

The Trinity as a Scriptural Foundation for BAM

By

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Abstract

Business as Mission (BAM) includes in its global definition that it be “intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations.” This article’s purpose is to establish a scriptural foundation for the work of BAM. A BAM enterprise is intended to pursue values associated with the Kingdom of God, with the business itself as part of that mission. The Great Commission is clear that Christians are to expand the Kingdom of God and be intentional in how they do this. It also emphasizes the Trinity’s importance in this transformation. Using a model of innovation based on the Trinity, this article establishes a scriptural foundation for the work of BAM. Similarities exist between the Father’s role in initiating creation and salvation and a leader who begins a BAM enterprise. BAM leaders can parallel the Son’s roles, particularly in activities related to teaching and mentoring. Today the network effects and community-building enabled by the Holy Spirit are also apparent in BAM organizations through their BAM communities and ecosystems. And just as the Holy Spirit allowed the Gospel’s spread during Paul’s imprisonment and other obstacles, that flourishing continues today through the efforts of BAM organizations throughout restricted access areas.

Introduction

“The claim has been made that athletics is the best way to reach people for Christ. Clearly there is a transcendence that occurs on a field of competition, and a Tim Tebow or Kurt Warner can garner the attention of a crowd.... However, the power of business is significantly greater. It has the impact to evangelize and is the only mission technique that can provide jobs and transform a society that can help lift people out of poverty. BAM’s impact is long term.”¹

The Great Commission clearly states God’s intention that Christians are to reach out to others for Christ: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Business as Mission (BAM) reflects this forethought in its global definition that includes being “intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations; focused on holistic transformation and the multiple bottom lines of economic, social, environmental, and spiritual outcomes.”²

Unlike the Friedman doctrine that argues that the firm’s goal is to increase profits and that its focus should be on the accountability it has to its stockholders, BAM extends a firm’s focus to include stakeholders with environmental and social concerns and incorporates a spiritual element as well.³ A BAM enterprise is intended to pursue values associated with the Kingdom of God as it financially sustains itself. It is worth noting that a BAM enterprise is not the same thing as a traditional firm pursuing profit while being religious. In the BAM model, business itself is an essential part of the mission. The Great Commission is clear that Christians are to expand the Kingdom of God and be intentional in how they do this. It is also worth noting that the Great Commission emphasizes the importance of the Trinity in this holistic transformation.

This article considers how Scripture provides a foundation for the work of BAM, particularly the spiritual element. It uses a model based on the Trinity that was initially developed to explain the phases of innovation. As the article explains, many of the parallels between the members of the Trinity and the phases of innovation are informative for those interested in the foundation and operation of BAM enterprises. This analysis recognizes similarities between the Father’s role in initiating creation and salvation and a leader who begins a BAM enterprise. Also recognized are parallels between BAM organizations and characteristics of Jesus, particularly in activities related to teaching and mentoring. This analysis will also show that the network effects and community-building enabled by the Holy Spirit are also apparent in BAM organizations through their BAM communities and ecosystems. And just as the Holy Spirit allowed the spread of the Gospel in the face of obstacles like Paul’s imprisonment, it works to extend God’s Kingdom through the efforts of BAM organizations throughout restricted access areas.

Application of the Trinity Based Model for Business Formation

One helpful approach to developing a scriptural foundation for enterprises associated with the BAM movement is a model of innovation based upon the Trinity.⁴ This model examines parallels between how the Trinity works in the creation and salvation processes and activities that are associated with the three phases of innovation. The invention phase of the innovation cycle corresponds to God the Father’s role in initiating creation and salvation. Humanity is created in God’s image and is a steward of his creation. The second phase of innovation, commercial viability,

has activities that correspond to behaviors of Jesus: redemption, teaching, and disruption. Market significance is the ending phase of innovation, and shares parallels to the network effects and community-building enabled by the Holy Spirit.

What might “being intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations” look like through the lens of the Trinity model? Many of the parallels identified in the Trinity model are helpful in constructing a scriptural foundation for how to start and operate businesses. In addition, there has been a need recognized for a more complete definition of BAM to include its “special strategic relevance to marginalized people and unreached peoples in restricted-access contexts.”⁵ Examining the Trinity’s roles in the creation and salvation of humanity provides a scriptural foundation that addresses these points. Using this model is particularly relevant given BAM’s intentional goal of meeting the needs of people who have been neglected or otherwise overlooked.

The Father

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27). God created humans in his image to glorify the original “so that the world would be filled with reflectors of God.”⁶ The Father’s role is one of an initiator in creation (and in salvation).⁷ In considering how this role can motivate and instruct a leader involved in a BAM enterprise, Barnhart recognizes three points relevant to starting and operating a business that are applicable to the analysis at hand. Humans bear God’s image. They have been assigned dominion over the world created by God. When God created the world and humanity, he was conducting an investment that had risk. Table 1 details these three points in the Trinity model as well as their application to BAM enterprises (Table 1).

Table 1
Applications of the Father’s Role in Creation to Innovation and BAM enterprises

Responsibility in Creation and Salvation	Model of Innovation	Application to BAM	Example
Initiator	Create with forethought and purpose	Focus on the intrinsic rather than instrumental value of the business.	Address food desert by building a grocery store
	Manage creation as image bearer of God	Consider long-run implications of decisions on not only profit, but environmental and human concerns as well. Take risks that are biblically informed.	Consider benefits for the community and environment in locating businesses. This could require locating businesses in settings that are riskier than those considered by a firm not associated with BAM.

Constructing a Trinity-based foundation for BAM begins by considering how God would go about starting a business. It helps to recognize that God designed everything with forethought and purpose when he created the world.⁸ This suggests that customers would readily recognize and appreciate the intrinsic value of a business created by God through the impact it would have on their lives.

This approach contrasts with the focus traditionally associated with for-profit enterprises. Leaders managing a for-profit business concentrate on its instrumental value, meaning that they value profit or another aspect associated with it because it provides a means to an end.⁹ This view perceives the business as an instrument to maximize profit or accomplish some other outcome. Achieving this outcome allows the leader to undertake another goal, such as making donations to a charity.¹⁰ One problem associated with focusing on a goal such as profit maximization is that it can tempt leaders to make across-the-board job cuts or other short-term decisions to appease worried stockholders. Another problem with such a focus is that it may lead to the objectification of workers, environmental factors, and other inputs, considering only their immediate utility to the process at hand.¹¹ Aside from harming workers and other stakeholders, viewing business through this lens can also generate consequences that hurt stockholders in the long run.

Maintaining a sole focus on this business' instrumental value misses an opportunity to allow God's kingdom to flourish.¹² Solely focusing on the instrumental value of the business overlooks what God would propose as the purpose of the business.¹³ Donating money in the example above fails to address the structural problems in the community, such as a lack of access to important goods or a scarcity of employment opportunities. Redirecting focus on the business' intrinsic value allows the business itself to become what helps the community.¹⁴ One helpful example that makes this point is that of a food desert in South Dallas that causes some large grocers to make donations to charities. Actually placing a grocery store in South Dallas (and operating at lower margins or even a loss) could be more beneficial to households in the area than profits donated to charities.¹⁵

A second point relevant to starting a business is apparent in Genesis 1:28: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" This passage reveals that God expected the human created in his own image to be a steward that manages his creation. Ephesians 2:10, Isaiah 43:7, and 1 Corinthians 10:31 also describe humanity as God's handiwork that he intentionally created to "do good works" and to glorify himself. Examining the Father's role in the Trinity provides a mandate for BAM leaders that the decisions they make should not only be profitable but promote human flourishing and enhance the environment. This approach requires considering not only the immediate impact of a decision on profit, but longer-term implications for the firm's financial health as well as implications for stakeholders with environmental and humanity concerns. Expanding the firm's focus on outcomes beyond short-term profits in its decision making will allow it to recognize value in circumstances where traditional firms limited to looking at the single bottom line will not.

This last point is reinforced by the concept of Biblically informed risk-taking. God's original plan was that humanity would "participate in his glory... (but often) the project seemed to end in complete failure or bankruptcy."¹⁶ The careful stewardship described above allows for cautious risk-taking such as what is described in the Parable of the Talents when the master criticizes a servant for failing "to put his master's money to work on his behalf."¹⁷ Additional

direction is offered regarding the importance of diversification to entrepreneurs to protect their welfare from unexpected disaster.¹⁸

The Son

Another key element of BAM's mission is using business to reach those who are marginalized or have been neglected. In Scripture, God the Father sent his son in human form to reach out to humanity and convince them that they needed salvation. Jesus' ministry contrasts with that of the incumbent religious authority of that time that distanced themselves from the marginalized. An important aspect of Jesus reaching out was that he became human and lived among those needing salvation. Convincing humanity that they needed salvation required Jesus to focus his ministry on teaching and redemption. Serving the immediate needs of the neglected also required disrupting the status quo in the local religious community at times. His life is instructive for those BAM leaders seeking opportunities to address the needs of the oppressed and neglected. Table 2 details these in the Trinity model as well as their application to BAM enterprises.

Table 2
Applications of the Son's Role in Creation to Innovation and BAM enterprises

Responsibility in Creation and Salvation	Model of Innovation	Application to BAM	Example
Teaching	Taught by example, living his life with authenticity	Do not isolate from customers and workers but follow Jesus' example of living among those the enterprise wants to reach	Use Jesus' interactions with the disciples as guidance in training others to take on leadership roles
Disruption	Reached out to those who had been forsaken by the religious authority	Seek opportunities to serve the needs of the neglected in areas that are less affluent or risky	Consider locating enterprises in overlooked or shunned areas, such as red-light districts, refugee camps, or areas recovering from conflict

One of the most important ways that Jesus reached out to humanity was through his teaching. Passages such as Matthew 4:18–22, Mark 1:16–20, Luke 5:1–11, and John 1:35–51 describe how Jesus recruited and traveled with the disciples to help spread the Gospel. He spent time with those he was working with and those that he was trying to serve. As noted in the Trinity-based model, the authenticity in how Jesus lived was one of the most effective ways that he convinced people to

convert.¹⁹ Those he encountered witnessed love, forgiveness, forbearance, and other qualities through his willingness to obey and submit to God repeatedly.

It is important that the authenticity observed in Jesus' behavior be apparent in the operations of the business itself. A BAM enterprise should not use the business as a sneaky avenue to approach those who have not been converted to Christianity. Rather, the business's intent should include a genuine provision of value to its customers and community through its products or services.

Leaders operating BAM enterprises can inform themselves by paying special attention to exactly how Jesus went about reaching out to humanity. Jesus did not minister from afar. Business leaders trying to follow Christ's example should not isolate themselves from their colleagues and customers. And when they interact with workers and customers, they need to remember that Jesus' ability to convince people of their need to repent and ask for salvation occurred through how sincerely he lived his faith. "Informed people today ... are more likely to follow Jesus when they see it lived out in the realities of where life happens, and in normal growing economies that is in the marketplace, where people spend most of their time. It is a best practice that every Jesus follower worker in the world sees his life on the job as a way to make other Jesus followers...."²⁰

Passages related to how Jesus recruited and commissioned disciples to help spread the Gospel can also provide guidance to leaders as they train others to take on leadership roles in BAM related organizations. Businesspeople possess an array of talents including accounting, marketing, management, and other skills. Participating in a BAM enterprise allows them to "do more than PRAY and PAY (give to missions), but they can also PLAY (be in the game of making disciples through their business)."²¹

The authenticity apparent in Jesus' ministry is also an interesting example of Founder Market Fit, "an innate, unfair advantage that sets founders apart from their competitors." This is an essential characteristic for startup firms seeking capital in their initial stages because they lack the substantial financial information necessary to convince investors of their viability. This means the founders themselves must find a way to persuade investors that a viable market exists and that their firm will be successful.²²

Focusing on intentional Kingdom business may mean that a BAM enterprise threatens incumbent firms. In Luke 13:14-17 Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of a synagogue leader who complained when Jesus healed a possessed woman on the Sabbath. While in the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus read the passage below from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, based on Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). Although initially well received, he was forced to leave after he said "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" in Luke 4:21. Jesus was able to convince his followers that he was who he said he was by living his life genuinely and honestly, even when it meant angering those in authority and risking his own life.

As indicated earlier, an important part of the BAM mission is prioritizing attending to the needs of the neglected. Successfully tackling this requires identifying those customers who have been

overlooked by incumbent firms and determining how to help them. This principle is apparent in Jesus' interactions with those in society that lacked social capital. He intentionally focused on those marginalized in the community, including women, the poor, and others disregarded at that time.

Focusing on those who have been overlooked suggest that a BAM organization would be more inclined to locate in places that would not appeal to a traditional for-profit organization. The poor, marginalized, and otherwise neglected are likely to be in areas that are less affluent or otherwise economically riskier. These could include red light districts, refugee camps, or areas recovering from conflict. A BAM enterprise would be more likely to appreciate the value of addressing needs existing in these communities than a traditional model. They would be more likely to recognize a market where traditional models would only recognize risk. Their multiple bottom lines would be able to perceive worth where more traditional models of valuation would reflect a loss.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit's part in the salvation of humanity occurred through allowing the Gospel to spread and the church grow. As the Trinity-based model observes, the Holy Spirit advanced these activities through the formation of faith communities and the networks initiated by Pentecost: "The Holy Spirit, by promoting faith and unifying communities as witnesses of God's benevolence, encourages organizations that glorify God through building strong, networked communities."²³

In considering how this role can motivate and instruct a BAM enterprise, there are two points relevant to starting and operating a business that are emphasized in the Trinity-based model. The formation of community was essential to the growth of the Church. In addition, there were network effects that allowed the Gospel to spread. Similarly, new BAM enterprises in challenging economic communities are often assisted by incubators and other systems that foster growth. These are helpful because of the communities and the networks they provide. Table 3 details these in the Trinity model as well as their application to BAM enterprises.

Table 3
Applications of the Holy Spirit's Role in Creation to Innovation and BAM enterprises

Responsibility in Creation and Salvation	Model of Innovation	Application to BAM	Example
Promot growth of the church by forming faith communities	Access to a community of users increases the probability of conversion and encourages potential users to try something new.	BAM communities	A Salaam Center engages the local community. It operates a thrift shop that provides affordable consumer goods and also serves as a community center. ²⁴
Spread the Gospel by	Technological infrastructure	BAM ecosystems Business incubators	Resource provision such as:

initiating networks.	supports and enhances the spread of an innovation.		Mentoring/Training: Accompany the entrepreneur. Incubation/Growth: Support enterprise as it starts up or reaches point it is ready to grow. Recruiting: Providing head hunting services Capital/Investment: Provide funds for growth. Networking/Prayer: According to BAM, this is essential as “the networks, their accompanying conferences, and the channeling of networks into regular, strategic prayer meetings that has allowed for the work of God in us and through our businesses.” ²⁵
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The role of the Holy Spirit in forming Christian communities is apparent in Ephesians 4:3 as Paul encouraged the early Christians to keep “unity with Spirit through the bond of peace” and remain connected to one another. The Trinity-based model emphasizes that the Holy Spirit united communities with shared values and mission. Research indicates that actual conversion occurs through “a network of interpersonal attachments,” where evidence confirms that new religious movements that become closed networks fail to spread but those occurring through close and direct relationships tend to grow.²⁶

How is a supportive community connected to a BAM enterprise? BAM organizations care about generating a profit but prioritize being a part of something that is important. The Trinity-based model suggests that a BAM enterprise is more likely to experiment with something riskier if there is a community available to assist and encourage them. As a member of an existing community, a BAM enterprise is better equipped to take chances on locations that would not appeal to a traditional business prioritizing profit.²⁷

The Trinity-based model specifies a second role of the Holy Spirit that is relevant to BAM enterprises, recognizing that the Gospel’s spread relied on network effects. John 15:26-27 and Acts 2:1-12 describe how the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples during Pentecost, allowing people

from different countries to hear the Gospel in their own language. The Holy Spirit's actions enabled the Gospel to be shared across language barriers, a network effect. Just as language barriers could have halted the spread of the Gospel, potential challenges that could inhibit a new business are prevalent in many environments surrounding BAM enterprises. These can include lack of human capital related to starting a business, a lack of funding from banks, a community resistant to generating profits or taking risks, or overwhelming competition from incumbent firms.

What provides the network for BAM organizations? The organization features an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is described as “local networks of entrepreneurs, business leaders, local investors, and mentors in a single community or local area.”²⁸ Resources provided by these ecosystems include knowledge, information regarding cultural attitudes, established businesses, other entrepreneurs, co-working spaces and other locations for operations, and existing markets. Ecosystem networks have become increasingly important in BAM enterprises. Such networks allow new enterprises to mature, economic development to occur, and the Kingdom's influence to increase across the world.²⁹

In contemplating BAM's “special strategic relevance to marginalized people and unreached peoples in restricted-access contexts,” consider how the Holy Spirit promoted the Gospel's spread in the face of challenges such as Paul's imprisonment and epidemics. In Acts 28:31, Paul “proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” Stating the Gospel as being spread “without hindrance” is significant for two reasons.³⁰ First, it reflects Paul's enthusiasm. In addition, Paul's incredible productivity during his imprisonment in Rome is evident in the prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) and can be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Rather than imprisonment halting Paul's ability to share the Gospel, the Holy Spirit worked through Paul's letters to spread the Gospel further in time and location than would have otherwise been the case.

Paul's being imprisoned provided a second way for the Holy Spirit to spread the Gospel. Liang observes that that God used it “for the greater progress of the gospel . . . and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my [Paul's] imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” (Philippians 1:12–14).³¹ In other words, it was Paul's imprisonment that prodded the early believers to share God's word even more intentionally.

The power of the Holy Spirit is also evident in the spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire. Two epidemics (circa AD165 and AD251) were among the natural disasters that occurred that killed up to one-third of the population.³² The church assisted with the disaster at hand. “For the faithful, disasters are but opportunities for refining character, learning obedience, and testing the faith.”³³

The examples above reveal how challenging events that appeared to be barriers accelerated the spread of the Gospel. Events such as Paul's imprisonment and epidemics forced believers to go beyond means that would have been traditional at that time, sharing the Gospel through alternate means such as Paul writing the Prison Epistles and the Christians ministering to the victims of illness. These episodes provide important insight into how the Holy Spirit allows the Kingdom to flourish currently in areas that resist missions or church planting. For instance, missions work has focused on Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus with limited success over centuries.³⁴ Today some

countries outlaw evangelism, do not grant visas to missionaries, or otherwise restrict activities of the church.

Goodhew recognizes the ability of BAM to provide a “creative access method” as an avenue for the Gospel to reach those in restricted access countries, which is particularly apparent in countries within the 10/40 window.³⁵ He shares one instance of a Christian who struggled in attempts to share the Gospel with his Muslim neighbors. Perceptions that he was “paid by Westerners to proselytize” left them inclined to openly resist his efforts.³⁶ The community eventually accepted him after he established a cattle farm. His business allowed them to see him “deal with real life issues” and even motivated them to have him join their community’s council of elders. Goodhew shares another example of an enterprise led by a founder intent on spreading the Gospel is an IT company based in India. The nature of the business provides numerous opportunities for the community to see Christ through the company’s words and actions.

Conclusion

Matthew 28:19 is one of the most well-known Scriptures associated with God’s plan for his followers to extend his Kingdom and share the Gospel with those who do not know him. But this plan is not limited to this particular Scripture. In the Old Testament, his covenant with Abraham included a promise that everyone could someday enjoy the blessings he had promised to share with Abraham’s descendants. But his plan was for those descendants to share God’s word by serving as an example and not blend in with everyone else by worshipping idols. In John 4:26, the Samaritan woman at the well was the first person with whom Jesus revealed his identity as the Messiah. Acts 8:26-40 describes the conversion of the first Gentile, a eunuch. Each of these instances reveals God’s desire to extend his kingdom to those outside the religious elite and also incorporates the work of the members of the Trinity.

This article develops a scriptural foundation for the work of BAM with a model based on the Trinity that was developed to explain the phases of innovation. Analysis using the Trinity-based model accounts for why a BAM enterprise will take risks concerning locations that would not appeal to a traditional business prioritizing profit. It lays out the parallels between the members of the Trinity and aspects of forming and operating BAM enterprises. Those who establish BAM enterprises share similarities with the Father’s role in initiating creation and salvation. BAM organizations share characteristics with Jesus, particularly in activities related to teaching and mentoring. It is also apparent that the network effects and community-building enabled by the Holy Spirit are also apparent in BAM communities and ecosystems. And BAM’s success in extending God’s Kingdom to restricted access area through “creative access” reflects the ability of the Holy Spirit to continue to spread the Gospel in the face of obstacles, just as it did during Paul’s imprisonment through his Prison Epistles.

About the Author



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Notes

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