

# WHY BIBLICAL INTEGRATION IN BUSINESS?

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As 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian business faculty, our call to prepare students for the marketplace is no small task. With the shifting sands of the economic landscape (from knowledge economy to innovative economy), a globalized business environment, and technological progression unparalleled in human history, today's marketplace of commerce is possibly more complex and multifaceted than at any other period in human history.

Given the increasingly dynamic world of business, adequate preparation is not only necessary but critical. Higher education is a rite of passage for those preparing to foray into the labor market. Furthermore, beyond providing labor, the next generation of business men and women participate in the marketplace as consumers—purchasing the goods and services they value. In a paradoxical way, then, the marketplace is something students prepare for even though they have always existed within it. Almost inescapably, we all find ourselves rooted in the market.

Yet there is another market even more critical than the marketplace of commerce. This is the marketplace of *ideas*. It is difficult to trace the ideas that ultimately influence our actions. But while ideas may be difficult to connect to what we do, that does not mean that they are irrelevant. Rather, it is just the opposite. Ideas (what we think, perceive, and believe) are the cornerstone for activity (what we do; how we behave). Why? Because our view of the world and the beliefs that accompany our perception of reality will ultimately animate our words and motivate our actions. “That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts,” suggests Ralph Waldo Emerson, “will determine our lives.” Similarly, historian Glenn Sunshine writes that if we want to understand why, and how, a civilization changes over time—trace the ideas of that time that make up the dominant worldview (Sunshine, 2009: p. 16).

So, to summarize, we find ourselves embedded in a complex marketplace of commerce. However, at an even deeper level, that very marketplace of

commerce is embedded in an equally complex marketplace of ideas. That is, our business activity is situated within a larger cultural system of norms and values. Moreover, not all values are created equal. (To disagree with this statement would be to reinforce its accuracy.) The implications, then, are enormous when we consider our participation as people of faith within the marketplace. Where will we look for answers? What is our blueprint to make sense of human action and purpose? What ideas will equip us to navigate the complexities of today's innovative, technology-driven, globalized business environment?

Here, business acumen alone is not sufficient to address these questions. It was the Romantic era poet William Blake who provided a remarkably prescient and timeless description of modern day market impoverishment. In his work “The Everlasting Gospel,” he writes:

This Life's five windows of the soul  
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole  
And leads you to Believe a Lie  
When you see with not through the Eye.  
(Blake, n.d.)

Here Blake references our interpretation of the world through the senses (five windows of the soul).<sup>1</sup> What we apprehend of reality, writes Blake, leads us to “believe a lie.” The deception, however, is a result of seeing *with* our eyes. That is to say, engaging, interpreting, and reasoning upon the world without seeing *through* the eyes with a heart, a conscience, and a biblical mindset. As people of faith, we aim to see through the eye to understand the inescapable realm of business and the intricate web of beliefs, value-judgments, and practices it is comprised of. That is, we wish not to participate simply as the world does, but rather, to exist as a “prototype of the new humanity” (Wright, 1995: p. 122).

Why Biblical integration in business? Because ideas matter. Business theory and application will continue to be necessary components when conducting individual or corporate affairs in the marketplace. Yet business, as a discipline, does

not escape the boundaries of moral and ethical deliberation, thus making Orthodox Christian values an indispensable component of faith-based education. If our marketplace of commerce is indeed embedded in a marketplace of ideas, to what ideas are we to turn when it comes to embodying a faithful expression of business activity? Thankfully, we echo Simon Peter in John 6:68: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (NIV).

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>Note, here, that this is the very definition of empiricism. An empiricist values experience apprehended through one’s senses.

#### REFERENCES

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