection on this truth to inform all (including business) praxis.[105] There was a time that Christian theology was considered the "Queen of the sciences" and a necessary reflective and ethical tool for societal development and survival, but her throne has been empty for quite a while.[106] May this current revival of the quest to fully integrate the call to join in the work of God in business, help us to once again see and accept



**FIGURE 2**
**THE INTERPLAY OF COGNITIVE ELEMENTS IN DECISION MAKING**

Perceptions — Theological Reflection — Interpretation of Information — Judgements — Decisions

that Christianity and business are not enemies but essential co-laborers.

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