WHY BUSINESS MATTERS TO GOD

JEFF VAN DUZER

A Note from the Editors:

As the Editorial Board of the *Christian Business Review*, we look forward to building a great body of scholarship, literature, and conversations about doing real business in the real world, especially as we consider our mutual challenges in the light of the Christian scriptures and through the experience of the Christian life. In this inaugural issue, we are blessed to be able to include the introductory chapter of Jeff Van Duzer's book, *Why Business Matters to God*. After all, that is what we are all working to understand, and to the extent that we believe that business *does* matter to God, then we are working together to encourage and help one another to act as if this is so. We appreciate InterVarsity Press and Jeff Van Duzer for giving us permission to reprint this material, and we hope that it will be a conversation starter for all of us.

*Taken from *Why Business Matters to God (And What Still Needs to Be Fixed)* by Jeff Van Duzer, Chapter One: In the Beginning.

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Consider an unfinished parable: Three students make appointments to ask a pastor for career advice. The first student explains that she is considering going to law school and asks the pastor why God might want a Christian to be a lawyer. After thinking about her question for a moment, the pastor answers that Christians in law make sense because God cares about justice. By becoming a lawyer she can help advance God's desire for a just society. The second student explains that he is considering a career in medicine and asks why God might want Christians to serve as doctors or nurses. "That's simple," the pastor replies, "God cares about wholeness, and by pursuing a career in the medical field you can play a key part in God's healing work in the world." The last student arrives for her appointment and says she is considering a career in business. She asks the pastor why God might want her to pursue such a career.

At this point, however, the parable remains unfinished. How should the pastor respond? If law furthers God's interest in justice and medicine furthers God's interest in healing, what aspect of God's work will a business career further? Or, put differently, from God's perspective what is the purpose of business?

God's Purpose for Business

Answering this question is not as simple as it may seem at first. Indeed, on closer examination, this one question raises three other preliminary questions.

First, does it even make sense to talk about God having a purpose for business? Or does God only have a purpose for *people* in business? Stated more generally, does God have purposes for institutions? Or is it better to understand institutions (such as corporations, economic systems, governments) as merely artificial human constructs that are in and of themselves inherently neutral—they can further or thwart God's desires depending on the intentions and actions of the human beings within them, but as separate things they are of no account.

Second, setting aside for the moment the question of institutions, what do we mean when we ask about God's purpose for people in business?[1] The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1674) begins this way:

Question 1. What is the chief end of man?

Answer. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Is this all that we can say about God's purpose for people active in business? Does God simply have a general purpose for men and women—to glorify and enjoy God—that they are to faithfully pursue across all of their activities? Or can we say something more? Are there any unique purposes that God would like to see accomplished through business activities?

And finally, assuming that God has unique purposes for people in business, are these purposes intrinsic to the actual business activity or only instrumental? For example, businesses can make money for their owners, who in turn can use that money to support mission activities. In this sense businesses could be said to serve God's purposes *instrumentally*. They generate the funds necessary to sponsor God's desired activity.

Businesses can also serve as a platform from which Christians can share their faith with others. Here too is a use for business. *Instrumentally*, it creates a forum for the sharing of the gospel. But still, this is not intrinsic to business itself. Christians are called on to "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks"

about their faith regardless of the setting (1 Peter 3:15). In the supermarket, on the sidelines of soccer fields, in PTSA meetings as well as in work settings, Christians are invited to share the good news sensitively with all who might be interested in hearing. This fact, however, does not tell us much about how God intends to use the practice of business itself.

Does business have an intrinsic as well as instrumental purpose in God's kingdom?

Specifically, can we say that business activities—analyzing balance sheets, manufacturing products, marketing goods, providing performance reviews—in and of themselves further God's kingdom?[2] Does business have an *intrinsic* as well as *instrumental* purpose?

The Search for Purpose

Searching for biblically based answers to these questions is not easy. In a narrow verse-by-verse sense there is not much to work with. One can find a handful of ethical admonitions such as the Old Testament's prescription against using faulty scales to apportion out purchased grain (Proverbs 11:1) or the New Testament's admonitions to pay a worker his or her just due (Luke 10:7). Unfortunately, even in the aggregate these prove to be fairly thin threads from which to weave a whole theology. While there is certainly a great deal of teaching in Scripture on economics and a regular call to fair dealing, there is very little written directly about the purpose of business activities, the appropriate limits of business and its role, if any, in God's work in the world.

Consequently, rather than seeking to construct a theology of business from a handful of specific verses, I have found it more useful to build on what has sometimes been called the "grand narrative." All of Scripture (through many writings and in many genres) tells one basic story—one basic story in four great movements.

In the beginning God created a world and placed human beings at its center (creation). It was God's intent to enjoy creation and live in a loving intimacy with humankind forever. This initial intent, however, was thwarted by human disobedience (the Fall). All the rest of the story is about reconciliation. God seeks to reestablish the love relationship that was intended from the beginning (redemption). These efforts climax with God's arrival in the person of Jesus Christ, who breaks down the wall of separation through his death and resurrection and inaugurates the new creation. The full implications of this victory are revealed in the last Chapters of the story, the final conclusion (consummation).

The choice of a narrative hermeneutic and the identification of these four great movements of Scripture is certainly not the only option. Theology can be shaped in a number of crucibles. For example, many theologians work in fields of moral, historical or practical theologies. Even for those committed to a biblical theology, there can be many different organizing principles. And to make matters more complicated, even among those adopting a narrative approach to their biblical theologies, there are differences over how to divide the Scriptures into separate movements.[3]

My choice of narrative is partially

tactical, as "story" seems to be one of the most effective means of communicating truth in our current cultural environment. Hopefully it is also an ecumenical approach. While the creation – fall – redemption – consummation framework is often associated with the Reformed tradition, as a basic outline of the biblical story it can be adopted by a wide variety of Christian faith traditions. Indeed down through the history of the church this has been a standard way to describe the Christian journey. The emphasis placed on each movement may differ slightly from tradition to tradition (and the implications that follow from these differing emphases may be nontrivial), but still as a basic outline of the overall biblical narrative, this approach should allow for different traditions to find common ground.[4]

In the context of this grand narrative, then, it makes sense to begin our search

What did God have in mind at the very beginning?

for purpose with a consideration of the creation movement. After all, the creation account describes the world as God originally intended it to be. While the Fall interfered with this plan (and will need to be considered separately), it is still useful to start by considering what God had in mind at the very beginning.

The Brevity of the Creation Account

When we think of the Scripture story as comprising four grand movements, it is remarkable that the description of the first two of the four movements is completed by the end of the third Chapter of the first book. Creation is described in Genesis 1–2.[5] The Fall is described in Genesis 3. Everything else in Scripture—the remainder of Genesis, the remaining thirty-eight books in the Old Testament and all of the New Testament—is given over to the great third movement of redemption and the fourth movement of consummation.

For our purposes the very brevity of the creation account should serve as an important reminder. First, it reminds us that God is most fully known in redemptive activity. In some ways, virtually the entire Bible tells the story of God's efforts to restore the relationships that God desired from the beginning. It is a story of love—a love that is expressed in a constant reaching out, a grace that seeks communion with a rebellious people, consistently offering them that which they do not deserve. A theology of business must be set, first and foremost, in the context of God's desire to restore this loving relationship.

Second, as we turn to the "creation movement" itself, the sheer brevity of this section of Scripture must give us pause as we seek to draw conclusions about God's original plan. Here we find only the slightest of hints, almost imperceptible nods toward various aspects of divine truth. On the one hand, this brevity invites us to speculate from the tiniest of clues. On the other hand, it reminds us that for the most part we are speculating. The terse account reinforces our need for humility, reminding us that we must wrap our conclusions in a cloak of tentativeness. Much of the meaning of the creation story will necessarily remain shrouded in mystery.

Observations from Creation

With these cautions in mind, then, let us consider what observations we might make from the account of creation.

1. The material world matters to God. The observation that the material world matters to God is so obvious that it would be easy to overlook. Throughout the Genesis account of creation God makes material things, and each is declared good. Clearly, the material world matters to God. When God conceives of human flourishing, it involves, in part, the satisfaction of the material needs and desires of men and women.[6] Food that nourishes, roofs that hold out the rain, shade that protects from the heat of the sun—these are all part of God's good design. When businesses produce material things that enhance the welfare of the community, they are engaged in work that matters to God.

2. Human beings are called to steward God's creation. The Genesis account reminds us that the world was made by God and remains God's creation. God made the heavens and the earth. God turned on the lights. God parted the waters to bring forth the sky as well as dry land. God made plants and wildlife, and for a finale, made human beings.

Nowhere in the account is there any suggestion, however, that title to creation was somehow then transferred to Adam and Eve. The only things given to them outright were "seed-bearing plants" and "fruits with seeds," and these were only made available to them as food (Genesis 1:29). By the double reference to "seeds," the account suggests that even in this provision for them, God did not intend to relinquish the ongoing productive capacity of God's creation to human beings. They could eat the fruit, and the plants would continue to grow more fruit. In effect, Adam and Eve were invited to enjoy the income from God's trust without invading the principal. God remained the owner. As the psalmist reminds us:

> The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. (Psalm 24:1-2 *(NIV)*)

This is not to say, however, that Adam and Eve were mere passive beneficiaries of God's largesse. They were given a role to play. In a short-hand way we can identify this role as one of "stewards" or in more modern parlance "trustees." A steward (or trustee) is "a person who manages another's property or financial affairs; one who administers anything as the agent of another."[7] Human beings were called to steward God's creation on God's behalf. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15).

For Christians in business, acknowledging their role as stewards is an important first step toward understanding God's intentions for business. Implicit in this acknowledgment is the conviction that the business does not belong to them or to any other earthly owners. It belongs to God. This sets the frame through which any consideration of shareholder or stakeholder rights must be viewed.

Of course, this is not the end of the inquiry. It is not enough just to conclude that we act as stewards of God's creation. This conclusion invites the next question: if we are to manage creation for God's purposes, what end should we be pursuing? What does the owner want us to do with the "trust corpus"?

Consider, by analogy, a family trust established today. In law, the trustee who agrees to administer the trust for the family is bound to follow the instructions of the one who formed and funded the trust, the trust's "settlor." These instruc-

tions are usually set forth in a trust agreement. To the extent that the agreement is silent on certain points, the law will fill in the gaps by implying certain duties for the trustee. For example, by law a trustee owes the trust his or her undivided loyalty. All self-dealing with trust assets is strictly prohibited. The trustee may not favor one class of beneficiaries over another and must diversify the portfolio to avoid unreasonable risk and so on. Moreover, subject to all of these constraints, the trustee's charge is clear: he or she is to maximize the return on trust assets for the benefit of the trust beneficiaries.

By analogy, then, for Christians it is not enough just to declare that we act as God's stewards. It is an important first step but not the end of the discussion. As stewards/trustees we need to know what our goal in managing the "trust corpus" is and what constraints we need to abide by along the way. More specifically, as stewards of God's businesses, we need to know what our goal (or purpose) is when managing the business and what limitations we need to observe to manage the business in accordance with God's desires.[8]

3. Human beings are made in the image of God. On three separate occasions we are told that human beings are made in the image of God.

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

What does this mean? In what sense are human beings stamped with God's image?

This is a difficult question to answer and Scripture gives few clues. Theologians have debated the issue at length. The notion that we have been created in God's image is not confined to the Genesis account but is repeated on a number of occasions throughout the Scriptures. Evidently it involves a close parallel between the original and the image; on two occasions—2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15—Christ is said to be the "image" of God the Father. It suggests that the image-bearer plays a role in revealing the essence of the Other.

At a minimum, however, we should find in the Genesis use of "image" an intent to reflect those characteristics of God that have already been described in the Genesis account. Specifically, two such characteristics are important for our purpose. First, God has been described as inherently relational ("Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness" [Genesis 1:26]). Second, God has been described as a worker. God makes things.

Relationship. The God in whose image Adam and Eve were created is the trinitarian God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—a God inherently relational from before the beginning of time. The plural pronouns in Genesis 1:26 remind us that before God *did* anything, God in three persons *was*. All of the mighty acts of creation flowed out of that relationship. Indeed, because the work of creation was itself an overflowing of the love nature of the Godhead, it was a tangible expression of this relational character. The work gave expression to the relationship. Moreover, since creation was designed to return glory to God, the work of creation not only came out of relationship but was intended to return for the benefit of the Trinity.

As people made in God's image we are reminded that human beings are also inherently relational. We are only fully complete in community. As God re-

marked about Adam: "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). The nurturing and building of community is, therefore, one of the fundamental tasks to be pursued by those seeking to be genuinely human. To be true to the Genesis account, any theology of business must be relational and communitarian in character. Relationships in community must precede labor and productivity. Business must flow from relationship and be shaped so as to flow back to support the community.

Work. The God in whose image Adam and Eve were created was also a worker.

> By the seventh day God had finished the *work he had been doing*; so on the seventh day he rested from all his *work.* And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from *all the work of creating that he had done*. (Genesis 2:2-3, emphasis added)

Men and women, then, were made in part to work, and by so doing to reflect this aspect of God's glory.

Christians often incorrectly perceive work as having been assigned to human beings as punishment for Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Nothing could be further from the truth. The call and the opportunity to work were embedded into the very fabric of human beings as they were first designed by God. Adam and Eve were assigned work in the Garden from the beginning.

And it was not just any work. Since Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, they were made with an inherent capacity for and need to be engaged in creative activity. Of course, their creative activities differed from God's in that only God creates out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).[9] Human creativity is always derivative, always derived from the work of the Creator. But still, to reflect God's image is to create, to innovate—to bring new things and new ways of doing things into being.

In business terms God made the initial capital investment. He richly endowed the earth with resources. Adam and Eve were the initial managers called to creatively organize (name the animals) and manage these resources (take dominion), to enhance the productivity of the Garden (be fruitful and multiply) in a sustainable (guard creation) manner. Creativity is not just a gift given to some artists or design engineers. It is inherent in the very meaning of being human.

In addition, if the work that Christians do is to reflect the work of God, it must also be meaningful work. After each act of creation, God examined the creative handiwork and pronounced it "good" (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and after the creation of human beings, "very good" (v. 31). For our work to mirror God's it too must aim for outcomes that are good. Good work has substance and meaning.

When humans engage in creative, meaningful work that grows out of relationships and gives back to the community they become more deeply human. Of course, work became more difficult as a consequence of the Fall ("Cursed is the ground because of you; . . . it will produce thorns and thistles for you" [Genesis 3:17-18]). But the pre-Fall picture is of human beings gardening and farming on land that readily yielded its produce without demanding payment in sweat and toil. Indeed, pre-Fall work was inherently pleasurable.

One last thought about being made "in the image of God." While there is a

sacred quality to all creation—it was all made by God and God pronounced all of it "good"—human beings were given a unique status and dignity. They alone of all the creatures were made "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27). Down through history the church has consistently taught that the dignity of men and women must be particularly respected in light of their unique place in the created order.

4. Humans are made to live within limits. A fourth observation follows from the third. While human beings were made in the image of God, men and women were clearly not made to be gods. Nowhere in the creation narrative are Adam and Eve offered the opportunity to become God, nor are they assured that as originally created, they are already gods. In fact, the narrative takes pains to communicate just the opposite. God preexists. It is God who speaks the world into being, setting its boundaries and defining its essence. God is beyond boundaries. God is unlimited.

By contrast, God places a limit at the very center of human existence.

> In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. . . . And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:9, 16-17)

Thus, to be fully human is to be inherently limited.

The serpent understood this. When the serpent tempted Eve to eat from the forbidden tree, he assured her that by so doing she could be "like God" (Genesis 3:5). The fundamental temptation that Adam and Eve succumbed to was the temptation to deny their limited nature in an effort to be, for themselves, gods.[10]

5. God delights in variety. A fifth observation that we can take from the Genesis account is that diversity appears to be built into the very fabric of God's design. Even before God created human beings, God created a wide array of other creatures. Elsewhere in Scripture we are reminded that God enjoys the breadth of creation in all of its variety. It is enjoyed for its own sake and not simply for any utilitarian value that it serves.[11]

When God perceived that Adam was inappropriately "alone," God did not make a second Adam. Rather, God made an Eve. Eve was different—a difference that complemented and made whole Adam, who was in himself incomplete.

God's love for diversity is reflected throughout the Scriptures. One of the more confusing passages in the Old Testament relates to an early effort by humanity to build a tower in the city of Babel (Genesis 11:1- 9). What marked these efforts was that all those engaged in the building spoke with one language and appeared to be motivated by a single purpose. In this primordial story, God intervenes in judgment, scattering the peoples and giving them a multitude of languages, which precludes them from communicating with one another.

It is often noted that Pentecost was a reversal of God's judgment at Babel, but this is only partially true. It is true in that through the out-pouring of the Spirit, unity was once again made possible for God's people. Everyone was able to understand each other and communicate across cultural barriers ("each one heard them speaking in his own language" [Acts 2:6]). It was not a reversal of Babel, however, in the sense that it returned everyone to a single language. Rather, it appears that in God's intended design

there will always be a multitude of peoples speaking a multitude of languages. Even at the end of times we are told that kings and nations from around the world, consisting of different peoples and different cultures, will come to worship God (Revelation 21:24). God delights in the diversity of the created order.

6. The Garden was incomplete. Finally, in the first two Chapters of Genesis humankind is assigned certain tasks. Specifically Adam and Eve were to "subdue" and "rule" over the created order (Genesis 1:28). They were to "be fruitful." In this way they were to "fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). They were given an opportunity to name the animals, to classify and bring order to creation (Genesis 2:19-20). They were called to "take care of" the earth and thereby protect God's created order (Genesis 2:15). These tasks were given by God to humanity as a blessing. Performance of the tasks allowed men and women to express aspects of their very identities and to delight in the work itself. But the performance of these tasks also served another purpose.

The Garden of Eden before the Fall is correctly described as an expression of God's perfect will. Here the goodness of the original creation prevailed. This goodness was expressed in a flourishing and harmonious peace. It would be incorrect to say, however, that the Garden of Eden as initially created by God was complete—that had Adam and Eve only avoided the forbidden fruit, humankind would have lived to the end of time in this unchanging idyllic garden setting.

In Genesis we are told that after creating the necessary raw materials God still did not cause the fields to flourish because no humans were yet available to work the fields.

> When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth *and there was no man to work the ground*. (Genesis 2:4-5, emphasis added)

The Garden was created as a perfectly balanced and resourced starting point. As originally designed, however, the Garden of Eden was not God's intended endpoint. God anticipated moving on from the perfection of the Garden, relying, at least in part, on the activity of the men and women who God had placed in the Garden. They would till the fields. They would gather the fruit. They would understand, organize and classify aspects of the created order. They would create new things. They would be fruitful. As a people they would fill the earth and work the created order to ensure that it was fruitful in a like manner. In other words, God anticipated partnering with human beings to cause the Garden of Eden to flourish.

Of course, God could have chosen to provide for the world supernaturally. Every morning, for example, God could have dropped manna flakes from heaven, and our responsibility would have been limited to running around with our mouths open and our tongues out. But for most of history God did not do this. Rather, human beings were created with a capacity to pool their resources (what we now call "capital"), to design and build an oven (technological innovation), to order and receive shipments of flour (supply chain), to bake bread (operations), to put it on trucks (logistics) and to deliver it to a hungry world. As Martin Luther once said, as we do the work to

which we have been called we become the hands of God.[12] We actually take the bread that God intended to provide for a hungry world and make delivery on God's behalf.[13] This work has intrinsic and not just instrumental value in the kingdom of God.

In God's economy, to say that something is perfect is not to suggest that it is done. The Garden was perfect, but it was not static. In fact, even the "end of time" is probably not best conceived of as a static destination where we will someday arrive. As stewards we are not aiming for a fixed endpoint, just for a further and more robust flourishing, an ever-growing and deepening intimacy.[14] At the beginning God didn't deliver a finished product; rather, God provided a setting in which human beings, working with and enabled by God, could cause the created order to flourish.

Thus, to summarize so far, God created the world and everything in it. It belongs to God. As a part of this creation God created men and women and endowed them with a unique dignity. They alone were created in God's image, designed from the beginning to reflect God's glory. They were created for relationship, with one another and with God. They were created as diverse creatures with differences that complemented each other and delighted God. They were called to work as co-creators with God, to steward the creation. God intended that men and women would take the raw materials that had been provided and, in partnership with God, help to grow and construct the kingdom here on earth. Men and women were not, however, created to become God. At the center of their existence were to be limits and God called them to live from that place of limitedness.

God's Purpose for Humankind: Narrowing the Question

Let us now return to one of the original questions. Does the Westminster Catechism say all that can be said about God's intended role for humankind (to glorify God and enjoy him forever)? Or can we identify a more specific charge to Adam and Eve from the Genesis account?

There is no doubt that the Genesis account confirms that our primary vocation is to glorify God. Created "in his image," our lives are intended to reflect or reveal the divine glory—God's essence and character. But the creation mandate adds specificity to this general calling.

For one, we reflect God's glory through nurturing our relationships with God and with one another. The Garden narrative in Genesis 3 provides us with a tantalizing hint of the intimate friendships that must have existed before the

"God intended that men and women would take the raw materials that had been provided and, in partnership with God, help to grow and construct the kingdom here on earth."

Fall: Adam and Eve walking and chatting with God in the Garden "in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8). As we model this loving intimacy in our relationships with God and with others we reflect an aspect of the triune Godhead and give God glory.

But we also glorify God by engaging in the work we have been called to undertake. Already we have seen that this work is to be meaningful, engage our creativity, reflect our diversity, and grow out of and give back to the community. These are characteristics of God's work; when our work reflects these characteristics, we reveal God's glory.

But we have also seen that our work can glorify God in another way. Our work is actually used to accomplish God's purposes on earth. In addition to exhibiting God-like characteristics, we are invited to participate in the bringing about of God-desired results. In Genesis God assigns particular tasks to humanity. Adam and Eve were told to "subdue" and "rule" over the created order, to work the fields, to "multiply" and "be fruitful," to "fill the earth," to give order to creation, and to guard the earth. One aspect of these tasks was to involve Adam and Eve in partnering with God to cause the land to bring forth its crops so as to provide for the material well-being of God's people and the created order. In the performance of these tasks, Adam and Eve advance God's agenda and thereby give God glory. Collectively, these activities enable the community to flourish as God intended. They are to be undertaken for God and, as it is sometimes said, "for the common good."[15]

The Role of Business In the Creation Mandate

But what does this have to say specifically about business? Business is, of course, not the only institution that human beings operate in. Christians in business are also members of families, citizens of nations, congregants in local churches and participants in various other institutions of civil society (e.g., book clubs, intramural sports teams, food kitchens and environmental groups). What then is the relationship between the work of any one institution and the overall creation mandate?

One possibility, of course, is that each person is called to perform each Genesis task in each institution or role. If this were correct we would conclude that *every* Christian in business must *through business* engage in *every* one of the Genesis activities. But surely this cannot be the case. Consider one obvious example. Adam and Eve were called to multiply. That is, they were to enjoy sexual relations and produce off-spring. For this "task" there is a corresponding institution, the family. Presumably, during moments of sexual intimacy, neither Adam nor Eve was expected to be tilling the ground or naming animals.

To house the production of offspring in the institution of business (or anywhere else other than in the family) would be a perversion of God's intent. Rather, it would seem that certain institutions are better suited for certain tasks. The family is a better institution in which to situate the bearing and raising of children (be fruitful and multiply). The church and neighborhood might be the best settings to nurture community. Universities may be the best setting for the study and analysis of the created order (naming the animals). The government, with its coercive powers, may be in a better position to assume primary responsibility for guarding creation.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul talks about all of the different func-

tions that the church is to perform. These include teaching, preaching, prophesying, administering and a number of others. But was each individual Christian called to perform all of these functions? Certainly not.

> There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. . . .
>
> The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. . . .
>
> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:5-7, 12, 27-30)

In an analogous way, all of humanity is charged with all of the Genesis tasks, but each individual and each individual institution is only one part of the body. Each institution has only a part to play in the whole.

Of course, there is no reason to assume that any given institution will always be responsible for the same aspects of the creation mandate. As the nature of these institutions and the societies they are found in change over time, various aspects of the creation mandate may be reallocated between institutional spheres of activity in different proportions. At some times aspects of the mandate might be best furthered by government action. In different times the same tasks might be best pursued through private enterprise. Sometimes a university should take the lead in advancing research. In other circumstances it might best be conducted by the state or a corporation. A consideration of which tasks make the most sense for which institutions at any given moment is ultimately a time-bound and culturally embedded decision.[16]

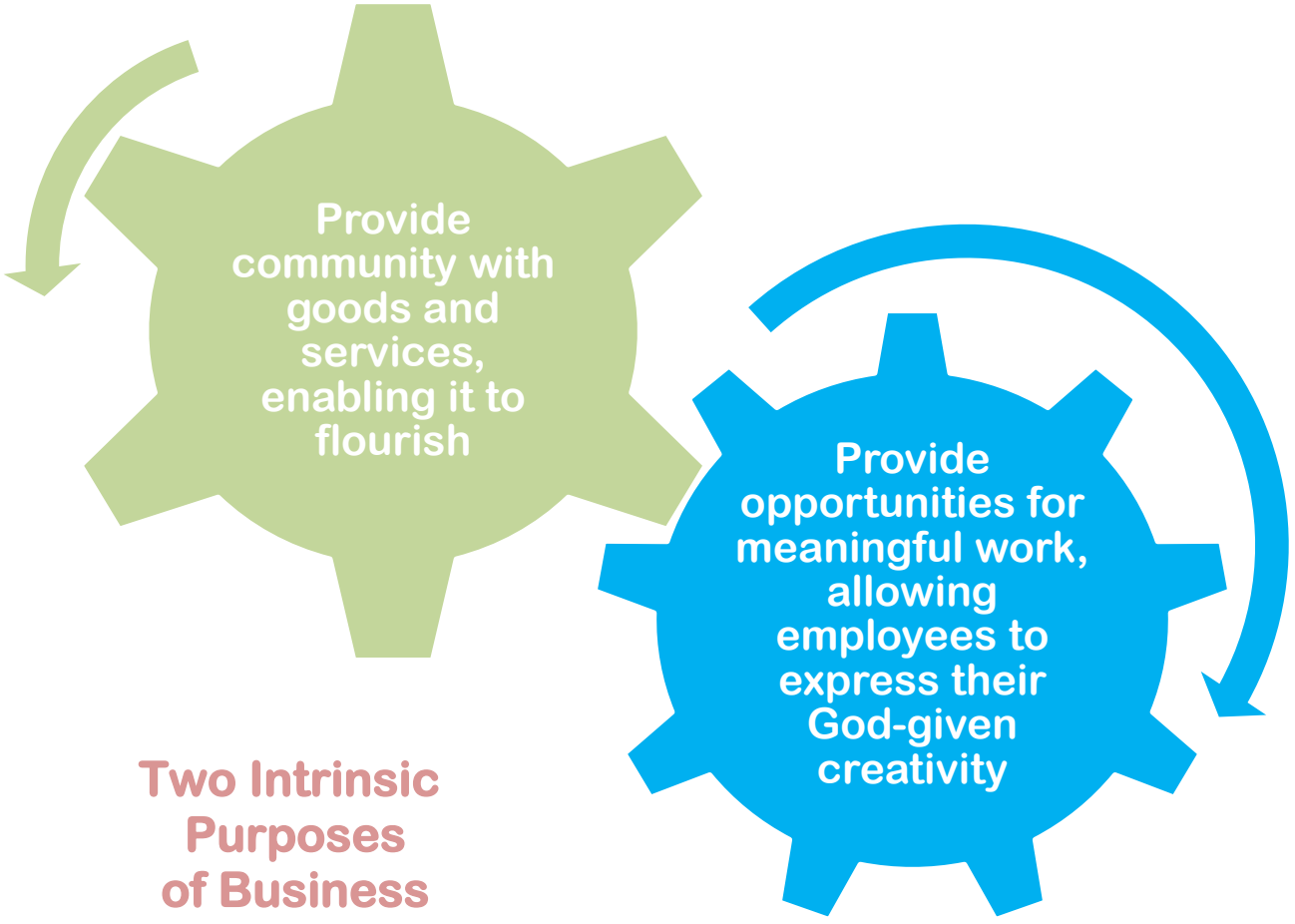
So the question boils down to this: In our twenty-first-century context, which aspects of the creation mandate are best suited for business to handle? Or using Paul's language, what is the unique giftedness of business at this time and place in history?

In my judgment, the answer is twofold. First, business appears to be uniquely well situated to work the fields, to cause the land to be fruitful, and to fill the earth—what we might in modern parlance characterize as "to create wealth." Second, business is also the dominant institution (although obviously not the only one) equipped to provide organized opportunities for meaningful and creative work. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and its state-managed economies, it now appears beyond question that in the twenty-first century private enterprise operating in a relatively free market system will be the institution best positioned to efficiently deliver the goods and services desired by worldwide consumers and the most prolific source of new job creation.

From this I would conclude that at this time in history, there are two legitimate, first-order, intrinsic purposes of business: as stewards of God's creation, business leaders should manage their

businesses (1) to provide the community with goods and services that will enable it to flourish, and (2) to provide opportunities for meaningful work that will allow employees to express their God-given creativity. One goal for the Christian businessperson who is stewarding God's business is focused outward—providing goods and services that enhance the quality of life. One goal focuses inward—creating opportunities for individuals within the company to express their vocation in the performance of God-glorifying work.[17] When managers pursue these particular goals for their companies, they participate directly in God's creation mandate. They engage in work of intrinsic and not just instrumental value.[18]

Before we press on, let me clarify something about this purpose statement. So far, I have attempted to identify God's purpose for business as a whole. In effect, I have been trying to identify those goals that God might set down were God to write a corporate mission statement for the whole institution of business. I have suggested that the mission statement would focus on the twin goals of providing appropriate goods and services and providing meaningful and creative work. Of course, by negative implication, I have also left some things out. For example, I don't believe that "fostering of relationships in community" or "protecting the environment" would make



God's list of fundamental purposes for the institution of business as a whole. This does not mean, however, that these tasks are not essential for human flourishing or even that they are of no importance to business. As we will discuss at length in the following Chapters, all faithful businesses will need to take these and a variety of other similar concerns into account—if not as their purpose, their *raison d'être*, then at least as constraints on their operations. We have much more work to do. But we begin with the notion that pursuit of these particular purposes—providing appropriate goods and services, and meaningful and creative work—is a piece of, a starting place for, what it means to be a faithful steward of God's business.

Three Related Observations

Three closing observations are in order. First, note that this formulation of the purpose of business makes the particular goods and services to be produced a relevant consideration. Specifically, are they goods and services that God would want to make available to the world at this time? Many times I have met with Christians in business who have suggested that the specific output of their efforts is irrelevant. All that counts, they argue, is how they engage in their business activities (e.g., with honesty and compassion). I disagree. Virtually everyone would agree that a pimp or prostitute (even one who does his or her work with integrity, compassion and caring) is unlikely to be furthering the kingdom of God through these professions. A full understanding of the creation mandate should extend this further. In certain times and places, faithful obedience to God's kingdom values might require that we invest less of our aggregate capital in the production of violent video games and more in the development of sanitary water facilities for developing countries, less in weapons of mass destruction and more in quality wood products, less in fossil fuels and more in renewable resources.

Under the business model that operates in most corporations today, deciding which product should be produced comes down to assessing which of the products that the company could produce would yield the highest return on investment (ROI). While this is not always easy to calculate (and is often calculated incorrectly), it has the seductive quality of mathematical certainty.[19] It does not, however, necessarily lead to operations that accord with kingdom values. Online betting and pornography may yield higher rates of return but are unlikely to lead to human flourishing.

Of course, it is not possible to come up with a particular formula that will clearly dictate which goods or services should be produced. There is no single litmus test. Each of us faithfully listening to God may come up with a different answer. But even if we may end up with different answers, we are called to start by asking a common question: Instead of asking in the first instance, *Which choice will maximize my ROI? we ask instead, Given the core competencies of my organization and the assets under its control, how can I best direct the organization to serve? Which products or services could we produce that would best enable my community to flourish?*

And this leads to a second observation. Note that nothing in this Genesis model supports the conclusion that business should be operated for the purpose of maximizing profits. In fact, this model turns the dominant business model on its head. In most business schools today and in most corporations (particu-

larly larger, publicly traded corporations) the sole legitimate purpose of business is said to be maximizing profits for the sake of the shareholders.[20] Indeed, influential economists have argued that business managers have a moral obligation to do everything within their power (short of breaking the law and violating conventional norms of society) to maximize profits.[21] Under this model, providing meaningful work to employees and being honest and straightforward with customers are good business practices *to the extent, and only to the extent,* that they enhance the bottom line. In other words employees and customers become a means for achieving the goal of maximizing shareholder wealth.

Under the Genesis model, however, the employees and customers become the actual ends of the business. The business is run for their welfare. Profit is not important as an end in and of itself. Rather, it becomes the means of attracting sufficient capital to allow the business to do what, from God's perspective, it is in business to do—that is, to serve its customers and employees.

Of course, this doesn't mean that profit is unimportant. Generating profits is critical. "No margin, no mission." Without profit a business dies. But the Genesis model places profit in a proper perspective. It becomes the means to service rather than the purpose of the enterprise itself.[22]

> To turn shareholders' needs into a purpose is to be guilty of a logical confusion, to mistake a necessary condition for a sufficient one. We need to eat to live; food is a necessary condition of life. But if we lived mainly to eat, making food a sufficient or sole purpose of life, we would become gross. The purpose of a business, in other words, is not to make a profit, full stop. It is to make a profit so that the business can do something more or better.[23]

And one last observation. Sometimes I worry that to suggest that one of the fundamental purposes of business is to "produce goods and services that enable the community to flourish" might conjure up some image of a cookie-cutter manufacturing process whereby the same goods are just repetitively stamped out by machines year after year and handed out to customers who come by. But this would be a mistake.

The Genesis model views employees and customers as the actual ends of the business. It places profit in a proper perspective. It becomes the means to service rather than the purpose of the enterprise itself.

I intend a far more robust understanding. Indeed the Genesis model statement of purpose assigns a very high calling to business. Business is to be in the business of "value creation" or "creating wealth." Put simply, successful businesses find ways through innovation to *make more or better things from less.*

In so doing, business generates the economic capital that sustains the entire society.

> At the very heart of capitalism . . . is the creative habit of enterprise. Enterprise is, in its first moment, the inclination to notice, the habit of discerning, the tendency to discover what other people don't yet see. It is also the capacity to act on insight, so as to bring into reality things not before seen. It is the ability to foresee both the needs of others and the combinations of productive factors most adapted to satisfying those needs. This habit of intellect constitutes an important source of wealth in modern society. Organizing such a productive effort, planning its duration in time, making sure that it corresponds in a positive way to the demands it must satisfy, and taking the necessary risks: all this has been a source of new wealth in the past 200 years.[24]

As Bonnie Wurzbacher, a senior vice president with Coca Cola put it in a recent interview, "As the sole source of wealth creation in the world, [business] enables every other social, civic and even spiritual institutions [*sic*] to exist."[25] In economic terms, all other institutions are funded (through taxes or philanthropic giving) by the wealth first created by business. This can be seen when a new business moves into a community, and is often felt acutely when a business closes or departs.

The call "to produce goods and services that enable flourishing" is a call to participate in this innovative and industrious work. It is a call to constantly be looking for ways to deliver more or better goods and services. In fact, it is the combination of the two purposes I have identified previously—enabling creative work (innovation) and producing community-flourishing products (productivity)—that really brings businesses' unique contribution into sharpest focus.

Conclusion

Let's finish the parable we started with. What can we tell our student considering a career in business? In short, we can tell her that she is considering a noble calling that will involve her in delivering on key aspects of God's creation mandate. If a Christian lawyer seeks to advance God's justice, and a Christian doctor seeks to administer God's healing, a Christian businessperson seeks to serve a hurting world by providing it with the material goods and services that will enable it to prosper. The Christian in business enables individuals to express aspects of their God-given identities by affording them the opportunity to participate in meaningful and creative work. In short, the Christian in business is in the business of rendering service that will enable humanity to flourish. ⌖⌖

Notes

[1]For convenience and flow of argument, I have elected to treat the question of God's purpose for institutions as a stand-alone discussion in Chap. 6.

[2]I make repeated references throughout this book to the "kingdom of God," "God's kingdom" or words to that effect. By this I mean simply the place or places where God reigns, where God is king. The characteristics of this kingdom are the subject of numerous parables and other biblical teaching. While perhaps not all-encompassing, Paul Stevens identifies four key features of God's kingdom: "First, [the kingdom of God] brings the forgiveness of sins. . . . Second, the kingdom brings healing and recovery of full life: 'the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.' . . . Third, the kingdom restores community by providing an open table for sharing meals with sinners, with poor and rich. . . . Finally, Jesus de-

nounced collective, institutional and structural sin . . . especially for the effect it had on the poor and the oppressed" (R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God's Business* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], pp. 84-85).

[3]See, for example, N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *NTWrightpage <www .ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm>* (creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, church).

[4]My choice of this particular approach is also a reflection of my own heritage. I have grown up as a Protestant primarily in evangelical Presbyterian churches. Consciously or otherwise, I'm sure that I bring a Reformed perspective to this project, hopefully tempered in part by my current happy assignment in a Wesleyan institution.

[5]Additional poetic accounts of God's creation can be found in the Psalms and are alluded to elsewhere in the Scriptures. Still Genesis 1-2 remains the primary account of God's initial work at creation.

[6]In this book I make repeated references to "human flourishing," but this is a difficult concept to reduce to a simple definition. At its heart, a human being flourishes when he or she moves toward becoming more the person God designed him or her to be. As such, this notion has a developmental character. It implies growth and change. Human flourishing also taps into the notion of biblical abundance. Jesus assures his followers that he has come "that they might have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). But it is a multidimensional abundance. It includes the spiritual, physical, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and social aspects of our lives. It does not consist of the mere accumulation of more things—particularly when such accumulation comes at the cost of the development of other human dimensions. On the other hand, it is not merely a spiritual concept. It is not just limited, for example, to the cultivation of the gifts of the Spirit. As I have argued in the text, the material world (and the physical goods derived therefrom) matters to God. Our physical well-being is a part of human flourishing. It is also not a solitary concept. It contextualizes individual well-being within a community. A rich understanding of human flourishing acknowledges that individuals are made for relationships. While it recognizes the value and dignity of each individual, it also affirms that individual development must be grounded in community.

[7]Dictionary.com, s.v. "stewardship," *<www.dictionary.reference.com>*.

[8]In her book *Believers in Business*, Laura Nash describes her findings based on extensive interviews with evangelical business leaders. She notes that the " 'good steward' was the most frequently cited metaphor for personal leadership among the group. For these CEOs it implied service, quality, a responsibility to be fiscally productive and a detachment from self-serving motives" (Laura Nash, *Believers in Business* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994], p.74).

[9]There is no need here to enter into the debate as to whether it is best to characterize human beings as co-creators or subcreators. For our purposes it is sufficient to affirm that to be human is to be intrinsically wired for creative work. See the discussion in Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, p. 24; and Stephen Bretsen, "The Creation, the Kingdom of God, and a Theory of the Faithful Corporation," *Christian Scholar's Review* 38 (2008): 115-54, 138-39. See also John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, §§13, 113.

[10]Of course, this observation has immediate application to business. As I will discuss in much greater detail in Chap. 2, many of the consequences of Adam and Eve's unwillingness to accept their limited nature show up in broken aspects of business. Moreover, the institution of business itself is often unwilling to accept a limited role and is tempted instead to exalt itself to God-like status, a consequence that I take up in greater detail in Chap. 6.

[11]" 'Rejoicing,' 'delighting,' and even, as some translations have it, 'playing' in creation characterize God's involvement in the cosmos" (Loren Wilkinson, "Christ as Creator and Redeemer," in *The Environment and the Christian: What Does the New Testament Say About the Environment?* ed. Calvin B. DeWitt [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991], p. 35, commenting on Proverbs 8:27-31).

[12]"So we receive our blessings not from them [other human creatures], but from God, through them. Creatures are only the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings" (Martin Luther, explanation of the First Commandment, "Large Catechism" [1529], in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959], p. 368). Luther saw a very close tie between human work and the work of God. "God Himself will milk the cow through him whose calling it is" (quoted in Gordon Preece, "Work," in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*, ed. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997], p. 1126).

[13]"Between 1950 and 2000, grain land productivity climbed by 160 percent while the area planted in grain expanded only 14 percent. This extraordinary rise in productivity, combined with the modest expansion of cultivated area, enabled farmers to triple the grain harvest over the last half-century. At the same time, the growing demand for animal protein was being satisfied largely by a quintupling of the world fish catch to 95 million tons and a doubling of world beef and mutton production, largely from rangelands. These gains not only supported a growth in population from 2.5 billion to 6.1 billion, they also raised food consumption per person, shrinking the share who were hungry" (Lester R. Brown, *Plan B: Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble* [New York: W. W. Norton, 2003], p. 131.

[14]Isaiah 65:21-22 seems to suggest that work will continue even in the new heavens and the new earth.

[15]The notion of the common good has a rich heritage. It shows up in the writings of philosophers down through the ages. It is also one of the central features of Christian, and particularly Catholic, social teaching. In a very simplistic fashion, pursuit of the common good can be understood as making decisions and taking actions that are beneficial to the community as a whole. But as I use the concept in this book I intend a slightly more nuanced understanding. The Catholic religious tradition defines the common good as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow *social groups and their individual members* relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (emphasis added). This definition makes clear that it has both an individual and communal element. "Historically, a common good is considered to be a human perfection or fulfillment achievable by a community, such that the community's members all share it, *both as a community and singly*, in their persons. *A common good then, is neither a mere amalgam of private and particular goods nor is it the good of the whole that disregards the good of its members*" (Helen Alford and Michael Naughton, *Managing as If Faith Mattered* [Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 2001], p. 41, emphasis added). According to the catechism of the Catholic Church, the common good concerns the life of all. It consists of three essential elements. First, it respects the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. Specifically, it respects and fosters individual human development. Second, it requires the social well-being and development of the community as a whole. And finally, it requires the peace and stability needed in order to allow for this personal and collective development. Simply put, the common good allows for the flourishing of the community and the individuals who make up that community.

[16]Here I am siding with Nicholas Wolterstorff in his critique of a neo-Calvinists' position that holds that there are certain abiding "types" of social formation—that is that certain institutions are divinely endowed with certain functions in an immutable ontological sense. Wolterstorff argues that "we must ask how the functions performed are best parceled out among the institutions of society: which should be assigned to different institutions, and which to the same. When we look at the various societies to be found in the course of history, we find certain basic functions regularly performed, but we find them parceled out among institutions in all sorts of different ways. Functions that we assign to one institution may in other societies be assigned to different ones. . . . Is our assignment a good one for us? That must be our question" (Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], pp. 62-63).

[17]"Their view of work is that it has both intrinsic and extrinsic meaning and purpose. That is, the particular work someone does, in and of its own right, is of theological value. Work has the larger role of serving greater societal purposes and needs. Discovering that work can be a calling, and finding meaning and purpose in work are often significant motivators that draw businesspeople to the [Faith at Work] movement" (David Miller, *God at Work* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007], p. 135).

[18]From time to time I am challenged to consider a third purpose for business: specifically, that a business exists to "nurture relationships," to "foster community" or words to that effect. And I am almost persuaded. In our twenty-first-century global economy, business does indeed play a central role in community-building. Many employees spend the majority of their waking hours on the job, so their opportunities for nurturing relationships outside of work are limited. Moreover, much of the work that business does depends on individuals working in teams rather than alone. And technology is increasingly enabling teams to gather in virtual spaces so that online relationships can be cultivated in the work place even between individuals who are geographically dispersed. Consistent with the observations drawn from the Genesis creation account I can

also readily affirm that the tasks to be undertaken by business must be grounded in community, flow out of community and be designed for the community's common good. Having said this, however, I am ultimately not convinced. If I were asked by a Christian entrepreneur to explain why he should start a new business, it seems sensible and straightforward to explain to him that he should pursue his business because he has a product that can help the world or because he can employ individuals looking for life-giving work. These purposes fit the character of business activity. Making products and hiring workers are aspects of a business's DNA. I would also have no problem telling him that his work must in all cases be respectful of relationships and that he should nurture a healthy work community. But this is different than telling him that he should start a business for the purpose of nurturing relationships or fostering community. Making community-building a first-order purpose of every business stretches the institution of business too far from its fundamental character. This does not mean that healthy work communities are unimportant. They are critical to healthy businesses. They are just not its reason for being; they don't rise to the level of a foundational purpose.

[19]Al Erisman, long-time head of research and development in technology and mathematics for the Boeing Company, has argued that while the promise is seductive, achieving this certainty is often not even mathematically possible: "The second thing we learn from optimization is that these problems are very difficult. No one really knows how to truly solve most nonlinear, time-dependent mathematical optimization problems (which is the nature of the problem as formulated). So we do in practice what any good mathematician would do—we approximate the problem by something we can solve. In practice, what this means is that while it is very difficult to maximize shareholder value subject to constraints over the long term, we can likely be more effective in doing this over the short term. The pressures from Wall Street for short-term results only support the solution to this problem rather than the stated problem. It is generally not the case that a sequence of best solutions for the short term will together lead to the best solution in the long term. Anyone hiking in the mountains knows that to get to the peak you sometimes have to move lower before climbing higher. Similarly, short-term thinking in business may look good at the moment, but it often has very significant longer-term issues" (Al Erisman, "The New Capitalism?" *Ethix* 66 [2009]: 4-5).

[20]Setting my proposed Genesis-stewardship model against the shareholder-maximization model presents the most dramatic contrast. Of course, the shareholder-maximization model is not the only existing option for describing the duty of a corporate manager (and the corresponding purpose of the firm). Since the publication of R. Edward Freeman's seminal work *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Boston: Pitman, 1984) a competing approach to understanding management's responsibilities has been advanced under the heading of "stakeholder theory." There have been almost as many definitions of this theory as there have been articles written about it, but in general terms this theory assumes that management owes duties not just to shareholders but to other constituent groups that have a stake in the company, typically including at least employees, customers and suppliers. While this is an overly simplistic statement, in general this theoretical approach calls on management to make decisions in the interests of all stakeholders and to balance competing interests (in one fashion or another). As such this theory would certainly allow for a consideration of the business purposes that I am advocating, although this theory is not without its own theological shortcomings (see Alford and Naughton, *Managing as If Faith Mattered*, pp. 55-60).

There is no doubt that the stakeholder theory has gained in acceptance since it was first introduced, although the extent of its adoption in practice is difficult to assess for several reasons. First, management focused simply on increasing shareholder wealth may nonetheless adopt policies and make pronouncements that outwardly appear to be focused on other constituencies. For example, a company might adopt employee-friendly strategies ostensibly to respond to legitimate employee desires but actually do so because it desires to reduce turnover, lower costs and enhance profits. Conversely, management actually operating under a stakeholder framework may nonetheless choose to justify its actions as a means of maximizing shareholder wealth. Management might engage in this obfuscation because claiming benefits for shareholders would allow management to invoke the "business judgment" rule and reduce the chance that it might be the subject of lawsuits alleging violations of its fiduciary duties. Complicating matters further, most articles written about stakeholder theory are theoretical rather than empirical in nature and are tipped heavily (and disproportio-

nately) in the direction of large public companies (André O. Laplume, Karan Sonpar and Reginald A. Litz, "Stakeholder Theory: Reviewing a Theory That Moves Us," *Journal of Management* 34 [2008]: 1152-89, 1160, 1172). In short, it is simply hard to tell how much ground the stakeholder theory has actually gained on the shareholder maximizing model.

[21]See, e.g., Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits," *New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1970, pp. 122-26.

[22]Chapter 8 contains an in-depth discussion of the importance and role of profit in a company operating under the Genesis model of business purpose which I advocate for in this Chapter.

[23]Charles Handy, "What's a Business For?" *Harvard Business Review* 80, no. 12 (2002): 51.

[24]Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 120.

[25]Telephone interview with Bonnie Wurzbacher reported on *Worldview Matters*, October 9, 2009 <http://biblicalworldviewmatters.blogspot.com/search/label/Bonnie%20Wurzbacher>.