

Discussion: Business as Mission

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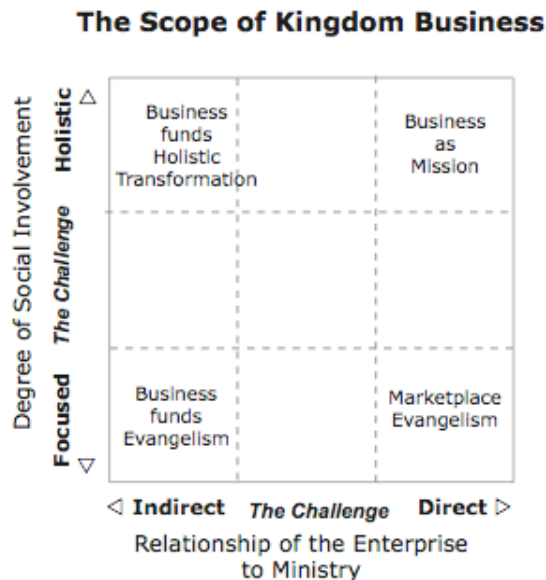
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The following was a panel presentation to the students of Wheaton College, 19 March 2004. It was held during an all-campus chapel, so it was designed to be inspirational in addition to informational. The participants represent a variety of viewpoints clustering around the concept of “Business as Mission.”

Kenneth R. Chase

Eighty percent of the world’s poor live in countries that contain the highest concentration of unreached people. Thus, most of the poorest people in the world are in places that have not been reached by the message of Jesus Christ. Unemployment in these countries ranges from thirty to eighty percent. Many of these countries, because of their existing religions, are closed to the influence of Christian teaching.¹ If you want to serve these poor in the name of Jesus, what can you do?

Our discussion today will introduce you to an exciting and challenging answer. The answer has been titled “Business as Mission.” The name emerged from the work of many scholars and business professionals who have been gripped by the unique opportunities provided through business ownership and entrepreneurial activity. Please consider this graphic.



The vertical axis is the scope of a business’s social involvement. If you are using your business skills to funnel money to ministry—a common practice for linking business and mission—or, if you are using business money to fund holistic transformation, even evangelism, then you are thinking of business for

mission. The horizontal axis is the relationship of the business to ministry. If you are using your business as an avenue for evangelism—either through being a testimony in the marketplace or by funding evangelistic practices—then you are thinking of mission *through* business.

Today, our guests will urge us to move our thinking toward the upper right quadrant—business as mission. The “Business as Mission Working Group” at Wheaton College has developed this definition: “Business as Mission is a vision for doing business in Kingdom-enhancing ways. Practically speaking, this means subjecting every business decision, policy, and practice to the biblical values of stewardship, reconciliation, justice, dignity, and peace. Business as Mission views business as a primary institution to holistically serve peoples’ needs in a way that demonstrates the reality of God.”²

Today’s guests are Dr. David Befus, an alumnus of Wheaton College, currently President of the Latin America Mission and previously having served in positions of leadership with World Vision, World Relief, and Opportunity International. Ms. Kim Daus-Edwards is Chief Transformation Officer of Equip Business Missions and recently served as Director of Organizational Learning and HR Communications with Intuit, the software company in Mountain View, California. Mr. John Warton, Jr., is President of the Board and the International Director of the Business Professional Network. He also is on the board of directors for the Kingdom Business Forum. We invited these guests here today because they are passionate about the role of business in promoting God’s Kingdom.

John, let’s begin with you. Tell us about your understanding of Business as Mission. How do you define it? What does it look like?

John Warton, Jr.:

I like the way you phrased that question, because all I can share now is *my* understanding. This is a fresh work of God, and I don’t believe anyone yet fully understands the work that God is doing in raising up people to use business as a strategy of missions. But one of the ways to look at it is this. Business as Mission is the practice of legitimate business according to Kingdom values for Kingdom purposes. Business as Mission is not about a Christian working in the business world and living out a private faith with no connection, no implications, for business practice. Neither is this about establishing phony businesses in mission fields that are used by evangelists simply as an access strategy. Nor is this about using the business environment as a context for other ministries, as valid and successful as they may be, such as evangelism and discipleship. It is really about the practice of business according to Kingdom values and for Kingdom purposes.

Chase:

Kim, you have been promoting this kind of practice with Equip Business Missions. Would you amplify the concept of Business as Mission from your perspective?

Kim Daus-Edwards:

In my experience working in corporate America, God led me on a growth process of discovering business as mission. Like John said, it is not one answer. One of the biggest initial insights that God gave me was that my work inside corporations, as a leader, was to view the corporation as a mission field. Just as you need to learn the language and the culture of any group to reach them, God first started with me by teaching me that business has a language and culture I needed to learn.

Now, as I work with business missions in Equip, we are training business people to rethink the way they look at business and to see it through a Kingdom lens. What does God say about your business and how to run it? How does he want to use your business for his purposes? We take teams of people, who are consultants in business from the U.S., to other parts of the world on what we call business missions trips. These are short-term engagements, and during the trips we work with God to re-purpose businesses for the Kingdom of God.

Chase:

David, in your work with Latin American Mission, you have been innovative in developing for-profit organizations in Latin America. Why do you do that?

David Befus:

This concept of using business or productive economic activity as a tool for ministry is an addition to the international ministry toolbox. I heard on your campus radio station yesterday an advertisement for students to become missionary teachers. That long has been a service that we have used in international ministry as a tool for evangelism and discipleship. This month's issue of *Decision Magazine* of the Billy Graham Association focuses on medical missions and mentions how a missionary medical doctor went with William Carey in the 1700s. We can think of health clinics and medical assistants as a tool for ministry.

To that toolbox we need to add the promotion of productive economic activity, and for several reasons. One reason is that even in the secular circles of the MBA program I attended at the University of Michigan, the professor of corporate strategy, C. K. Prahalad, argued that if corporate America fails to look at poverty in the developing countries, and fails to look at the world's poor majority and address their need for jobs, then business is doomed. The whole future of the world economy is dependent on having a

place for these people. So why don't we, as Christians, use this tool of creating income, of creating jobs, as one of the options for Christian ministry?

Chase:

Help us to better understand this practice. We are talking about creating jobs for under-reached people, for poor people. How does that work?

Befus:

I can respond best by an example. We have a request in Mexico from an Indian population 350 kilometers north of Mexico City, the Chichimeca peoples. They are unreached and a focus of the Mexican missions movement. They have a Mexican missionary working with them. According to the missionary's survey of this population, what is their greatest need? Their need is for a job. We often talk about how work is a part of the Christian life. But the problem facing many in the world is that they do not have work. We can talk about the creation mandate to work [see, e.g., Genesis 2:15], but in Latin America and many other places in the world, people don't have work. So, in responding to the need of these 3,000 families, we have developed a job creation program. They are growing *nopales*, which is a kind of cactus they eat in Mexico. This is addressing a need that then will help them also in education and in health, because they will be able to buy these services. They will be able to pay for teachers.

Chase:

John, do you have another example?

Warton:

I do. Our organization works with Latin American Mission in Colombia and El Salvador to create jobs, but we also have a program in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan. It is hard to imagine, but the unemployment rate is actually 65% in Kyrgyzstan, which means many people have never worked. Many young people have grown up in homes and they have never seen their fathers work. In fact, it is impossible to make a living in Kyrgyzstan as a doctor, because no one can afford to see a doctor or buy what the doctor might prescribe. So, five years ago, we began a program of job creation, and the short story is that, at this point, we have 104 Christian entrepreneurs in the program. They have expanded their businesses with training and loans and added a thousand jobs, permanent jobs, in their country. For those thousand people and their homes, and their families, it is extremely significant. Biblical principles are taught, along with the kind of principles that Kim and Equip provide. It has had such a dramatic impact on the country that now the government is aware of it and helping us.

Chase:

Kim, in your work consulting with corporations in South Africa, what kind of impact for the Kingdom of God do you see? How do you sense that?

Daus-Edwards:

It is sensed in so many ways. The first big question always to ask is, “What is the Kingdom in your heart? How are you being changed? And so we have seen business leaders in Cape Town, South Africa, and in the San Francisco Bay Area, being re-purposed, entirely transformed for Christ. In your faith life, have you had those times where you turbo into something? You develop more, and then you develop more, and you’re on fire. It is like that working with business where we ask, “What would God say about your product and your marketing strategy and your funding plan?” Asking spiritual questions about the business issues brings that about. So, first, I would say it is personal, and then I would say that we are seeing companies transformed. At first we chose mid-market companies, not the micro-enterprise and not the large corporation, but in-between companies, because the opportunities were wide open. We also found that the mid-market companies in Cape Town, South Africa, had the ability to influence deep into South Africa, into small communities and also into other nations in Africa. So, we worked with mid-market companies to help them reframe: how could they take their business into other places, and how could they create jobs, and how could we talk about unemployment realistically and the AIDS problem through business, and how could the businesses serve? So, we have seen businesses re-purposed and have new products and new opportunities that go out into the community and solve problems.

Chase:

David, a harder question for you. You are with the Latin America Mission—a missionary organization—and yet you have workers developing jobs. Can we do Kingdom work without explicitly evangelizing others?

Befus:

Well, I think that there is a discussion of this issue related to Christian education: can you be a Christian college or university without explicitly talking about the integration of faith and learning? I find a lot of similarity with that discussion in the arguments that are presented concerning Christian organizations working in economic development. There is the view that helping the poor, in itself, is a Christian witness, and—I started doing this in the 70s—I have struggles with that, because the problem I see, especially in this area of economic development, is that when you are successful in helping people become better off economically, this success doesn’t necessarily lead to Kingdom values. In Honduras, for example—I worked in Honduras for eight years—somebody who is successful in business gets to have another woman. So, you want to be a Christian organization that has helped somebody have another woman on

the side? I believe that the explicit presentation of the gospel needs to be part of these types of programs, and I also have personally seen that people grateful for assistance in having a job and in having an income are even more grateful for having a life with Jesus Christ and knowing Him personally. So, I think it is a good question. It is something that is debated. I am sort of on the side of saying, “No, we need in all of our programs an explicit program promoting Christian values, promoting a relationship with Jesus through what he did on the Cross.” We’re not saying that that is the requirement for people to participate, just as Jesus didn’t say before he helped somebody, “Do you follow me?” He helped people. But we have that as a conscious part of our programs.

Chase:

So, we are creating jobs in the name of Jesus. John, do you have any theological formulations or biblical passages that might assist us in understanding or motivating our intentions here?

Warton:

Yes, absolutely. Colossians, chapter 1, verses 19 and 20. Paul says, “For God was pleased . . . to reconcile to himself all things [through Jesus], whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (NIV). The reality is that God has also redeemed the business community to Himself, through Christ. That is a very foundational verse, but another one, very relevant, is in Mark 14:7, and I challenge you to ponder this verse. Jesus said, “The poor you will always have with you.” It is repeated in all four of the gospels, but only in Mark does he add these words of Jesus, “And you can do good to them whenever you wish” (NASV). Ken earlier mentioned the world’s poor, and if you travel the world, you see it, and it begins to tear you up inside to see how people live, and Jesus said, “Do good to them.” One of the challenges facing the Church now is, ‘what is good for the poor?’ We’ve learned we can do many things that are not good for the poor in the long run. Certainly one of the best things we can do is to give them a job and the opportunity to support themselves. They are not lazy and they are not dumb, but they do need some help, and that is one of the ways to do it.

Chase:

You all have had various experiences working with people whose lives have been transformed. Maybe we can start with David and then John, and then close with Kim. Do you have a story or an illustration of a life that has been transformed through a Kingdom business? David, does one come to mind?

Befus:

I know that in Wheaton from time to time you talk about programs with children-at-risk. What we are conscious of is that children-at-risk become adolescents-at-risk and adults-at-risk, and we have a program in Lima, Peru, with Scripture Union—in conjunction with their program for street kids—of creating

businesses. They have a fleet of taxis. They have a carpentry shop. They have a bakery. They have *triciclos* (bicycle-type taxis). They have a shoe factory and a water purification plant. And through this, number one, they generate half their budget, so they are not dependent just on U.S. donors. The businesses are creating funds. But number two, they are finding jobs for the street kids. That is what has impressed me so much, to see people that have come to Jesus through a street kid ministry have jobs through this business that helps to generate funds for the street kids ministry. It is great.

Warton:

Several years ago, Dr. Befus introduced me to a farm in Costa Rica. It is called, Granja Roblealto [Acorn Farm]. It was created in the late 60s by an American businessman named Brooks Herman. He had a business in Florida raising chicks, and the missionaries came to him and asked him for a donation. It was a tough year for him; he apologized, couldn't do it, but he said, "If you would like, I can send down one of my hatching machines, and I can show you how to start a business." And they said, "Okay." He sent the machine down, went and showed them how to do it. Eventually, he sent down two more machines, and they began the egg hatching business. From the late 60s, fast-forward to today; they have more than thirty hatching machines, and they supply 85% of the market for chicks in Costa Rica. Now, the advantage of that and the Kingdom impact of that is that the chicks meet the U.S.D.A. standards for health. The mortality of chicks is very low, which means that the Costa Rican farmers who buy them lose very few of them. Because they are so healthy and inoculated against all kinds of diseases, they gain weight rapidly. The hens become large and lay large eggs earlier and longer. The consumers in Costa Rica are able to buy plumper chickens, because of the healthy chicks that the farmers are raising, and the same is true with the eggs. The whole business is run ethically on Kingdom principles. It happens to produce a profit every year of at least \$200,000, sometimes more, all of which goes into Christian ministry in Costa Rica. One ordinary American businessman started the whole thing.

Daus-Edwards:

One of the clients we worked with on our first business missions trip to Cape Town, South Africa, is a great example of a life transformed and serving the kingdom through business. This man is a construction CEO whose company builds developments in Cape Town. He had been raised in a Christian home, but he had not fully given himself over, and about five years ago, he was reading II Chronicles 7:14, "If the people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear them from Heaven." God says, "And I will forgive their sins, and I will heal their land." So this man was thinking about healing the land in Africa, he asked himself, what could he, just a business guy, do? This idea of business as ministry was beginning to merge for him—by the way, work and ministry are the same word in Hebrew [*abodah*]. But he had been inspired by this verse from Chronicles, the Transformation videos by George Otis, Jr., and visions God began to give him about prayer and revival throughout all of Africa. This man rented the Newlands Rugby Stadium in Cape

Town and on the Africa Day of Prayer, issued an open invitation to come pray II Chronicles 7: 14 in the name of Jesus. He had no idea what would happen. Four years ago on that first prayer day, the stadium was filled—45,000 people of all nations, tongues, and tribes, in the name of Jesus, praying II Chronicles 7:14. Immediately, he began to get calls from other people and stadium owners all over South Africa and from some of the Northern nations, and they said, “ I will pray with you next year.” So the second year on the International [Africa] Day of Prayer, eight stadiums, about a million people, were praying in the name of Jesus to be healed, to repent for the sins of Africa, and to change, and to come to know Jesus. Then the third year, which was last year, they had over seventy stadiums all over the continent of Africa and millions of people praying in the name of Jesus for healing and for transformation for Africa. And this year, on May 2 [2004], the fourth year of this day of prayer, over 140 stadiums, 28 nations across Africa and estimates between 15-30 million people will be praying in unity for transformation in Africa. And this came from one guy who first said, “I am just a business person.” And God said, “No, you are a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

¹ This data comes from Bryant L. Myers, *Exploring World Mission: Context and Challenges* (Monrovia, CA: World Vision Resources, 2003).

² Figure 1 also was developed by the Business as Mission Working Group at Wheaton College (IL) under the direction of Dr. Norm Ewert (Business/Economics Department). Both the figure and the definition were distributed to the audience during this panel discussion. It should be noted, given the current political climate here and abroad, that the term “Kingdom” in the definition refers solely to the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God (or, synonymously, the Kingdom of Heaven) and does not involve any connection between business as mission proponents and an earthly theocracy.