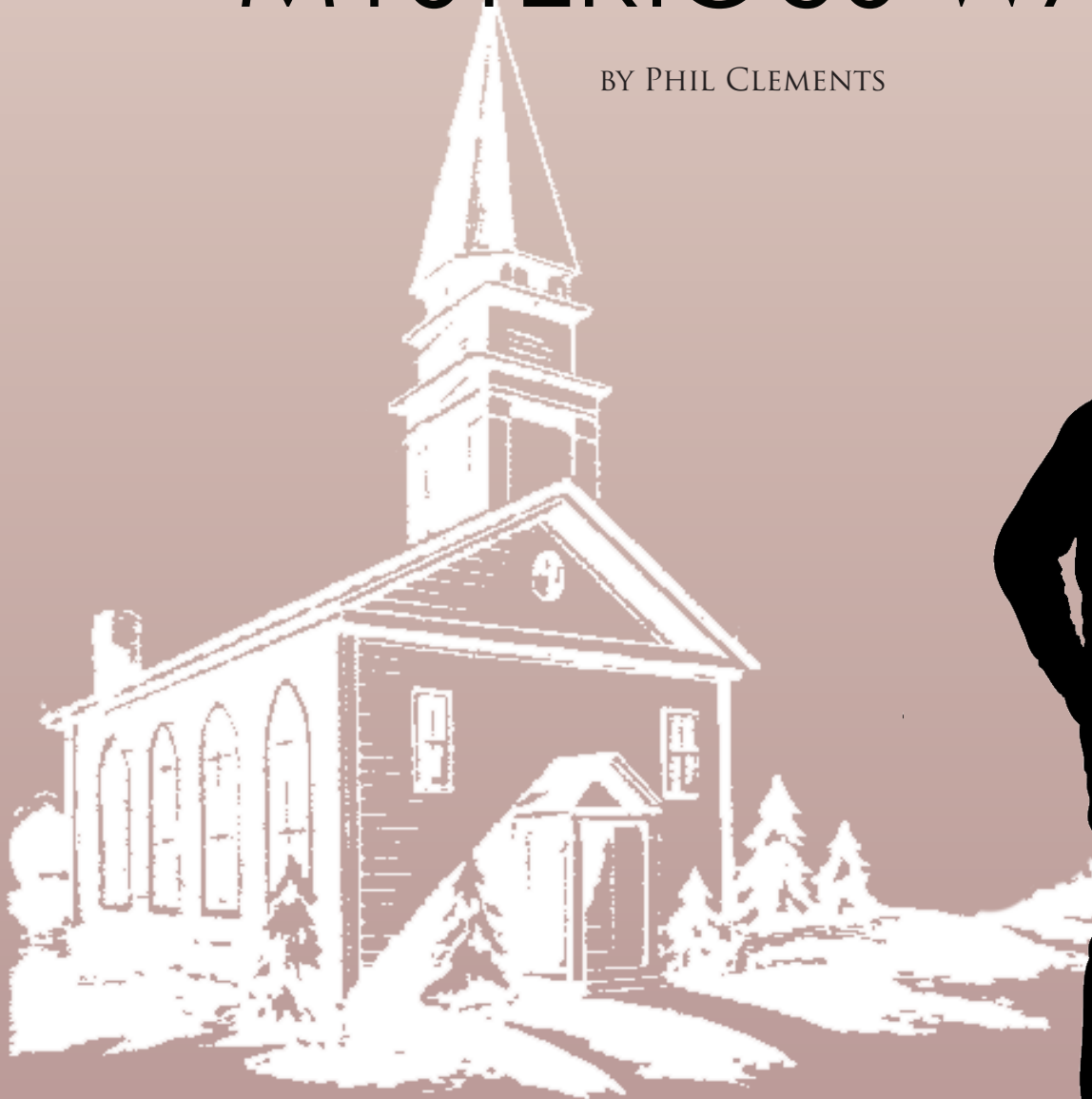


PERSONAL SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN BUSINESS

LIVING CASES

GOD LEADS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

BY PHIL CLEMENTS





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“Max Weber was right.”

So starts David Landes' paper in the book *Culture Matters*.¹ “Right about what?” I asked myself, and who was Max Weber anyway? So God, in His mysterious way, changed the course of my life.

It was 2003. I was the Chairman of the National Bible Association. I was visiting one of the Association's long-time and most faithful board members, John Templeton Jr., president of the Templeton Foundation. “Phil, you must read this book,” as John handed me *Culture Matters*. Since John, better known as Jack, recommended the book, I spent the summer reading the book. For those of us of the business persuasion, reading a set of Ph.D. papers is just painful. But I managed to get through it.

In my mind *Culture Matters* has a simple proposition: faith drives a country's economy and the Protestant faith makes for the best economy. Interesting, but who cares, was my response. But there was more. Perhaps commerce had changed because of the Reformation. Answering the questions about Weber became compelling. I mentioned this to my wife, Julie. She giggled, because as an economics major at Hunter College, a New York City public college, she studied Max Weber's theory on the implications of the Protestant Ethic. Going to our library, she handed me her book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, by Max Weber.²

Weber's book is a long white paper written in 1904. *Culture Matters* is an anthology of current white papers published in 2000. That Weber's work has survived 100 years and was right, is an interesting opening for *Culture Matters*. Right about what? Weber says that Reformation Protestantism changed the way commerce is done. His theory was that the Reformed Protestant believed that not only was he saved by faith, through God's grace, but that God had elected him for salvation from the beginning. This means that the individual relates solely to God. In addition, because of this election, a Reformed Protestant was assured of salvation. To Weber, this assurance left the Reformed Protestant needing to prove his salvation and assurance by work and thrift. To me, the question was, “Was Weber right?”

I have been a Christian since age seven. I grew up under the spiritual care of my grandparents, because my parents divorced when I was about five. In the 1950s a divorcee was shunned by the church. So my mother, a faithful Christian woman, was uncomfortable in the church setting. My grandparents were Pentecostal and regularly took us to “prayer meetings” and “revivals.” One evening at prayer meeting, I was kneeling by a sofa, praying in a kid's way, and began to think about what this Christian faith was all about. In simple terms, it was clear then that I was a sinner and it made sense that I was not perfect as God was perfect, that God had sent Jesus to die for us in payment for our sins, and that I needed to invite Jesus into my life. So I did. I have been a Christian ever since.

Throughout my career, God made many decisions easy by giving me only one choice. Often we struggle with where to work, should I seek another

position, what if I don't like what I am doing, etc. But for me, my walk with God was at one point very casual and at another point very focused. I have always been comfortable that God has me right where He wants me. This has proven true because I never changed jobs for about thirty years, starting right out of law school.

Fast forward to 2004 as I confronted this question of "Was Max Weber right?" I was faced with the conundrum of being a Christian for over forty years, working with major global enterprises and building businesses around the world as a senior partner of a Big Eight accounting firm, but had never heard of Weber's proposition. How can this be? God reminded me that He had given me this question and kept prodding me to get an answer to whether Reformed Protestantism had changed commerce and the way business was done.

Like other CPAs with a law degree, I tend to be very systematic in the approach to problem solving. To answer the Max Weber question, it was clear that I needed to understand Reformed theology, and not just in a cursory manner by taking some courses here and there. I searched and found Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, and started their virtual program (RTSV) in the summer of 2004 to pursue a graduate degree in theology.

the answer to the Max Weber question. Max Weber was right, but for the wrong reason. The Reformation had indeed changed commerce as the world knows it. But protestants do not work hard and are not thrifty in order to prove their election and salvation. They do these because they have assurance, owing everything including their time and talents to God who has saved them. These individuals live for God now with the expectation of being with Him in eternity. Every effort and every business opportunity are for God's glory. This completely different perspective at every level of business changed commerce as Weber identified, and such an orientation is only found in people who practice the assurance of heaven. What Weber identified and Landes affirmed has been a great gift to mankind.

During the days of my professional practice, I dealt with clients who practiced integrity, whose ethics were fundamentally consistent with the Christian tradition. Practically all of them were honorable and ethical. But if that could be labeled a Christian era, then today we are truly in a post Christian era. It is this shift that causes me to worry that even Christians are at risk of forgetting the principles of doing business right.

In discussing this problem with Peter Lillback, president of Westminster Theological Seminary, he

"For a Christian, every effort and every business opportunity are for God's glory."

At the same time, the world was changing at Standard & Poor's (S&P), where I was Executive Vice President of Corporate Value Consulting. S&P, a division of McGraw Hill, bought my unit in 2001 from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), which needed to sell the unit because the Securities and Exchange Commission had adopted regulations making PwC's Corporate Value Consulting practice, which I ran as part of my duties at PwC, no longer viable. I was able to get S&P to buy the business, keep all of the professionals and clients and make PwC a lot of money.

In 2004 we had a new president at S&P and she apparently had other plans for the unit. By October, I was terminated. I had to call my oldest daughter, who was in another S&P division, to give her a heads-up. Her first comment was, "Looks like God wants you to go to seminary full time." That was exactly what I did. I completed my Masters in Theological Studies degree at RTS in the Spring of 2006. It was just another example of God making a decision on where He wants me to be.

Along with my ministry training I finally found

suggested a conference on this topic to see if there was any real interest in the broader Christian business community. In 2010, we co-hosted the first of such conferences on Christian business ethics in Philadelphia.

To lay a foundation for what God might do going forward, I set up the Center for Christian Business Ethics Today, LLC (Center).³ The Center has hosted three conferences to-date, using several innovative structures to explore and educate the Christian community on "In God's world, business done right is a blessing." The conferences now focus on looking at each of the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) and their implications for the world of commerce.

For the Christian in business today, the question is how he or she operates the business in a fashion that is consistent with God's design for His world. The Decalogue presents a good framework for how God designed the world of business to operate, e.g., consistent treatment of all customers, honoring agreements, respect for another's property including time, talent as well as treasure. The Center's conferences and materials are designed to aid the business person in understand-

ing and applying these principles. From the conferences come series of papers that are published into books, which are now being translated into Korean and Portuguese as Christian communities across the world look to use them for their own edification.

Being a Christian and a business person under God's direction has been a wonderful personal experience. Over the years, God has blessed me with abun-

dance and fulfillment in careers, family and personal relationships. Why would the God of heaven and earth love me and give me these kinds of opportunities? The only response I have is this: I am thankful for His love, and I know that He does lead in mysterious ways to change our lives for His glory.

Notes

¹Lawrence E. Harrison & Samuel P. Huntington (eds.), *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York, NY.: Basic Books, 2001).

²Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1930).

³The Center for Christian Business Ethics Today (the Center) (www.cfcbe.com) was established in 2009 to address the need for application of traditional Christian principles to business operations. The Center focuses on the ethical issues arising in the details of operating a business. The Center does not assume a global understanding of right and wrong for every situation. Rather the Center believes ethics starts with a clear understanding of the standards of right and wrong, then applies these principles to the gray areas of global commerce.