

Book Review

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***Evangelical Christian
Executives: A New Model for
Business Corporations.***

Lewis D. Solomon. (2004).
New Brunswick: Transaction
Publishers.

One might not expect a non-Christian to take an even-handed approach to evaluating something as potentially controversial as integrating faith at work. But Lewis Solomon, an ordained rabbi, interfaith minister, and professor of business law at George Washington University Law School does just this. Solomon states that he believes that Jesus “was a Hebrew prophet, neither the son of God nor the

path to salvation in this life or the hereafter.” If this is the case, why bother reading his book?

For one, getting a view of Christian business from an “outsider” might actually be a helpful mirror from which we can gain an awareness of how others perceive us. Second, as shown in the citations of his book, Solomon has done his homework. A thoughtful approach to questions Christians ask of themselves, it seems, may help us in the process of clarifying our own values. Third, though he is not a believer, he shares some of the same values with Christians in terms of the role personal faith plays in the whole of life.

Solomon’s thesis is that Christian executives can “successfully lead businesses with goals beyond the short-term profit maximization for their shareholders.” His assumption is that individuals bring their religious faith and values into the corporations they serve. The evangelical Christians he studied intentionally do this.

The book examines “from a corporate governance perspective, how senior executives” bring evangelical Christianity into their businesses. In his review of corporate executives, Solomon has developed three models of

how faith integration influenced the corporate cultures: constant, transformational, and evolving.

Solomon attempts to interpret evangelical Christian executives using their own words and actions. He builds his book on six case studies illustrating the variety with which Christian business leaders integrate their faith. In his portrayal of the six successful companies, Solomon tries to demonstrate that integration of faith at work can take any one of three forms:

- 1) Low-key, non-preaching approach that avoids imposing religious views on their employees. Executives with this approach draw clear lines of distinction between personal faith and their business. They do not discuss openly their faith [or] sponsor company prayer groups to demonstrate their faith.
- 2) Preacher executives “weave their religious faith into the fabric of their business.” They assertively promote their beliefs, desiring that employees will embrace the same. The preacher executives “wear their faith on their sleeves,” actively proselytizing others.

- 3) Stewardship and servant leadership executives “take a more sophisticated approach” for integrating their faith at work. Their faith permeates every aspect of their lives, guided by the two themes of stewardship and servant leadership.

Covenant Transport and R.B. Pamplin Corporation are, in Solomon’s mind, illustrations of constant Christian influence in a company since its inception. ServiceMaster and Herman Miller illustrate transformational influence, while Interstate Batteries and R.W. Beckett each started as a secular organization and evolved into religious-based entities primarily because of the leadership of the CEOs.

For each company, Solomon reviews the company’s financial and operational results as well as the reported behaviors of senior executives as they sought to infuse company values with personal Christian values. His review of each company’s history attempts to add weight to the proposition that faith integration can be sustained over time but more than this: sustained integration of faith in business can have a positive influence in corporate success.

Ultimately this book is about the debate over the issue of the purpose of business. As he puts it, the fundamental questions are: in whose interest and to what ends should corporations be run? Solomon contributes an important point in this debate by citing six organizations that have goals loftier than profit. His hope is that a creative, unresolved tension will always exist between the economic objectives, a commitment to Christian values, and competition in the marketplace.

Questions can be raised regarding Solomon's thesis. First, some will be uncomfortable with the generic definition of spirituality that Solomon uses in his analysis. Spirituality, for some, can be more narrowly defined in terms of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. However, few will find fault with the elements he includes in his definition. Second, Solomon's review of Christian evangelicals is founded on his interpretation of evangelicalism. One should ask the question, has he got it correct? Third, are six cases adequate to illustrate the variety of Christian experience? Fourth, one might just as easily find companies run by committed Christians that are floundering. Fifth, this reviewer is left asking which style of faith integration is

best? Solomon does not attempt to answer this in his book. He merely contends that all three styles have been found through case studies to be associated with successful companies.

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