

Title: Business Ethics – Entryway to the Nations

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Abstract:

As we think about “Bottom-up Approaches to Global Poverty” we have to look at solutions in a systematic way. Business, Politics and Culture all play roles in helping or hindering the poor in cultures all over the world. A system has to be created to respect all people and create a just environment for law and business. One way the church can contribute in this endeavor is through business ethics delivered on a global scale but in a culturally sensitive way. Business ethics provides a natural way to discuss beliefs because beliefs form the foundation of one’s ethics. Business people can play an important role in business as mission by clearly understanding faith-based ethical principles, being able to apply ethical principles, and using this natural business-based application of principles to impact people inside and outside the organization. We could say that business ethics does not support the mission but it IS the mission. So business ethics can and should have a positive influence on global cultures. The goal is to create a business, political, cultural environment where the poor are not exploited, and are treated with respect, dignity and opportunity. Businesses can help through such efforts as: paying fair wages, giving back to the community, communicating openly and honestly with employees, developing skills of workers, and communicating ethics throughout the organization and in the business processes.

But also as we look at business effectiveness, there is a significant body of research that indicates that ethics are good for business in such things as controlling costs from criminal activity and developing trusting relationships with customers which helps sales. Another function of business ethics practitioners is to help businesses understand the connection between ethics and excellent business practices. People will need encouragement and specific guidance to persevere in difficult political climates in order to gain the long-term benefits from ethical businesses.

This paper will present an overview of the historical background about the church and the poor, particularly as it involves business ethics. We will look at some of the problems and opportunities the church has faced as it has tried to engage business regarding ethics. We will also look at several case studies of Christian companies and how they managed to implement or not implement ethics. For example, we will examine the case of John D. Rockefeller who came from a strong Christian background and followed his pastor’s advice to give away his money but did not receive instruction on how to establish business ethics in his organization. We will then look at 20th century models that call on church involvement in business ethics and compare and contrast those models with current business as mission models that encourage living out faith in specific ways in business. We will then conclude by looking at a specific example: the forming and implementation of a non-profit organization called The Global Institute for Ethical Leadership, an organization formed to engage the global community in ethics. We will discuss the basis for the organization as a model to learn from and examine other ways that business can have a positive impact through business ethics.