

*The Journal of  
Biblical Integration  
in Business*

**JBIB**

a publication of



## **The Statement of Purpose**

The **JBIB** serves as a refereed forum for discussing faith-learning-life links in business. It is committed to the proposition that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16-17). Faculty and business practitioners are encouraged to share their perspectives on how to best equip college students to live out their Christian faith in the workplace. The **JBIB** is published by the Christian Business Faculty Association with underwriting support from Cedarville University in Cedarville, Ohio.

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# Mainstreaming: Watching, Wading, and Swimming

Sharon G. Johnson, Editor  
Cedarville University

## The Tensions

What does it mean to be a Christian professor? My answer to this question is not merely academic, nor entirely personal. It will energize my efforts and order my priorities. It will impact the balance I seek between teaching and researching, between school and home and church. Beyond my personal take on things, my definition will have an impact on the way I define my role(s) in my department. It will influence my views toward appropriate course loads, the kinds of projects I may be willing to engage in with colleagues, and my perspective on service to my university in terms of task forces and committees.

I've lately had to reexamine my own answer to "What does it mean to be a Christian professor?" Cedarville College will become Cedarville University by the time this issue of the **JBIB** is published. Discussions about the "designator" change have been going on for almost two years, and a significant part of the discussion is whether the

designator change recognizes what we already have become as an academic community or what we aspire to move toward. At heart, the question has been "What does it mean to be a Christian university?" Along with this change, I have been a part of "giving birth" to graduate programs at Cedarville University. As director of graduate programs, I have worked with many different campus groups as we wrestled with the impact of graduate programs and the degree to which the creation of such programs would signal a redefinition of our university's primary calling to be an undergraduate teaching arena. Finally, my own department has been engaged in a series of long and challenging discussions about the costs/benefits of seeking national accreditation for our business program. Here, too, we have wrestled with clarifying our vision and values.

All three arenas of change have focused my attention on issues of personal and community identity and priority. What does it mean to be a Christian professor

at a Christian university?  
How can I think and pray through the tensions and opportunities presented to me and to my colleagues?

### A Model

Being the visual thinker that I am, I created a model to help me work through my own responses to the changes of which I am a part (Figure 1).

I teach management courses with a special focus on strategic planning. The “field” of strategic management is really a moving, turbulent stream of discussion and

debate carried out in journals, meetings, the popular press, Internet sites, professional consulting, and many other arenas. The discussion and debate focuses on matters of vision and values reflected in various models and theories (what I’ve termed the “philosophical” issues), matters of improvement of actual business practices, and matters dealing with pedagogical concerns related to the processes of teaching and learning.

My roles relative to this stream are as teacher and scholar. As a teacher my role is to

interpret the discussion and debate going on in my field of strategic management and to direct part of the stream to my students. That direction is accomplished through the way my course is structured, the textbook and other resources I make available to my students, the course assignments, and any technology-mediated resources I use in class (computer simulations, threaded discussions/chat rooms, etc.) An important part of my teacher role is to interpret ideas from the stream in order to make them more accessible to my students.

As a scholar, my opportunity is to participate in the actual stream of discussion and debate in my field. One way to do this is to be an active researcher and publisher, investigating either new ideas or investigating possible variants and extensions of existing ideas. This can be done in various contexts (journals, professional meetings) and at various levels (Class “A” journals, regional meetings). This role dimension places me as a contributing participant in the stream, adding my investigation and ideas to build the “body of knowledge” in my field.

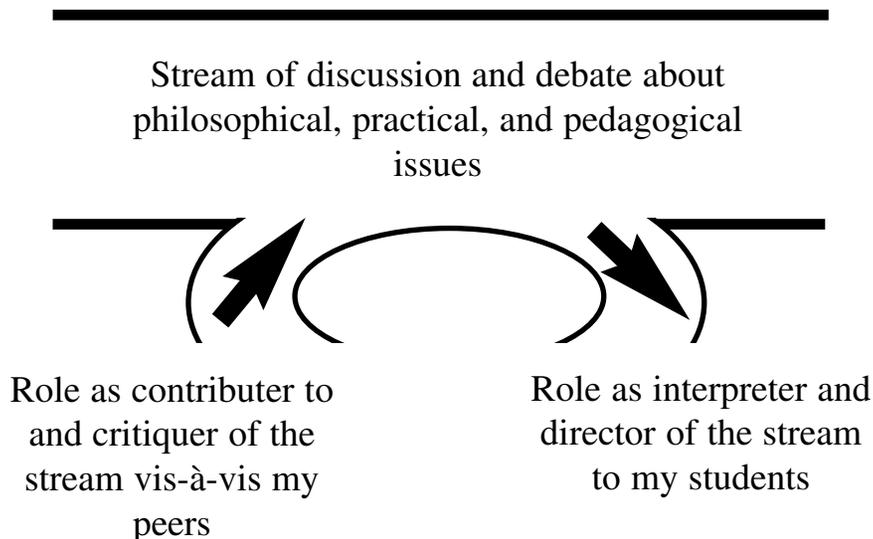
A second dynamic of the participant role, and one which I

think may have particular interest for faith-informed concerns, would be that of critiquer of the stream. In academia this role is played out in various ways: manuscript reviewers, writing of rejoinders, and even original pieces of writing that focus on weaknesses or gaps in existing theories and models. As a Christian scholar in strategic management, one of my roles may well be to highlight areas where certain business assumptions, say about competition, may well be at variance to biblical principles or precepts. As I look back upon the first five issues of the **JBIB**, I see a number of instances where this role as challenger of the “status quo” of scholarship in various fields of business has been assumed by the writers published in the **JBIB**.

### Two Questions—Many Possible Answers

Given this overall framework of scholarly/teaching roles, I’d like to note a variety of challenges we all face as we seek to answer the question “What does it mean to be a Christian professor?” I’d like to portray these challenges in the form of two questions.

Figure 1



**As a Christian professor, are my roles as both a participant in the stream and as a director of that stream to my students in congruence or in conflict?** At first thought the answer to this question might be “obviously yes.” Who would be in a better position to interpret and direct the discussion and debate in their field than someone who was actively involved as a contributor to the stream? The research process would seem to broaden and deepen one’s awareness about the issues in one’s field of study. But consider this—what if my own research, in order to be published, follows a pretty narrow “slice” of the whole set of issues in the stream? What if my own research colors my reading of the whole stream so that everything becomes interpreted in ways that reflect my own particular and narrow “take” on things? And, what if my particular slice of research has little to do with what I teach at all? Consider also matters from a resource context. What if the time it takes to do research takes away time (or energy or creative commitment) from my teaching role? What about the resource issue “on the margin”? That is, what happens if I am deciding to spend five extra hours in research

vs. five extra hours in course preparation? What would I determine to be the most desirable investment? *My point most broadly is that it is very possible that my roles as participant in the stream and as a director of that stream to my students probably result in both congruencies and conflicts which must be weighed both individually and in terms of the collegiate community in which I participate.*

**As a Christian professor, am I obliged to be both a participant in the stream and a director of that stream to my students?** This question speaks to the moral imperatives of my decision to become a Christian professor. The answer to this question is complex because it involves the interplay of such factors as my own professional aspirations, my institution’s direction and support, and my sense of divine calling. The answer is complicated even further by the notion that at different times in my life I might come to different answers (my professional aspirations when I first began teaching in 1976 were different from what they are today). And, we can complicate the answer even more by noting that my sense of “obligation” is

informed by different and often competing voices: professional associations, tenure committee expectations, and times in prayer as I seek God’s direction. *Here, my point would be that choices about “obligation” are inherently complex and intensely individualized.*

### **Continuing the Discussion and Dialogue**

I now teach at Cedarville University, we offered our first graduate courses this summer (of 2000), and our business department has decided to continue to move ahead in the accrediting process. In truth, we are not certain where any of these initiatives will ultimately take us. What is certain is that we shall be different in ways that are both intentional and unintentional. Our future is a matter of 1) targeting our expectations and directing our energies toward those expectations, and 2) dealing with the inevitable surprises (both pleasing and dismaying) that our efforts to attain our expectations will bring.

On a personal level I am committed to being both a participant in the stream of discussion and debate in my academic field and a teacher developing courses that allow my

students to better understand the issues of my field. I believe that the roles are congruent, but come with a cost. I have found no easy way to achieve a balance in my life as I juggle the demands of scholar, teacher, husband, father, church member, and community contributor. What I have found is that increasing amounts of prayer time have become critical as I seek God’s wisdom. The questions are hard; the answers are difficult. I want to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5, NIV), and be careful that I “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but [am] ... transformed by the renewing of [my] ... mind” (Romans 12:2, NIV).

### **This Issue of the JBIB**

This sixth issue of the **JBIB** is dedicated to remaining a forum for Christian faculty to be participants in the discussions and debates related to the connections between business philosophy and practice and the truth of God’s Word.

This issue is especially exciting because we are addressing issues of philosophy, practice, and pedagogy. We lead with a section on the important concept of servant-leadership.

In “The Importance of Leader Visibility in Servant-Leadership,” Tucker et al. explore the connection between leader visibility (defined as the public presence, behavior, and interactions of a leader with followers, whether before a large organization or a small group) and servant-leadership. It describes servant-leadership, reviews leader visibility literature, and constructs a theoretical model that graphically illustrates the interrelationship of the two areas. A second article, written partly in response to Tucker et al.’s piece, is “Stewardship-Leadership: A Biblical Refinement of Servant-Leadership” written by Nicholas A. Beadles. Beadles reviews the current thought on servant-leadership and questions whether servant-leadership is a sufficiently unique approach to leadership to warrant thinking of it as a “biblical” approach to leadership. He also offers a revision of the theory which might bring the theory into better alignment with the Scriptures. Included in this section are responses to Beadles’ article by Brian Porter and Virgil Smith. The articles in this section offer a variety of ideas, and their references and footnotes offer those interested an opportunity to

explore the idea of servant-leadership.

We follow this leadership section with a special section on applied biblical interpretation. The lead article is “Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: — An Illustration — God’s Immutability and Human Integrity” by Richard Chewning. In his article Chewning raises significant theological questions:

*Is God a learner? Has He ever learned anything? Does God ever forget anything? Does God ever change His mind, about anything or anybody, for any reason? For example, does prayer change God’s mind? God has a will, but does He ever modify it? How about God’s “emotions,” like His jealousy and wrath; do they fluctuate and change with circumstances?* (p. 50)

Accompanying the article are several response pieces that help place Chewning’s ideas into a business practice context.

This article is followed by a wonderful piece related to course pedagogy. Over the years of editing the **JBIB** it has been my desire to encourage more articles related to the area of teaching, something almost all CBFA

members share in common.

In “An Honors Course in Economic Philosophy and Policy Development,” Douglas Dotterweich details the elements of a course that emphasizes moral philosophy as the foundation for the development of sound economic policy. I am especially excited because Dotterweich teaches at a state university and wrestles with some tensions that may be less prevalent than at private Christian schools.

Adding to the discussion that was initiated in the editor’s introduction to this issue of the **JBIB** is Steven L. Rundle’s article “The Christian Business Scholar and the Great Commission: A Proposal for Expanding the Agenda.” Rundle points to a paradigm shift in missions outreach that focuses on workplace evangelism, and he discusses the possibilities for this development for research, new degree and certificate programs, and new opportunities for business-related field support.

We then follow with the first of what I hope will be an ongoing series of cases developed for readers of the **JBIB**. Niles Logue offered us the opportunity to print his write-up of the New Era Philanthropy situation that had such a dramatic impact on a

variety of Christian and non-Christian institutions (including some of the colleges from which CBFA members come). The case was done in three parts and includes discussion questions for classroom use. I am genuinely excited about the opportunity of providing **JBIB** readers with this case material, and we encourage its use in the classroom (feel free to make copies of the case – be sure to give appropriate credit to Logue and the **JBIB**).

### Some Concluding Thoughts

The **JBIB** was created to offer Christian faculty (at both Christian and secular schools) a resource that might help them grow as both scholars and teachers. The number of manuscripts we receive has increased each year, and for that we are grateful. Let me encourage **you** to become a participant in the stream of discussion and debate the **JBIB** has sought to channel and foster. Your ideas and experiences could make a vital contribution to the stream. I would urge you to become more than a “watcher.” Wade out into the stream, test the water, and link arms with those who are seeking to swim and make a difference. At the back of this issue of the **JBIB** you will find

information about submitting manuscripts for review.

My thanks as always go to the superbly professional public relations staff at Cedarville University, led by Roger Overturf and his assistant, Kara Steinman. Kara's work as technical editor of the **JBIB** and Roger's leadership and encouragement have been indispensable in the production of the journal you are holding in your hands.

Also I want to thank the 41 men and women who currently serve as reviewers for the **JBIB**. Their names are listed at the back of this issue. It is their thorough and constructive insistence on scholarly excellence and biblical faithfulness that have allowed the **JBIB** to grow in its mission.

The logo for the Journal of Biblical Inquiry (JBIB) features the letters 'JBIB' in a bold, serif font. A vertical line is positioned to the right of the letters, extending from the top of the 'B' to the bottom of the 'B'.

## Dialogue I

### The Importance of Leader Visibility in Servant-Leadership

Bruce A. Tucker, Mt. Paran Christian School; A. Gregory Stone, Regent University School of Business; Robert F. Russell, Emory & Henry College; and Gerald P. Franz, Practical Bible College

*Tucker et al. examine the relationship between leader visibility and servant-leadership and find that leader visibility determines the quality of servant-leadership.*

*All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the **Holy Bible: New International Version** (North American Edition), © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.*

#### Abstract

This paper explores the connection between leader visibility and servant-leadership. It describes servant-leadership, reviews leader visibility literature, and constructs a theoretical model that graphically illustrates the interrelationship of the two areas. The connection between servant-leadership and leader visibility involves both the leader's personal character and the leader's interaction with followers. Leadership visibility affects the process by which leaders transmit their personal values, beliefs, and principles to their organizations. Consequently,

leader visibility is a moderating variable that affects the quality of servant-leadership.

#### The Importance of Leader Visibility in Servant-Leadership

*Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (Matthew 20:26-27, KJV).*

This article examines the prospect that leader servanthood and leader visibility are interrelated parts of the mosaic of leadership. The paper includes the following segments:

1. A description of the origins and tenets of servant-leadership.

2. A literature review that emphasizes the leader visibility attributes that relate to servant-leadership.

3. An analysis of the interrelationship between servant-leadership and leader visibility, including a graphical presentation of the structural relationship.

4. An explanation of the importance of leader visibility in the selected servant-leadership attributes of vision, empowerment, and trust.

5. A concluding discussion of the potential applications of the concepts.

The objective of this paper is to provide additional insights into the concept of servant-leadership by examining the significance of leadership visibility and the interaction between the two theoretical constructs.

**The working definition of leader visibility for this review is the public presence, behavior, and interactions of a leader with followers, whether before a large organization or a small group.**

While leader visibility may affect most every managerial style, this paper focuses on the link between visibility and

servant-leadership for several reasons. First, servant-leadership is a potentially “higher order” managerial style that requires ongoing long-term development and growth on the part of the leader. Secondly, it appears visibility is particularly important for servant-leaders. Finally, leader visibility further appears to directly impact some functional aspects of servant-leadership.

### **Servant-Leadership**

Jesus initiated the concept of servant-leadership. “He was and is the master servant-leader” (Cedar, 1987, p. 22). Jesus said, “whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:26-27, KJV). Sanders (1994, p. 21) said in reference to Jesus that servanthood is “*the Master’s master principle.*” Ultimately, Jesus demonstrated the utmost love of a servant by laying down His life so that “whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

### **Scriptural Foundations of Servant-Leadership**

Among the important Scriptures that establish the servant-leadership concept are the

parallel passages found in Matthew 20:25-28 and Mark 10:42-45. These Scriptures include three critical components that support the concept of servant-leadership. First, Jesus identifies the nature of worldly, human leadership. He states the “rulers of the Gentiles lord it over” and “their high officials exercise authority over” the populace (Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:42). The second major statement of Jesus is His specification of the prerequisite for greatness in the kingdom of God—“whoever wants to become great among you must be your *servant* and whoever wants to be first must be your *slave*” [emphases added] (Matthew 20:26-27; Mark 10:43). The third critical part of the passage is Jesus’ identification of His own servant nature. He stated, “the *Son of Man* did not come to be *served*, but to *serve*” [emphasis added] (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).

The aforementioned passages directly address the issue of leadership. They clearly indicate that *Jesus saw Himself as a servant-leader*, one whose very incarnation had the purpose of serving humankind. Despite His inherent authority as the Messiah, Jesus did not seek an earthly

kingship. Instead, Jesus advocated that those who want greatness in the kingdom of God should seek the role of servant. The passages indicate that Jesus, the person who is exalted above all creation, the leader of all leaders, willingly humbled Himself to serve humanity.

### **Modern Servant-Leadership Theorists**

Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) inspired the servant-leadership concept among modern organizational theorists with his essays and books during the 1970s and 1980s (Spears, 1996). Greenleaf suggested that leaders strongly need to rethink how they relate to their workers. Leadership, according to Greenleaf, must first and foremost meet the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1977).

An important distinction Greenleaf made is that servant-leadership is not a template of behavior alone. Genuine servant-leaders are servants at heart who also lead, not leaders who practice some measure of service (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 14). The leader must be genuinely interested in the welfare of employees and serve on that basis to realize the full benefits of servant-leadership. To Greenleaf,

this was a deeply spiritual matter (Spears & Lloyd, 1996, pp. 29-30).

In addition to Greenleaf, various other writers espouse servant-leadership as a valid, modern theory for organizational leadership (see Akuchie, 1993; Block, 1993; Briner & Pritchard, 1998; DePree 1989, 1997; Fairholm, 1997, 1998; Ford, 1991; Gaston, 1987; McKenna, 1989; Oster, 1991; Pollard, 1996a; Rinehart, 1998; Stone & Winston, 1998; Winston, 1999). DePree (1992, p. 220) said, “above all, leadership is a position of servanthood.” Servant-leadership takes place when leaders assume the position of servant in their relationships with fellow workers. “Servant-leadership is the desire to see those you work with become all they can be” (Winston, 1999, p. 76).

Servant-leaders assert the important place of values, beliefs, and principles in leadership (Covey, 1990; Ford, 1991; Stone & Winston, 1998). According to many writers, values are the core elements of servant-leadership; they are the independent variables that actuate servant-leader behavior (Batten, 1997; Covey, 1990; Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999; Ford, 1991; Kouzes &

Posner, 1993; Malphurs, 1996; Melrose, 1997; Nair, 1994; Rinehart, 1998; Stone & Winston, 1998). Consequently, the internal values of servant-leaders yield functional leadership attributes.

### **Servant-Leadership Characteristics**

The literature regarding servant-leadership reveals many distinguishable attributes of such leaders. These include eight functional attributes: 1) vision, 2) credibility, 3) trust, 4) service, 5) modeling, 6) pioneering, 7) appreciation of others, and 8) empowerment (Russell & Stone, 2000). The functional attributes are the operative characteristics of servant-leadership. They are identifiable

*At the organizational level, the servant leader establishes vision, empowers employees, and builds trust.*

characteristics that actuate leadership responsibilities. Each functional attribute is distinct, yet they are all interrelated. In some cases, the attributes reciprocally influence one another. The functional attributes are those that must be present to truly qualify an

individual as both a servant and a leader. While all of the attributes of servant-leadership are important, this study focuses on the role of leader visibility in only three of the functional attributes: 1) **vision**, 2) **empowerment**, and 3) **trust**. At the organizational level, the servant-leader establishes vision, empowers employees, and builds trust.

For a servant to be a leader, he or she must have a vision—a goal and/or a direction for the future. According to McKenna (1989), Jesus clearly stipulated His primary vision: “**the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost**” (Luke 19:10). In reflecting upon the idea of vision, Robert Greenleaf (1980, p. 24) quoted the well-known Scripture from Proverbs: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (29:18, KJV). Kotter (1990) stated that one of the important ways leadership differs from management is that leaders establish a vision for the future.

Servant-leaders empower their employees by providing opportunities for them to do their best. In essence, servant-leadership involves turning the traditional organizational pyramid upside down (Blanchard, 1997). “Servant-leaders multiply their

leadership by empowering others to lead” (Wilkes, 1996, p. 25). They coach and mentor followers to increase their skills and help them achieve their full potential. An essential part of Jesus’ ministry was training His disciples and empowering them for service (Wilkes, 1996). Initially, He gave them instructions to preach and heal among the Jews (Matthew 10:5-8), but later Jesus empowered the disciples with the Great Commission to reach the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

Servant-leaders express trust in various ways, including valuing followers, accepting personal accountability, and having a willingness to be vulnerable (Stone & Winston, 1998). According to Martin (1998, p. 41), “Trust is the root of all great leadership.” Jesus sought to establish trust between Himself and those who followed Him. He said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me” (John 14:1). Ultimately, Jesus calls people to trust His leadership by placing their faith in Him.

### **Leadership Visibility**

Jesus not only initiated the concept of servant-leadership, but He also confirmed the importance

of leader visibility. Jesus was a visible leader who taught by example (Hind, 1992; Sanders, 1994). He “modeled for all time what servant-leadership looks like” (Wilkes, 1996, p. 17). He visibly modeled the ideal of love in servant-leadership. At the Last Supper He “showed them [the disciples] the full extent of His love” by washing their feet (John 13:1). Furthermore, He explicitly instructed them to follow His example [emphases added]:

*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than His master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent Him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (John 13:14-17).*

Modern leaders have the opportunity to emulate the servant-leadership characteristics of Jesus. Maintaining a visible leadership presence is an important part of this process.

“The effective servant-leader is highly visible in his leading and caring and comforting”

(Cedar, 1987, p. 109). Manz (1998, pp. 49-50) said, “the visibility of leadership is a tremendous opportunity.” One means for leaders to exercise influence on group members is by their visible example (Bass, 1990, pp. 13-14). Kouzes and Posner (1993, p. 47) argue that followers must witness leaders “do what they say they will do.”

The causal relationship between servant-leadership and leader visibility involves two primary components: 1) the leader's personal character, and 2) the leader's interaction with followers. These two areas include the subcategories of personality, style, trust, and motivation, which can be used to assess the quality of servant-leadership in a leader's public example.

### **Leader Character**

An effective leader exhibits unique personal characteristics in the organization (House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Weber, 1968). Such visible characteristics display the leader's servanthood. Visible variables to assess character influences are personality effects and visible style.

Personality influences convey a leader's attitude. Some strong

characteristic, even if not physical, accompanies a leader (Atwater, Penn, & Rucker, 1991; Gardner, 1995; Hunt, 1991). Becker's research (1998) emphasized that integrity and character produce higher levels of productivity in leaders. The opposite effect happens for narcissistic leaders who take advantage of their followers (Sankowsky, 1995).

An effective leader's visible, personal style adapts to the situation (Hollander, 1978; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). The important factor is to read and adapt to the situation for the good of the group (Green & Nebeker, 1977). The entire concept of situational leadership emphasizes the importance of leader adaptation; the key point in this theory is that the leader must apply the appropriate combinations of directive and supportive behaviors (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996).

### **Leader Interactions with Followers**

Effective leaders establish appropriate power by visibly interacting with followers. Referent power, as defined in French and Raven's (1959) power taxonomy, comes from strong interpersonal relations. Roberts

(1987) called this “relational power” and indicated its base is mutual influence and reciprocal interchange. It is one of the more befitting types of power for servant-leaders to wield. Yukl (1998, p. 199) argues that the “obvious way to exercise referent power is through role modeling.” Toro CEO Ken Melrose states that he tries to be a *visible* role model by incorporating “some practices in my daily work regimen that illustrate what I'm asking others to do” (1995, p. 150).

The visible behaviors that affect leadership interactions are variables of trust and motivation. Trust is the “most looked for” value in superiors (Frost & Moussavi, 1992). Expressions of trust are the basis for effective work relationships and productivity (Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Fairholm, 1994; Heckscher, Eisenstat, & Rice, 1994; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The trust factor establishes positive relationships for effective productivity. In the context of trust, authority recognizes people's gifts and guides them to effective discipline and work (Helgeson, 1996).

Visible and effective motivation leads to a person's personal growth and a sense of

autonomy in determining one's destiny (Greenleaf, 1996; Markovich, 1997; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Sullivan, 1988). Motivating leaders see communication as a tool for organizational growth and encouraging the well-being of workers (Clampitt, 1991; Hackman & Johnson, 1996; Napolitano & Henderson, 1998). Finally, effective rewards stimulate motivation by producing a sense of accomplishment and development (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1995; Klein, 1994; Thorlakson & Murray, 1996).

A leader's conspicuous actions powerfully attract the loyalty and commitment of followers. Martin Chemers (1993, p. 311) showed that a leader's actions solicit the attention of the followers and fulfill their expectations of a good leader. He stated, "When the leader is seen as fulfilling expectations about goal-related activities, he or she is seen as an effective leader: 'That's a good leader.' When the leader satisfies the follower's personal, emotional needs, follower loyalty and commitment are elicited: 'That's my leader!'" The attitudes and behaviors of followers reveal the power of visible leadership.

### The Importance of Leader Visibility in Servant-Leadership

As mentioned heretofore, various theorists maintain that the core, personal components of servant-leadership are values, beliefs, and principles. These ideals translate into functional attributes of servant-leadership through the visible attitudes, actions, and behaviors of leaders. **Consequently, the primary argument of this paper is that leader visibility affects the transmission or dissemination process that takes place between the intrapersonal level of values, beliefs, and principles and the functional level of servant-leadership, which includes vision, empowerment, and trust. Consequently, leader visibility is a moderating variable that affects the quality of servant-leadership.**

If this argument is true, then visible leaders should be more effective servant-leaders, while non-visible (*not invisible*) leaders are likely to be less effective servant-leaders. The following graphic (Figure 1) portrays the causal relationship between visibility and servant-leadership:

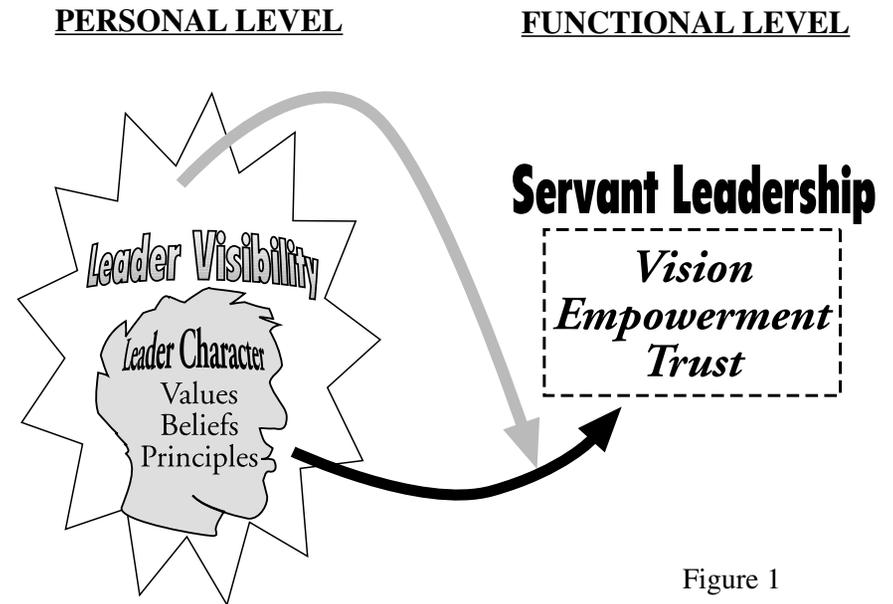


Figure 1

### Explanation of the Impact of Leader Visibility on Vision, Empowerment, and Trust

As portrayed in the previous diagram, leader visibility moderates the transmission of personal values into servant-leadership at the functional level. Leaders may possess the intellectual concepts associated with servanthood, but they must undertake behaviors that effectively implement the concepts. Leader visibility moderates servant-leadership in organizations by affecting the establishment of vision, empowerment, and trust.

### The Impact of Leader Visibility on Vision

A leader's visible behavior gives power to his or her vision. Snyder, Dowd, and Houghton (1994, p. 100) noted that the most important commitment a leader makes in relation to a vision is "the commitment to model the vision through one's own behavior in a visible and consistent manner." Consequently, the leader's behavior gives life to the vision. Burt Nanus (1992, pp. 138, 140) called this process "personifying the vision." He noted that the vision process is not complete until all the stakeholders

“viscerally understand where the organization is headed and have a high degree of shared commitment to the vision.”

Sashkin (1995) describes five particular kinds of visible behavior that model the vision:

1. focusing other people’s attention on the key issues of the vision;
2. developing communication skills, such as listening skills, that draw others in;
3. maintaining consistent behaviors that reflect the vision;
4. communicating respect for oneself and others; and
5. making risky decisions and remaining committed to those decisions.

Sashkin states that the purpose of a leader’s visible behavior in relation to the vision is to “attempt to create cultures that will guide their organizations into the future” (1995, p. 407). The model for the new culture is the leader.

Likewise, Barna (1996) emphasized that visionary living creates types of behavior that are different from non-visionary behaviors. Barna describes some of the visionary behaviors as personal interactions in which the vision is the central focus of

learning and growing. The visionary leader causes growth by modeling new behaviors. This necessitates that leaders move out from closed environments and interact in accountable relationships.

### **The Impact of Leader Visibility on Empowerment**

Empowerment requires visible leaders. Bennis and Nanus (1997) declare that to achieve empowerment, a leader’s behavior must pull rather than push people along. “A pull style of influence works by attracting and energizing people ... it motivates by identification” (Bennis & Nanus, 1997, p. 74). Max DePree (1989, p. 42) argues for empowerment by calling for “roving leadership.” According to DePree, “roving leadership is a key element in the day-to-day expression of a participative process” (1989, p. 42).

Servant-leaders notice their people and use their gifts. Bass (1990) notes that power sharing includes leaders involving followers in planning and decision-making. Leaders become conspicuous in welcoming people to join them in the important tasks of the organization. Shandler and Egan (1994) also note the need for leaders who

help workers to personal empowerment and cooperative skills. They assert that a quality environment calls for leaders who conspicuously develop a personal empowerment initiative within the organization.

### **The Impact of Leader Visibility on Trust**

Frost and Moussavi (1992) found that the only bases of power that are influential are those that foster trust through personal interaction, rather than through organizational reward or coercive systems. Visibility and personal interaction are important in building the relationships necessary for trust to develop. Sharing information with a sense of caring also builds trust. Heckscher, Eisenstat, and Rice (1994) note that growth stalls because new levels of trust are not established. They stress the need for face-to-face dialogue to facilitate trust.

Visible behaviors and communications form trust bonds that provide influential power. Gilbert Fairholm (1994, pp. 110-111) states, “trust is a range of observable behaviors and a cognitive state that encompasses predictability.” He notes that it is “only through direct interaction that we can develop a deep

conviction in others of our basic trustworthiness.” Bennis and Nanus (1997, p. 173) also state that trust is the “emotional glue” that holds an organization together. They note that the leader is responsible for the environment, and one way to influence it “is to demonstrate by their own behavior their commitment to the set of ethics they are trying to institutionalize.” Visibility is necessary for developing trust so that the servant-leader can influence the followers’ lives.

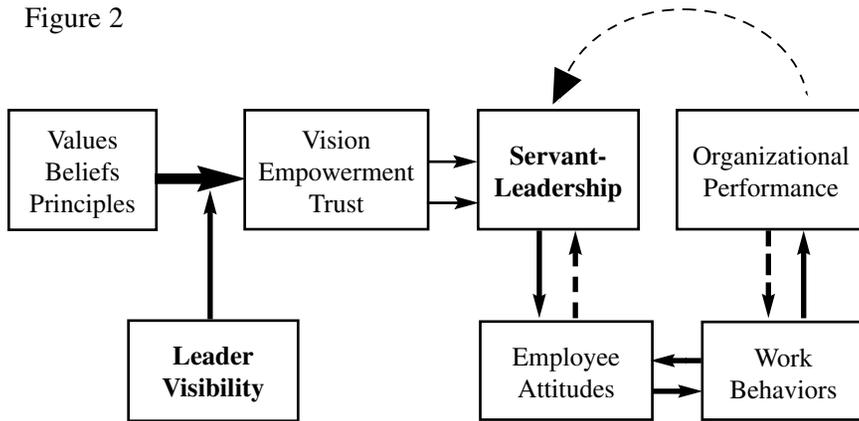
### **Application and Conclusion**

Leader visibility is a platform for servant-leaders to produce organizational growth. Several strengths of the connection between leader visibility and servant-leadership can be identified from this study:

1. Leader visibility and servant-leadership focus on productive relationships.
2. Visible personal and verbal interactions establish healthy organizational structures.
3. Visible behaviors influence vision, empowerment, and trust in leadership.

As indicated in the following model, *leader visibility moderates the process that creates servant-*

Figure 2



leadership in organizations.

In turn, servant-leadership affects employee attitudes and work behaviors. Ultimately, all of the variables impact organizational performance. (Figure 2)

Clearly, the model needs further examination and empirical testing. Future research should focus on the effects of leader visibility on servant-leadership. Consequently, questions posited for future research include the following:

1. What attitudes and responses result when followers see the leader's servant influences?

2. What are the effects on followers when they see leaders adapt their style for the good of the group or when leaders are rigid and lack the ability to adapt?

3. What effects do leadership style and character have on followers when they are visible in the leader?

4. What level of visibility is necessary for the leader to produce a servant influence on followers?

Each leader is responsible for assessing his or her level of servanthood. Jesus set a subjective standard of leadership for his own trainees when he said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

C. William Pollard, CEO of the Fortune 500 corporation ServiceMaster, stated:

*A servant-leader's results will be measured beyond the workplace, and the story will be*

*told in the changed lives of others. There is no scarcity of feet to wash. The towels and the water are available. The limitation, if there is one, is our ability to get on our hands and knees and be prepared to do what we ask others to do* (1996b, p. 249).

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## Dialogue I

### Stewardship-Leadership: A Biblical Refinement of Servant-Leadership

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*Servant-leadership is a popular leadership approach that is promoted in secular and sacred writings on leadership theory. This paper reviews the current thought on servant-leadership, questions whether servant-leadership is a sufficiently unique approach to leadership to warrant thinking of it as a "biblical" approach to leadership, and offers a revision of the theory which might bring the theory into better alignment with the Scriptures.*

#### Introduction

Today, servant-leadership has been the leadership theory that has been most embraced by Christians as a model for Christian leadership both in and out of the church. A simple Internet search on the topic of servant-leadership will yield multiple sites, secular and sacred, which recommend the virtues of servant-leadership. Many who write and teach on this topic apparently propose that servant-leadership is a biblically-based model and is therefore the only appropriate model for Christians to employ as they seek to apply their faith in their God-given roles as managers and leaders.

Though it may not be taught as "the" biblical model for Christian leadership, within Christendom, and on some Christian college campuses, servant-leadership is being taught as the best model of leadership for the Christian. Reasons as to why this theory is acceptable as a biblical model range from those who advocate this theory as being derived from the Scriptures to those who see it as the best alternative of the available theories: a theory that is not inconsistent with the Scriptures and which incorporates some of Jesus' teaching on service. Yet, is this a reasonable conclusion? Is servant-leadership theory, as

currently conceptualized, a truly biblical model, or does it need some refinement?

The purpose of this paper is to examine servant-leadership and to propose an extension that would bring the theory into better alignment with the Scriptures. First, in order to gain a context for the theory of servant-leadership, I will begin with a short review of servant-leadership theory development. Second, I will point out how some aspects of the theory prevent it from being thoroughly “biblical.” And last, I will offer some suggestions for a more refined formulation of leadership that is consistent with the Scriptures.

### **What is Servant-Leadership?** *Seminal Writing on Servant-Leadership*

Any analysis of servant-leadership must start with the work of Robert Greenleaf, whose seminal work, *Servant-Leadership*, stands as the fount of servant-leadership theory (this work is a more fully developed exposition of the thoughts that were originally published in a 1970 essay by him called “The Servant as Leader”). In *Servant-Leadership*, Greenleaf writes that the genesis of the idea of the servant-leader came to him

in an “intuitive insight” (1977, p. 12) as he reflected upon Hermann Hess’ book *Journey to the East*.

Greenleaf recounts that in Hess’ story, a servant, Leo, does menial tasks for a group on a spiritual journey to the East; along the way, Leo disappears and the group falls into disarray. Later, the narrator is taken into the spiritual Order that the group had sought and there discovers that Leo, all the while, was the head of the Order. Greenleaf uses this story to illustrate his central contention regarding servant-leadership: the servant-leader is servant first and leader second. He suggested that there was a difference between those who followed a leader-first model and those who followed a servant-first model, though these two models represented two extreme types with shadings along the continuum. Greenleaf proposed that the difference between the two “manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and most difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become

servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?” (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14, emphasis his).

In addition to defining a servant-leader as being one who is a servant first, Greenleaf goes on to give several other characteristics of servant-leaders. According to him, servant-leaders are able to listen and understand, they are able to withdraw and reorient themselves, they can accept and empathize, they know the unknowable, and they exercise foresight.

Larry Spears, the executive director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center and the bearer of Greenleaf’s mantle, says that servant-leadership is “a model that puts serving others—including employees, customers, and community—as the number one priority. Servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of commitment, and the sharing of power in decision making” (Spears, 1998).

### *Secular and Syncretistic Approaches to Servant-Leadership: A Sampling*

Various other authors have refined and added to Greenleaf’s

conceptualization and/or adopted parts of the servant-leadership model into their own conceptual frameworks. For some, like Stephen R. Covey and Peter Senge, servant-leadership has become a significant influence and often becomes a part of their framework, though it may not be the central theme; others have made servant-leadership a more central component of their theorizing (e.g., Block, 1993).

Max DePree, the chairman of Herman Miller and an author in the field of servant-leadership theory, writes in his book *Leadership Jazz* that there are 12 characteristics that are keys to being a successful servant-leader: 1) integrity, 2) vulnerability, 3) discernment, 4) awareness of the human spirit, 5) courage in relationships, 6) sense of humor, 7) intellectual energy and curiosity, 8) respect for the future, regard for the present, understanding of the past, 9) predictability, 10) breadth, 11) comfort with ambiguity, and 12) presence.

In a similar vein, Peter Block has popularized the idea of stewardship-leadership. Basically, though, the concept is a re-packaging of the essentials of servant-leadership and of Block’s own ideas about what constitutes

servant-leadership. In his book *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self Interest*, Block says that stewardship begins with “the willingness to be accountable for some larger body than ourselves—an organization, a community” and that it involves choosing empowerment over dependency and choosing service over self-interest (Block, 1993).

### *Christian Approaches to Servant-Leadership*

Myron Rush advocates a biblical philosophy of management which is nearly indistinguishable from servant-leadership, but is unique in that his approach clearly grounds servant-leadership (or management) in the Scriptures. He clearly believes that the Bible has a different and distinct view of the nature of the perspective of the leader, and he states that the “starting point in adopting a biblical approach to management is recognizing the vast difference between the world’s philosophy of management and the Bible’s philosophy of management” (Rush, 1990, p. 50).

Rush goes on to use Matthew 20:20-28<sup>1</sup> to illustrate his point. He points out that the world’s approach to management is to use power over others, and he cites

the traditional definition of management<sup>2</sup> as proof of the world’s perspective; he then goes further and proposes that this exchange between Jesus and his disciples introduces a “new philosophy of leadership and management.” Rush writes, “All other biblical principles relating to management simply expand on, or illustrate in action, the principles and philosophy of leadership and management being taught by Jesus Christ in this passage” (Rush, 1990, p. 52). Though he acknowledges that this is a very difficult passage to apply, he says that the difficulty does not excuse us from the necessity of applying it. And he further explicates the principles by writing:

*Therefore, the biblical approach to management, based on the principles presented by Jesus in Matthew 20:20-28, can be defined as “serving the needs of others as they work at accomplishing their jobs.” There is a vast difference between the biblical approach to management and the secular approach. Earlier in the chapter, the secular definition of management was given as “getting work done through others.” ... In the secular model*

*of management, power usually serves the manager. In the biblical model, however, the manager uses his or her power to serve the needs of others* (Rush, 1990, p. 53).

Recently, Tucker, Stone, Russell, and Fraz have entered the Christian stream of servant-leadership and propose that “leader visibility” is an important moderating variable that affects the quality of servant-leadership. In their review of the literature on servant-leadership, they indicated that the servant-

***Matthew 20:20-28 ... introduces a “new philosophy of leadership and management.”***

leadership model has eight functional attributes: vision, credibility, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment (Tucker et al., 2000).

From my review of the literature, it appears that the central tenet of servant-leadership is that the leader serves those around him and that this perspective and implementation represents an inversion of the traditional hierarchy where leaders are served by their followers. Though different

authors may suggest various functional attributes, the central distinguishing characteristic of this model is the motivation for leadership. The servant-leader model differs from other models of leadership because it emphasizes that the servant-leader is servant-first, while other leadership models address leadership from a leader-first perspective. Although different authors may emphasize different elements and component parts of implementation and characterization, there does seem to be agreement over this point. Greenleaf

himself suggests that the crucial difference undergirding his model is revealed “in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and the most difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons?” (Spears, 1998, p. 19). Yet the question remains whether this central tenet is sufficiently distinct for us to claim that servant-leadership is a “biblical” model for leadership.

### Difficulties for Servant-Leadership as “the” Biblical Model

The first problem for servant-leadership is that there is nothing that is distinctly biblical about it. Problematically, though, it appears as a seemingly “spiritual”<sup>3</sup> approach to leadership; the concept as it is currently conceptualized is not clearly biblical. The theory itself can be accepted and practiced by Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and atheists alike. This is true for both the secularized versions of servant-leadership and for the “sacred” versions as well. There is nothing in the theory that would cause those who do not accept the Bible as their authority to pause and to question whether they could rightly apply the theory. At best, the Christian approach to servant-leadership grounds itself in the example of Christ and in a few of his lessons on service, but that does not make the theory distinctly Christian and/or distinctly biblical. The fact that an atheist could embrace and apply servant-leadership ought to cause Christian authors and educators to pause before they assert that it is a truly biblical model of leadership.

Secondly, servant-leadership has an implementation problem.

How is one to determine which constituency one will serve at any given time? Theorists tell us that we are to serve our superiors, our customers, our peers, and our subordinates (we may go even further and expand this to include all stakeholders including stockholders and the public at large), but they do not adequately address that this presents an intractable problem. Virtually any decision that is made to serve one stakeholder necessitates that the manager/leader is not serving another stakeholder. If a manager decides to serve his employees by paying them more, he must either charge his customers more or pay the stockholders less, therefore failing in serving those stakeholders.

Thirdly, a reading of the literature on servant-leadership might have one suppose that the servant-leader ought not exercise authority or, if he does, it ought to be carefully and sparingly exercised. Allied to this idea, there appears to be an implication in the literature that the right to exercise authority is earned through the service of the leader. Yet, if we take Christ as our supreme example of servant-leadership, we must conclude that both of these implications are incorrect. Christ exercised

authority,<sup>4</sup> taught with authority,<sup>5</sup> and even delegated authority,<sup>6</sup> and certainly we must never be trapped into saying that Christ “earned” our submission and his right to exercise authority by his service.

Lastly, and most importantly, the sacred version of servant-leadership has a problem when, and if, it asserts that the element of Christ’s leadership that made him distinct was his emphasis on the service of humankind. The perspective of the service of others was a distinguishing characteristic of Christ’s lessons on leadership and of His example of leadership, but it was not the only characteristic of his leadership. It is a mistake to assert that Jesus was merely a servant and that He was “one whose very incarnation had *the* purpose of serving humankind” (Tucker et al., 2000, italics mine). The motivation to leadership is but one element regarding the nature of leadership and but one aspect of leadership illustrated and taught in the life of Christ. For instance, those who write on the Matthew 20 passage point out that Jesus changes the motivation for leadership from selfish ambition to “service,”<sup>7</sup> but often fail to adequately emphasize that Jesus was dealing specifically

with the disciples’ ambition for position.

As was the habit of Christ, He brought people to consider internal issues rather than mere external facades. The service element of Christ’s mission and of His example is but one element of all that He was and is, and to make it the preeminent tenet is to err.<sup>8</sup> Most fail to note that Jesus does not condemn their desire for leadership positions; instead He redefines the motive for achieving those positions. Christ did not condemn leadership; He redeemed it so that it should be marked by ambition that is redeemed, redirected, and self-sacrificing (Lawrence, 1987). A holistic approach to the life of Christ and a careful consideration of the contexts of His teaching on leadership ought to temper us and make us more cautious about asserting that service was the most important aspect of Christ’s mission and His approach to leadership.

### Refining Servant-Leadership Terminology

Let me suggest that those who would desire to teach biblically-based leadership theory ought to adopt a new terminology and a new perspective in order to distinguish a biblical approach

from the secular approach. In order to distinguish a biblically-based model, I recommend that we refer to it as stewardship-leadership<sup>9</sup> rather than service-leadership. This has the advantage of maintaining a clear distinction between models that are “spiritual” but not biblical and sets it apart from other syncretistic and secular perspectives.

The term *stewardship* also more accurately reflects a balanced biblical perspective

regarding leadership than does the term service-leadership. A steward

is one who manages another’s affairs (Webster, 1968). Often he is in charge of material goods, but he does not own those goods and so he is accountable to another for his actions. In biblical terms, he is one entrusted by God with spiritual authority and responsibility and is thus responsible to God for how he discharges those duties. Once we have completed an extension of the model of servant-leadership we will see that stewardship is the best designation for a biblical model of leadership.

### ***A Biblical Perspective***

As I have noted, leading from the motivation of service to others appears to be the central tenet of service-leadership, and yet this is an inadequate distinction and does not reflect accurately the mission and motivation of Christ. Those who write from a biblical perspective point to Him as the prototypical servant-leader; they refer to His example when He washed the disciples’ feet and to His instruction that “whoever wishes to be first among you shall

be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to

give his life a ransom for many.” Yet, can we conclude from this instruction and his example that the primary “motivation” for Christ was the service of others? We cannot, and, in fact, we must not. What was Christ’s primary motivation? Was it not service to God and a desire for His glory rather than service to mankind? This is a crucial distinction for a biblically-based theory of leadership. Clearly a biblically-based leadership theory must have at its heart a different motivation from the world’s,

and it must incorporate Christ’s instructions on service, but it must not make service to others the core perspective. Rather, a biblical view must make service to God its distinctive characteristic. Fundamentally Christ submitted Himself to His Father and served Him and lived for the glory of His Father. Christ’s service to man was derived from this foundational motivation so that He served man as He fulfilled His mission to glorify His Father. Christ’s service, His laying down of His life, was an activity that was derived from the primary motivation of submission to His Father and His desire to glorify Him. Was service to man through His redemptive work important? Of course, but service to man was not the fundamental and foundational perspective which gave rise to His actions. Sacred and secular service-leadership authors err when they take that which is secondary and derived and make it primary and fundamental. By focusing on one element of the life of Christ and only a few statements, they unfortunately promote an unbalanced view of what it means to have a biblically-based theory of leadership.

### ***Biblical Evidence***

This perspective is more consistent with the full testimony of both the Old and New Testaments and is reflected in a unique title which God gave to the most prominent servant-leaders of the Bible. Moses, himself a great servant-leader and a type of Christ, was called the “servant of the Lord.”<sup>10</sup> Joshua, another type, also shared this designation,<sup>11</sup> as did David.<sup>12</sup> None of these leaders would have seen themselves as servants of the people first or foremost. Often overlooked is that Christ had the designation as “servant” even before his birth, and, while he is not called literally “the servant of the Lord,” the clear inference is there. In Isaiah 53:11, in a Messianic prophesy where the Lord is speaking, Christ is referred to as “My Servant,”<sup>13</sup> thus, arguably, the first reference of Christ’s service has the perspective of service to God first.

This view of Christ as servant to God first also is found in the New Testament. Peter and John, when they were released from prison, lifted their voices in prayer and referred to Jesus as God’s holy servant.<sup>14</sup> Christ Himself had the perspective that He was God’s servant and under



***... a biblical view [of leadership] must make service to God its distinctive characteristic.***

God's authority. Consider Matthew 8:5-13:

*5 And when He had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, entreating Him, 6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain." 7 And He said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 But the centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." 10 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. 11 And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; let it be done to you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very hour.*

Why is it that Christ marveled at the man's faith? What was it that this centurion understood about Christ that those in Israel had missed? The key is in the centurion's comment regarding authority. He rightly understood that Jesus, like him, was under authority and, he rightly concluded, that this relationship granted to Jesus authority, just as his position and relationship to the Roman authorities granted him authority over others. Clearly, Jesus approved of this man's understanding of Christ's own authority. In this passage, we have the exercise of Christ's authority (not empowering others to do so), and we have His submission to His Father. Both elements, submission and authority, are combined in a marvelous teaching by the Lord Jesus.

Consider also the perspective of Christ that is revealed in John 17:1-5:

*1 These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, 2 even as You gave Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. 3 And this is eternal*

*life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, glorify Me together with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."*

Here we see again that the preeminent concern of Christ was the glory of His Father, and we also see that He recognized that He Himself had a derived authority over all mankind, an authority that He exercised through His redemptive work on the cross.

### Conclusions

Does this change in perspective help with some of the difficulties that face the servant-leadership model? Yes. First, by making service to God as the central tenet (rather than service to mankind), we restore some unique biblical content to the leadership model that would challenge those who do not acknowledge the Bible as their authority, and we put a barrier up for those who would seek a more syncretistic approach. Second, we partially resolve the implementation problem. Once God is central to the theory,

we are free to make decisions based on responsibility to him. We are not faced with serving multiple competing constituencies which are equally deserving of service; instead we serve one constituency, and that is God. Third, authority is rightfully and appropriately exercised without guilt, because it is an authority that is exercised in the context of submission to a higher authority. We are stewards who are under authority and who exercise authority. Last, restoring the centrality of service to God, we gain a more biblical perspective on leadership and, specifically, the motivation to leadership. We recognize that service to man is important, but it is important as a derived value and motivation. Instead of man, and the service of man, being the center of the theory, God is restored to his proper place: preeminent in all things and central to His creation and all the creature's activities.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Matthew 20:20 "Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left.' 22 But Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' 23 He said to them, 'My

cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.’<sup>24</sup> And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.<sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”<sup>2</sup>The traditional definition is “getting work done through others.”<sup>3</sup>One should remember that Greenleaf was a Quaker and a mystic. Both of these influences come through in the current ideas of servant-leadership. Quakers have a unique church government structure which is egalitarian—they do not have elders, deacons, pastors, or priests. As a mystic, Greenleaf spent a fair amount of time under the influence of Jungian therapy, maintaining a dream journal which included an encounter with a “pesky squirrel” that promised him that he would create a “great work” (Spears, 1996). Greenleaf himself considered servant-leadership to be his great work.<sup>4</sup>John 2:14 “And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated. <sup>15</sup> And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; <sup>16</sup> and to those who were selling the doves He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a house of merchandise.’ <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.’ <sup>18</sup> The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, seeing that you do these things?’” Matthew 9:1 “And getting into a boat, He crossed over, and came to His own city. <sup>2</sup> And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, ‘Take courage, my son; your sins are forgiven.’ <sup>3</sup> And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This fellow blasphemes.’ <sup>4</sup> And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, ‘Why are you thinking evil in

your hearts?’ <sup>5</sup> For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, and walk?’ <sup>6</sup> But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic— ‘Rise, take up your bed, and go home.’ <sup>7</sup> And he rose, and went home. <sup>8</sup> But when the multitudes saw this, they were filled with awe, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.”<sup>5</sup>Mark 1:21 “And filled with awe they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> And they were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, <sup>24</sup> saying, ‘What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’ <sup>25</sup> And Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’ <sup>26</sup> Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice, and came out of him. <sup>27</sup> And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.’”<sup>6</sup>Matthew 10:1 “And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.”<sup>7</sup>I place “service” in quotation marks because I plan to add some essential biblical content that is not present in the current formulations.<sup>8</sup>I hasten to add that it is an extremely important and central issue, perhaps even the most important, but to write as though it is the only element is an unbalanced approach.<sup>9</sup>Or perhaps merely the biblical term “stewardship.”<sup>10</sup>See Dt. 34:5; Joshua 1:1, 13, 15; 8:31; 11:12; 12:6; 13:8; 18:7; 22:2f  
<sup>11</sup>Joshua 24:29; Judges 2:8  
<sup>12</sup>Psalms 18:1; Psalms 36:1  
<sup>13</sup>Isaiah 53:11 “As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured

out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.”<sup>14</sup>Acts 4:27, 30. It is perhaps significant that they did not refer to Christ as the servant of mankind. In fact I can think of no instance where Christ indicates that he came as mankind’s servant. He came as God’s servant and as such served mankind.

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## Dialogue I

### A Response to “Stewardship-Leadership: A Biblical Refinement of Servant-Leadership”

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#### Introduction

Beadles’ purpose in writing *Stewardship-Leadership: A Biblical Refinement of Servant-Leadership* is to “examine servant-leadership and to propose an extension that would bring the theory into better alignment with the Scriptures” (Beadles, 2000). I wholeheartedly concur that this void needs addressing. Though the topic of servant-leadership has seemingly been discussed and rehashed sufficiently, it still is an enigma warranting further examination. In addition, the present understanding of servant-leadership, particularly in respect to Christians, needs development.

Beadles’ four concerns regarding the current ideology of servant-leadership are: (1) it is too inclusive,<sup>1</sup> (2) implementation is too difficult,<sup>2</sup> (3) authority is exercised too infrequently,<sup>3</sup> and (4) God is not the first priority.<sup>4</sup> Beadles contends that *servant-leadership* should become *stewardship-leadership*, via

exercising authority more (i.e., serving less) and placing *service to God*, rather than *service to humankind*, as the central tenant. In so doing, he postulates that his four concerns will be alleviated.

Beadles’ observations are useful, thought-provoking, and insightful. However, his four concerns are not obvious and are arguably unfounded. Further, the solution that Beadles proposes may have an undesirable outcome and create additional problems. This rejoinder will address and challenge the legitimacy of Beadles’ four concerns as well as his intended solution and its impact on the four concerns. In addition, alternate biblical refinements to servant-leadership are offered.

#### Widespread Acceptance

The fact that servant-leadership is practiced by non-Christians (as well as Christians) should not necessarily constitute it as unbiblical.<sup>5</sup> True, Christians

are promised that many of their thoughts and actions will be misunderstood or rejected and that they must readily accept insult and persecution (Matthew 5:11-12). However, biblical concepts need not always be divisive. Many tenants of Christianity, including loving one’s neighbor (Matthew 5:43), respecting family (Exodus 20:12), life being sacred (Exodus 20:13), and not taking from others (Exodus 20:15) are embraced by most predominant religions, as well as agnosticism and atheism. So, too, the precepts of servant-leadership (e.g., listening, understanding, accepting, service)<sup>6</sup> are biblical yet appeal to religions and beliefs other than Christianity. In fact, given that God has created everything and is master of its functioning,<sup>7</sup> it could be argued that ideas concurring with God’s nature should often be in harmony with God’s *entire* creation (i.e., Christians and non-Christians).

Therefore, Beadles’ suggestion of “making service to God as the central tenet”<sup>8</sup> (Beadles, 2000) of servant-leadership is proper. However, his objective that this “put a barrier up for those who would seek a more syncretistic approach” (Beadles, 2000) is questionable.

If servant-leadership does not oppose God’s nature, Christians should not discourage non-Christians from practicing servant-leadership. Jesus informed His disciples that when they prevented a man from casting out demons *because he was not one of them* (Luke 9:49), they were in error. “‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said, ‘for whoever is not against you is for you’” (Luke 9:50).

#### Impracticality of Servant-Leadership

Beadles clarifies his second concern with an example of competing constituencies, all who should be served. “If a manager decides to serve his employees by paying them more, he must either charge his customers more or pay the stockholders less, therefore failing in serving those stakeholders” (Beadles, 2000). There are at least two problems with this contention. First, Scripture teaches that God’s ways often appear impossible (Matthew 19:25-26) and are superior to our understanding (Isaiah 55:9), and our following constitutes faith (Hebrews 11:1). To the disciples, dying on the cross was ludicrous (Matthew 16:21-23), yet the disciples’ inability to understand did not

make God's plan erroneous. Though the concept of servant-leadership seems to be unrealizable, this does not indicate that servant-leadership is unbiblical and we should simplify it to our understanding.

Second, Beadles' example ignores the opportunity for *true* servant-leadership (i.e., the servant-leader *sacrificing* while serving). The servant-leader might drastically reduce her own wage to offset a wage increase to employees. In this manner, neither the customer or stockholder are disserved. Because the servant-leader has merely shifted a significant portion of her salary to her employees, customers need not be charged more and the stock's book value is unchanged. A servant-leader prefers to take from herself, not others, when serving.

### **Emphasize Authority**

The third concern of Beadles, *authority is exercised too sparingly*, is without empirical support and may be unfounded. Contrarily, one might conjecture that humans naturally gravitate toward a traditional management style (i.e., authoritarian) and that servant-leadership requires a conscious effort. If so, our

authoritarian nature needs to be reigned in, not billowed. It is probably a safe generalization that most leaders have become angry (i.e., similar to when Christ purified the temple),<sup>9</sup> but have infrequently turned the other cheek (Matthew 5:39), readily given more than is asked to a plaintiff that is suing (Matthew 5:40), forgiven a wrongdoer 77 times (Matthew 18:21-22), or washed others' feet (John 13:14-17).

Beadles desires leaders to exercise authority "without guilt, because it is an authority that is exercised in the context of submission to a higher authority" (Beadles, 2000). This concept is appealing, but unfortunately our sinful nature prevents any leader from being in complete submission to God (i.e., knowing and following the will of God at all times). We all see through a glass darkly (I Corinthians 13:12) and are imperfect (Romans 3:23). History indicates that guilt-free leaders *exercising the authority of God* have caused much harm, including wrongful suffering and death (e.g., the Crusades and the Inquisition). Guilt may be a healthy and appropriate characteristic in servant-leaders that should not be quenched. Christ's parable of the Pharisee

and tax collector clearly instructs that a penitent attitude, rather than self-righteous attitude, is proper (Luke 18:9-14).

### **Serving God**

Beadles' fourth and final concern, *service to humankind is emphasized rather than service to God*, may be circular. Knowing whether or not one's actions are serving God is difficult to assess. Apparently both the righteous (John 25:37) and unrighteous (John 25:44) serve, or disserve, God unknowingly. Fortunately, the dilemma of properly serving God is diminished, thanks to Christ's teaching that the very essence of serving God is serving others—"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Subsequent to washing the disciples' feet, Christ teaches them to follow his example and be servants of others (John 13:12-17). Therefore, according to Scripture, service to others, which is the heart of service-leadership, is also service to God.

### **Conclusion: Refining Servant-Leadership**

Beadles should be commended for continuing a much-needed discussion on the

proper biblical understanding and implementation of servant-leadership. His two ideas for refining servant-leadership, *making God the central tenant and exercising authority more often*, are worth considering. However, rather than progressing servant-leadership, Beadles' refinements may devolve servant-leadership towards a more traditional, authoritarian style of leadership. A leader, exercising authority *carte-blanche*, while believing she is placing God first, can easily become dictatorial.

I would suggest that a more pressing refinement in servant-leadership is to become greater sacrificial servants. As the writer of Hebrews astutely observes, our feeble attempts at following God (e.g., being servant-leaders) pain us little and have much room for improvement.<sup>10</sup> For example, Christ-like servant-leaders should empathize and live among their followers, as did Christ, not separated by social-economic barriers.<sup>11</sup> Means of sincerely enacting and achieving sacrificing servant-leadership might include the following: (1) reduce one's own salary to an amount equal to, or below, the lowest paid employee, (2) implement honest marketing campaigns that clearly state the negatives of the

company's product or service, (3) report to stockholders that income is a by-product, not a major concern of the organization, (4) have a greater concern for employees' personal lives than their work performance, (5) live in a non-affluent area of town rather than a gated community on lakefront property, (6) drive an inconspicuous automobile rather than a new luxury vehicle.

These are bold actions that require a servant-leader of great faith to implement, particularly given that such initiatives are not only sacrificial, but may result in leadership failure (based on worldly measures), rather than success.<sup>12</sup> Regardless, the servant-leader would be truly exhibiting that her treasures are in heaven and not of earth (Matthew 6:19-20). Those who witness such pure Christ-like servant-leadership might be so refreshingly touched that they are brought closer to the kingdom. This, Scripture indicates, is the greatest achievement of any servant-leader (Luke 15:7).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>That is, practicable by those who are not Christians. "The theory itself can be accepted and practiced by Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and atheists alike" (Beadles, 2000).  
<sup>2</sup>"Virtually any decision that is made to serve one stakeholder necessitates that the manager/leader is not serving another stakeholder" (Beadles, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>"...servant-leadership might have one suppose that the servant-leader ought not exercise authority or, if he does, it ought to be carefully and sparingly exercised" (Beadles, 2000).

<sup>4</sup>Beadles writes, citing Spears (1998), that servant-leadership is "a model that puts serving others—including employees, customers, and community—as the number one priority."

<sup>5</sup>"The fact that an atheist could embrace and apply servant-leadership ought to cause Christian authors and educators to pause before they assert that it is a truly biblical model of leadership" (Beadles, 2000).

<sup>6</sup>These characteristics of servant-leadership are listed in Beadles (2000) and attributed to Greenleaf (1977) and Spears (1998).

<sup>7</sup>God is "...preeminent in all things and central to His creation and all the creature's activities" (Beadles, 2000).

<sup>8</sup>Assessing whether one is *placing God first* is extremely difficult to assess. This will be discussed more fully in the **Emphasize Authority** section of this rejoinder.

<sup>9</sup>Christ purifying the temple (John 2:14-18) is Beadles' example of Christ exercising authority.

<sup>10</sup>"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4).

<sup>11</sup>"Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head'" (Luke 9:58).

<sup>12</sup>Worldly failure, however, is not an indication of ungodliness. Recall that Christ, the greatest servant-leader, was spit upon, slapped, and crucified (Matthew 26:67-68).

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## Dialogue I

### Response to "Stewardship-Leadership: A Biblical Refinement of Servant-Leadership"

Virgil Smith  
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According to Beadles, the purpose of his article is to "examine servant-leadership and to propose an extension that would bring the theory into better alignment with the Scriptures" (Beadles, 2000). Even the title of the article would lead the reader to suppose that his purpose is extension of the theory. However, if Beadles is correct and the theory is not biblical, there is no point extending it—one can only start over. I believe this is what Beadles' work actually leads us to. Rather than being an extension of servant-leadership, Beadles' work attempts to point out a fatal flaw in the theory as it stands and then describes what a replacement theory should look like.

The author points out that if our desire is to have a truly biblical theory of leadership, it is necessary to examine not only the theoretical structure, but also the motivations that structure attaches to. He is correct in this, since the motivations behind actions are

normally consistent with the actions. Moreover, motivations are of great importance to God. While He may turn a thing to good, even in the extreme case where man intended it for evil (see for example, Genesis 50:18-20), there is no guarantee that He will do so. Hence, Scripture consistently warns us to examine our own motives to assure that they are right (e.g., I Chronicles 28:9; Proverbs 16:2; I Corinthians 4:5; and James 4:3), and there is a responsibility for error even if that error is unintentional (Leviticus 5:4). Our salvation does not hang by such things, but none of us would willingly choose to be in error—nor should we teach a theory as biblical (i.e., true) that is flawed in this regard. Therefore, Beadles' contention that the theory of servant-leadership is not biblical cannot be dismissed lightly.

I suppose that any theory that is promoted by both Christians

and non-Christians should raise a red flag in our minds. After all, there is such a fundamental difference in the assumptions and values of the two groups (II Corinthians 6:14-15) that agreement should be immediately suspect. However, it is just possible that servant-leadership may be an exception. Just as we cannot dismiss Beadles' accusations lightly, we should not accept them untried.

My experience has been that there are three common methods of argument for a business or economic theory. First, there is the social argument. This argument maintains that the theory is "correct" because it helps society or groups of people or makes them feel better about themselves. Many of the arguments we commonly hear for trust and empowerment in the workplace have this approach. Second, there is the profit argument. That is, in the long run it is more profitable to do things this way, and after all, business exists for the benefit of the shareholders. In a strange mixture of this argument with the social argument, we find it often said that we should be in favor of more profit, since we can then do more good. Many of the discussions seeking ethical

conduct in business depend on the profit argument by itself or the profit argument combined with the social argument.

It seems obvious that these first two types of arguments, with few changes, will be accepted just as readily by non-believers as by believers. However, the third way to argue the validity of a business theory is rarely, if ever, acceptable to the non-Christian. This third way, the biblical argument, is to assume that ultimate truth is found only through God and His Word. The business theory must be humbly and carefully examined and placed under the authority of the Word of God, handled maturely. Assuming the theory holds up under its examination by the Word, we can declare it to be "biblical."

Therefore, one can never really say that a business theory is biblical until it has been fully examined by God's Word. However, we all have a tendency to pronounce some theory we like as "biblical" without going through all of the necessary work. It is common to find people who repeat statements brought forth through the social and profit arguments (especially the social) and conclude that the theory is therefore biblical. It seems highly

likely that this has been the fate of servant-leadership—even the title just sounds so Christian! It must be biblical! We are lulled into a lack of vigilance.

### **Biblical or Not?**

In regard to the three arguments, most discussions of servant-leadership clearly fit into the social camp. Therefore, they tend to be basically acceptable to non-believers as well as believers. However, the social argument will never be able to answer questions regarding the biblicality of the theory. These answers can only be obtained through searching Scripture.

Beadles begins this task and immediately finds a snag. This snag is the same as that of most social arguments—the servant-leadership theory leaves out God. It is no good to talk about serving people when we are not first serving our Maker. In fact, like most other social argument theories, servant-leadership struggles with the agency problem. It never really answers the question of why the leader should not act for his or her own good rather than for the good of others. Bring God into the picture, however, and this problem goes away. If we exist to serve our God, and Scripture says

one of the primary ways to do that is through serving others, we will subjugate our personal interests for the good of others because it is what our Master desires.

Beadles argues that the servant-leadership theory is not biblical because its primary creator, Robert Greenleaf, left no place for God in the theory. He makes the general argument that Greenleaf was more clearly swayed by his mysticism than his Christianity. While Beadles provides one line of reasoning, I decided to verify this. So, I somewhat randomly opened Greenleaf's *Servant-Leadership* (1977) and started reading. I almost immediately found evidence supportive of Beadles' position. Greenleaf says,

*If we view Moses as a human leader, subject to error like the rest of us ... he may have yielded to the temptation, common to this day, to attribute the law to "those higher up" rather than to assume the burden of justification himself. We do not know his conditions; he may have felt that he could not be sufficiently persuasive as a mere rational man. But how much better it would be for us today, if, as the inspired man he undoubtedly was, he had*

presented the law as a reasonable codification of experience and wisdom, a summary of those sensible rules to guide individual conduct and as the basis of a good society. This would have opened the way for continued growth of the law with further experience, and would have made the rational justification of the law always a contemporary concern (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 247).

Greenleaf appears to assume the biblical law was something that Moses made up. Moreover, he argues that it should be updated so that it remains contemporary. However, God consistently refers to it as *the law of the LORD* (see, for instance, Exodus 13:9; II Kings 10:31; I Chronicles 16:40; 22:12; II Chronicles 12:1; 17:9; 19:8; 31:3, 4; 34:14; 35:26; Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 9:3; Psalms 1:2; 19:7; 119:1; Isaiah 5:24; Jeremiah 8:8; and Amos 2:4), indicating that Moses was just the errand boy entrusted with delivery. As such, it is not up to Moses, or any other man, to make changes—and if God is truly immutable, as Dick Chewing rightly argues in another place in this edition of the **JBIB**, we shouldn't hold our breath waiting for Him to make changes.

Clearly Greenleaf is not biblical here. Lest we think that is just a fluke, a few pages away I found him saying,

*There – is – no – way for competent persons to gain superior wisdom for these times ... except to immerse themselves in the record of a person like George Fox who had it to a remarkable degree, and then wait with wonder and expectancy for new insight. They will go along the path of objective knowledge and analysis as far as these will take them – which sometimes is not very far. Then they will have a process, a learnable process, one that is unique to them, by which they will receive, experimentally, the dependable insight that will guide them the rest of the way. And they do not ask what that insight is or from whence it comes. They simply accept it, welcome it with gratitude, believe it, act on it* (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 230-231, emphasis mine).

This is Greenleaf writing as a mystic, and with mysticism clearly dominating his religion. Note that he is arguing that this “method” is experimental, and you are not to consider where the insight comes from (that jalapeño pizza you just ate?) or even *what*

*it is*, yet the results of the method are to be believed without question! This emphasis on belief or faith in the insights so derived is referred to over and over throughout the book. However, Greenleaf never says what the faith is supposed to be *in*. If we are not to question where the ideas come from, how will we ever know what we are to have faith in? It is not clear that the faith is in oneself. Nor is it clear that the faith is centered externally. It just is. Talk about blind faith!

Greenleaf argues that this form of information gathering should be central in the servant-leader's arsenal. Yet, the Bible tells us that knowledge only comes from the Lord (Psalms 119:65-66; Proverbs 2:6; 10:31-32; 22:12; Isaiah 33:5-6; John 8:31-32; Colossians 2:2-4; I Timothy 3:14-15; Titus 1:1-3; and I John 2:4-5).

It appears fairly conclusive that Greenleaf was not seeking to create a biblical theory at all (i.e., one drawn from Scripture). For that reason, it is probably inappropriate to try to make it fit into that mold. However, one could argue that even though the theory was not intended to be biblical, it still might be so. Beadles' arguments shine here.

He concludes that the servant-leadership theory fails to be biblical because it is man-centered, whereas a truly biblical theory of leadership would be God-centered. In this he is (biblically) correct.

### Now What?

Do we throw the servant-leadership theory out altogether? No. It is very useful for working with non-believers who would never accept a biblical argument but can be convinced by a social one. While the theory is not centered around God, it does urge leaders to actions that are correct, and thus is probably the highest form of leadership the unbeliever can rise to. However, servant-leadership as it stands is not sufficient for the believer. Beadles correctly argues that God needs to be explicitly placed at the center of the theory for it to be biblical. However, we must understand that doing so will create a different theory that only believers will accept. The very fact of making a leadership theory that is biblical will mean it will not be acceptable to non-believers. Anyone ready to take on the task?

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**JBIB**

## Dialogue II

### Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: —An Illustration— God's Immutability And Human Integrity

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*Of old Thou didst found the earth; and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. But **Thou art the same**, and Thy years will not come to an end.*

*Psalms 102:25-27*

*Chewning delves into study on the immutability of God, finds reasons to revere God's immutability, and arrives at principles for personal conduct and beliefs based on God's unchangingness.*

*[Note: This paper is Chapter 8 in a book currently being written. The working title of the book is "The Shaping Influence of God's Personality and Grace on the Human Heart and Behavior."]*

God's *immutable* nature is testified to throughout Scripture.<sup>1</sup> He has been, is, and will be eternally inalterable in His attributes, character, and personality. There is absolutely no variability whatsoever in or with God.<sup>2</sup> Immutability not only conveys the idea that God *does not* change, it also carries with it the fact that God *cannot* change. This profound reality about God is undeniably mind-bending for

mutable mortals who are ever-changing and who are the personification of variability. Humans are never the same from one minute to the next. Yet God has revealed Himself as the eternal, never changing, immutable **I AM WHO I AM**.<sup>3</sup> The very name **I AM WHO I AM** infers the property of immutability.

Contemplating God's immutability immediately brings

to mind a number of significant questions. They are questions requiring the “whole counsel” of God’s Word to explain and clarify their resolution. The “whole counsel” is required to prevent leaving the reflective thinker with internal contradictions, inconsistencies, or simple misunderstandings. Much is at stake in rightly thinking about God’s immutability. Accurate (whole counsel) thinking on this point reinforces a high and exalted view of God.

Unconsidered (cursory) thinking, on the other hand, ill-treats the transcendent grandeur ascribed to God by Scripture. Shallow reasoning can inadvertently create an unwarranted, elevated view of humanity. Rather than maintaining a “high view of God,” an unintended “high view of humanity” can be introduced that supplants or perverts the truth about God. What are some of these important questions?

Is God a learner? Has He ever learned anything? Does God ever forget anything? Does God ever change His mind, about anything or anybody, for any reason? For example, does prayer change God’s mind? God has a will, but does He ever modify it? How about God’s “emotions,” like His jealousy and wrath; do

they fluctuate and change with circumstances? If God is immutable, and He is, then the answer to every one of these questions must be NO!

The reader, however, may protest and say, “I can quote specific passages of Scripture that provide a ‘yes’ answer to several of these questions.” On the surface, the protest would appear to be warranted. That is exactly why the “whole counsel” of God’s Word is so important in addressing such encompassing questions regarding the character or explicit understanding of God’s immutability.

### **The Whole Counsel Of God**

The preceding two paragraphs have employed the idea of the “whole counsel” of God four times without explanation. What thought is being put forward by this expression? The concept is simple. The working out of the concept, however, is not so simple. The “whole message,”<sup>4</sup> the “whole purpose,”<sup>5</sup> or all that is “profitable”<sup>6</sup> in God’s Word is to be taught. Every question should be examined in the light of *all* that Scripture has to say about the matter. This ought to be done because the simple, first apparent message of a particular biblical text *may* be an inappropriate

interpretation. For example, Jesus, when teaching the crowd on the mountain, said, “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”<sup>7</sup> How is this statement to be interpreted?

The just quoted statement by Jesus could be construed to mean a human must first forgive his or her neighbor before God will forgive the forgiver. There are people who interpret Jesus’ words just that way. The author has been asked on numerous occasions to explain what the quoted passage does mean. The passage needs to be seen in the context of the “whole counsel” of Scripture – *all* that the Bible says about forgiveness.

The Word of God does teach that if a person *refuses* to forgive a neighbor’s sin, the refusing person will not be forgiven their sins.<sup>8</sup> The controlling principles associated with forgiveness, however, are two: (1) our sins have been forgiven us *for Christ’s sake*,<sup>9</sup> and (2) humans are to forgive *even as God has forgiven them*.<sup>10</sup> The first principle, our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, tells of the true motivation governing forgiveness—first and

foremost, God’s love of His Son,<sup>11</sup> and second, His desire to give Christ an inheritance in the saints (holy ones)<sup>12</sup> set apart for Him from the foundation of the world.<sup>13</sup> The second principle, because we have been forgiven we are to forgive others, is best exemplified in the parable told by Jesus in Matthew 18:21-35 where a slave is forgiven a great debt but in turn *refuses* to forgive a fellow slave a very small debt. The forgiving lord then comes back and demands full payment from the previously forgiven slave. The parable is *not* teaching that God withdraws previously granted forgiveness. It is teaching that those who, upon being convicted of their sin nature and their specific acts of sin, have subsequently *truly apprehended* God’s forgiveness and will gladly and willingly forgive those who have sinned against them. They know the debt they owed God is far greater than any debt any human could ever owe them.

Christ’s statement, “he who is forgiven little loves little,”<sup>14</sup> conveys the same significant truth. The person who rightly perceives the holiness of God and the depravity of their own nature but has tasted the deep joy of God’s costly forgiveness will count any trespasses against them

to be a negligible “debt owed them” when it is compared with the debt God has forgiven them. *Thus the person who refuses to forgive their neighbor a “trespass” is really a person who does not value any forgiveness*

*they theretofore thought they had received from God.*

Real forgiveness is remembered, cherished, and reciprocated.

Only those who have apprehended true forgiveness are empowered by the love of Christ to truly forgive others from their heart.<sup>15</sup> This is the teaching of the “whole counsel” of Scripture.

The questions posed earlier that relate to the immutability of God are frequently answered in ways that distort the truth about God’s authentic character and personality. Christians must learn to deal with such questions in the light of God’s “whole counsel,” like the forgiveness issue just sketched out. We will now do three things in the light of this need. First, the questions raised in the third paragraph, at the beginning of the chapter, will be discussed in the light of God’s “whole counsel.” Next, we will review some reasons to *revere*

God’s absolute immutability. We typically fail to realize just how consequential His immutability is. Finally, we will look at some applications for human beliefs and personal conduct that emerge spontaneously

from a biblically-guided world/lifeview of God’s immutability.

***We typically fail to realize just how consequential [God’s] immutability is.***

### **Immutability In The Light Of Substantive Questions**

Has God ever learned anything? Has God ever forgotten anything? Has God ever changed His mind about anything? The third question—“Has God ever changed His mind about anything?”—is the one that causes the greatest theological controversy. *Partial* biblical evidence can be gathered and *arranged* to answer this particular question in a way that could lead a person to arrive at one of two possible misperceptions. They might erroneously conclude that the Bible itself presents conflicting and irreconcilable information to the reader. Or they might conclude that the Bible does not communicate clearly and is therefore terribly difficult to

interpret. Christians hear beliefs of this type being communicated all too often.

The first question raised to test God’s immutable nature—“Has God ever learned anything?”—is the easiest of the three questions to answer, but as noted in Chapter 4, the answer to this question also has its detractors. The following quote appeared in Chapter 4 in the section titled, *God’s Omniscient Nature*:

*God is all-knowing.<sup>16</sup> God’s knowledge is infinite. There is nothing beyond God’s knowing. God’s knowledge is eternal. He has known everything—past, present, future, and suppositional—throughout eternity. Knowledge is inherent to God’s independent, eternal, and infinite nature. God did not obtain knowledge. God is knowledge. God is the wellspring of all knowledge. Humans grow in knowledge. God is the source of all knowledge. God knows all things distinctly—absolutely and fully.<sup>17</sup> We know nothing fully. God knows all things infallibly.<sup>18</sup> We know sufficiently, but never perfectly or exhaustively. God knows all things immutably.<sup>19</sup> Our knowledge is ever-changing. God knows all things perpetually.*

*He is always in the act of knowing all things that are present eternally in His consciousness. Nothing is ever out of His focused consciousness. And God did not come upon His knowledge sequentially. All knowledge has been, for eternity, a part of God. His omniscient nature is an attribute of His personality.*

It must be acknowledged that humans are incapable of comprehending how the infinite and eternal God could be, in His very “being” (**I AM WHO I AM**), the absolute sum total of all past, present, future, and suppositional knowledge. This is especially true when we consider the fact that God permits His image bearers to freely exercise their will in keeping with their nature. We do not know how God can have prior knowledge of a person’s future thoughts, intentions, motives, and actions. We are simply told that such knowledge is *inscrutable*,<sup>20</sup> and that God has possessed the sum total of all knowledge eternally. No, God has never learned anything in all eternity. No evidence is offered biblically and no evidence can be offered from the accounts of human history to contradict or refute the

biblical assertion that God is *omniscient*—all knowing throughout eternity.

The learning process that is such an integral part of human experience, and an irrefutable testimony to human mutability, is totally absent in God's own personal experience. God is *not* a learner. The truth of God's *immutability* is reinforced in human reasoning by this fact.

The second question raised to challenge God's immutable character is, "Has God ever forgotten anything?" This inquiry has been raised up in some people's minds because they discern specific biblical evidence that seems to imply, at least from their perspective, that God may have intentionally elected to *forget* the past sins and lawless deeds of His children. Isaiah, for example, quotes God, "I, even I, am the One who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; *and I will not remember your sins.*"<sup>21</sup> Jeremiah likewise reports God's declaration, "... I will forgive their iniquity, *and their sin I will remember no more.*"<sup>22</sup> In the same manner, the book of Hebrews records the same thought, "For I will be merciful to their iniquities, *and I will remember their sins no more,*"<sup>23</sup> and follows this with "*Their sins*

*and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*"<sup>24</sup> What is a believer to think regarding these renunciations of memory? Has God indeed forgotten our sins?

To take literally the idea that God could really expunge or obliterate from his memory an historic act or thought of one of His image bearers would attack the veracity of Scripture by declaring null and void two of His revealed attributes. The biblical declaration that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (immutable) would be a lie. He would be different today than He was at some time in the past when He presumably still remembered certain sins. Furthermore, the loss of memory, intentional or otherwise, would thoroughly undermine the revelation that God is all knowing (omniscient). He would presumably not know some things today that had taken place in the past. Neither of these conditions can stand the test of the "whole message" of God.

It is God's "not remembering sins" that presses the question regarding the extent of His memory, which in turn contests His immutability.<sup>25</sup> Scripture is plain, however. After God has looked upon "the anguish of His

[Christ's] soul, He [the Father] will see it and be satisfied ... He [Christ] will bear their iniquities."<sup>26</sup> The "debt" that the sinner owes God is *forgotten*—the debt has been paid; God has no reason to demand restitution. God has no reason to "remember" the debt or call for its reimbursement. It is not that God does not remember what the sins were or that a debt was due. It is that He will no longer bring the sins up for payment, for *a debt is no longer due*. Christ has paid off the debt for the "elect."<sup>27</sup> God has no loss of memory or diminished ability to remember when He says, "I will remember no more." It is the nature of the sinner that has been changed by God—he or she has been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>28</sup> The sinner is a "new person" who by *faith* has received Christ's full payment for their debt. It is the sinner who has changed and it is God who has applied another's payment (Christ's) to the sinner's "account payable." God has not changed. God's immutability is not in fact called into question.

The third and final question to be addressed – "Has God ever changed His mind about anything?" – is a troublesome inquiry for many Christians. It is troublesome because there are a

number of *apparent* contradictions in the Scripture that bear on the inquiry.<sup>29</sup> Reflect for a moment, however, on the conclusion just drawn in the preceding paragraph—the sinner has undergone a change; God did not change. The *principle* embodied in this just-arrived-at conclusion will be widely employed now in addressing the third question now before us. What is the principle? *God never changes, but He does change (or allows change to occur in) the disposition of affairs*<sup>30</sup> *for things and people outside Himself.*

Another fundamental *principle* that will shape the work in the coming analysis of the "apparent contradictions" is the *revealed* fact that God has ordained—established by His authority—that His children will be incorporated in significant ways in the process of accomplishing a number of aspects of His immutable will. To illustrate:

*Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*

***And how shall they preach unless they are sent?***<sup>31</sup>

God has ordained that He will deeply and intricately involve His children in His work of evangelization and discipleship. This is what biblical preaching and teaching are designed to bring about. God's children share in the work of God—not because God needs anybody (He needs no one), but because that is the way He has chosen to accomplish His “ends” amongst the peoples of the earth. This God-ordained human involvement in the working out of His eternal purposes brings a great depth of meaning to the lives of all His adopted children who are called to labor in the company of their Creator God. This important truth also plays a central role in reconciling what appears on the surface to be contradictory revelations.

It should be remembered, however, that the human side of the equation—humans laboring in the company of God—is not a “do it yourself” proposition. It is Christ living *in* His redeemed “bride” that makes the work effective. It is the Holy Spirit's motivating, encouraging, disciplining, comforting, and leading His people that results in the desired “ends.” “For it is God

who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”<sup>32</sup> His children are absolutely dependent upon His *superintending* and *enabling power* to accomplish anything that is well-pleasing to Him. With the above two principles in mind, we will examine the third question—“Has God ever changed His mind about anything?”

The first illustration of an *apparent* biblical contradiction that *seems to challenge* the immutability of God is:

**Challenge:** So the Lord *changed His mind* [repented] about the harm which He said He would do to His people (Exodus 32:14, emphasis and alternative translation added).

**Affirmation:** And also the Glory of Israel *will not lie or change His mind*; for *He is not a man that He should change His mind* (I Samuel 15:29, emphasis added).

In order to interpret the *apparent* contradiction to God's immutability—“So the Lord changed His mind”—one needs to see the context in which the verse appears. Then the question of the *first principle* needs to be

asked—“Did God change (or allow change to occur in) the disposition of affairs for things and people outside Himself?” The context is Aaron's creation of a golden calf for the people to worship when Moses delayed coming down from the mountain where he had gone to be with God. Upon observing the people's worship of the calf, God said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation” (Context: Exodus 32:1-10; quote: verses 9-10).

The *second principle* outlined above must also be simultaneously applied to the case in question: God has ordained the involvement of His children in much of His work of salvation and discipleship. Moses is, in this context, a “type of Christ.” “Moses entreated the Lord his God ...” (v. 11). He prayed for the people. He reminded God of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—as if God needed reminding. No, it is the readers of the accounts of God's dealings

with His people who need to be reminded of God's promises, for He breaks none of His promises. He did not break His promises here. God had no intention of breaking His promises, even when He spoke of destroying the people.

Before times eternal God had His perfect intercessor, His Son, Jesus Christ, scheduled to appear

***God had no intention of breaking His promises, even when He spoke of destroying the people.***

incarnate at a later date to take away the sins of His people. *Moses in this case is introducing or*

*previewing the intercessory work of the Christ to come.* Following the making and worshiping of the golden calf, God *changed the disposition of affairs for the people outside Himself* by raising up an intercessor, Moses, a type of Christ to “stand in the gap” between God and sinful humanity. Moses was foreshadowing the work of Christ<sup>33</sup> and the Holy Spirit<sup>34</sup> that continues to this day. God had ordained that without intercessory work being extended on behalf of those in rebellion He would utterly destroy them. But *He has raised up* an intercessor at every point in history when He has desired to reveal his

longsuffering, merciful, faithful, and kind intentions toward those who really deserve His full wrath.

Remember the *second principle*—God has ordained to use His children in doing His work of salvation and discipleship. This is what God did with Moses. He did not need Moses; He does not need us. He could have ordained other methods. But He did not ordain other methods. He ordained the use of His children. We are to pray for and intercede for those God places in our lives that need such help. Moses was the one ordained to fulfill this function at that time in history. Without Moses' intercession, God would have destroyed the people of Israel at that time. But He knew before times eternal that He would not destroy them because He had both ordained and prepared Moses to be an intercessor. Intercessors are an important, ordained "link" between our holy God and sinful humanity. *God did not change. God changed the disposition of affairs external to Himself. God provided, prepared, and involved Moses, His ordained servant, to participate in the "means" and "ends" that God established and ordained before times eternal to prevent the*

*destruction of His people.*

What changed were the circumstances that were external to God. Moses assumed the role of an intercessor and God employed Moses' intercessory work in revealing to subsequent generations both God's decree regarding intercessory prayer and the impact of intercessory prayer on the disposition of the administration, arrangement, and settlement of the sinful affairs of Aaron and the people. The affairs between God and His people were materially altered, from God's perspective, by Moses' intercession. God did not change. The affairs external to God changed.

Other challenging illustrations of this same type are:

**Challenge:** And the Lord was sorry [repented] that He had made man on the earth; and He was grieved in His heart (Genesis 6:6, alternative translation added).

**Affirmation:** For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed (Malachi 3:6).

or

**Challenge:** If it [a nation] does evil in My sight by not obeying

My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it (Jeremiah 18:10, addition by author).

**Affirmation:** God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Numbers 23:19)

The same two principles used with the first illustration need to be applied to the two "challenges/affirmations" outlined above. The conflict will be dispelled when that is done correctly. The reader would probably benefit from the exercise of (a) placing the biblical passages quoted above in their larger context, (b) observing how the situation external to God changes over time, and (c) watching how God involves His chosen people in His ordained purposes and accomplishments.

Some readers may be wondering at this juncture, "Is God rigid, 'wooden,' and unfeeling in His character? If He is unchanging, then in what state is He 'frozen'?" Such thinking emanates from a misunderstanding of God's immutability. God is

eternally and infinitely filled with joy. He is simultaneously eternally and infinitely filled with wrath. He is infinitely and eternally all that He has always been. He is infinitely and eternally "complete" and "whole." This reality is clearly beyond our capacity to either experience or fully comprehend. To His *finite* and *mutable* image bearers He discloses only tiny aspects of any of His attributes to them at any moment in time. And He does this in accordance with His infinite wisdom and perfect understanding of what is best for His children at that particular time in their life. But no, God is not "wooden," "frozen," and "unfeeling." He is simply unchanging in His *infinite* and *eternal* "completeness" and "wholeness."

The last example of "apparent contradiction" to be cross-examined in this chapter will be the three passages below. They will be subjected to a "whole counsel" biblical analysis to discern what God is *consistently* communicating.<sup>35</sup>

**Challenge:** "... the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, ... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:15-16) and

“And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14).

**Affirmation:** “And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us (I John 5:14).

Both of the “challenging” Scriptures are related to prayer. Does prayer change the mind of God? Many people think it does. But if it does, can God still be thought of as being “immutable”? The James passage tells us that prayer will “accomplish much.” The John passage seems to be telling people they can ask for “anything” they want. The “affirming” passage (I John 5:14),

however, seems to place an important limitation—“ask anything

according to His will”—on what should be expected regarding prayer. What does the “whole counsel” and “whole purpose” of God’s Word reveal regarding this important matter? If prayer does

not change God, or at least move Him to act, then why should His children pray?

The James passage quoted above literally speaks of a “prayer of faith”—a prayer wrought in or offered from the wellspring of faith. And from where does such genuine faith arise? It is a gift from God.<sup>36</sup> Faith is not an attribute of the *heart* that can be turned on and off by one’s will, desires, or intellect. The disciples recognized this fact when they asked Christ to increase their faith.<sup>37</sup> And God builds (increases) the faith in His children only as they exercise the faith already given them<sup>38</sup> or as He graciously provides it for the particular occasion at hand.

James speaks next of the “effective prayer”—one born of genuine faith—of a “righteous man.” And who is righteous?

Christ alone, amongst all people who have ever lived, is proclaimed to be

righteous in His own “works.” The people to whom His righteousness is imputed—put to their account—are those who trust (exercise faith) in the fact that Christ died for their sins.

***If prayer does not change God, or at least move Him to act, then why should His children pray?***

So people of faith are offering their prayers to God in and through the efficacy (the power to produce an effect) of Christ. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit himself who dwells in Christ’s children and Who both teaches them how to pray according to God’s will and Who prays for them when they are without the insight to know how to pray.<sup>39</sup> From this perspective, God’s mind is not being changed. Instead, God’s children are being taught and brought into fellowship with Him in a way that slowly brings them into conformity with His will and purposes.

The John 14:13-14 passage also has a context that surrounds it. And that context is one of *doing the will of God* in the midst of both loving Him and obeying His expressed will—read John 13:14-16, 34-35; 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10. If we love Christ, we will seek to do his will. It is in loving and obeying Christ that we are invited to ask for anything we want that is in keeping with His character, purposes, and will. In fact, elsewhere in Scripture we are told that when we ask amiss—with wrong motives or for wrong “ends”—we will not have our requests answered.<sup>40</sup> And we ought to be very grateful for this limitation on our prayers.

For who amongst God’s adopted children would want God to answer their “bad” prayer or a prayer that would hinder or diminish God’s infinite and perfect wisdom? A developing child of God wants more and more to see the perfect will of God done in everything. “Yet not my will, but Thine be done” becomes, over time, an “identifying stamp” of the growing Christian.

The “affirmation” passage above (I John 5:14) sums up nicely the “whole purpose” of God: “And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” God is training us to be like Christ, and Christ’s “meat” was to do the will of the Father.<sup>41</sup> He never wanted His own will to prevail at the expense of the will of the Father.<sup>42</sup>

So what are we to conclude? First of all we may conclude that prayer does not change God. He stands forever immutable, with an everlasting, loving commitment to His people. We may also conclude that God is at work in His people, teaching and training them to pray for things in keeping with God’s will as directed by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we are to understand and delight in the

realization that God invites us, yea, has ordained for us to be participants in His work by praying for the very things God desires. It is God's will that His children petition Him. Through prayer they join in the mission of God with God.

### **Reasons To Revere God's Absolute Immutability**

We generally take God's personality for granted. We seldom pause to ponder and meditate on the awesomeness of His revealed character. The *glory* of God is unmistakably evident in every one of His characteristics. His glory is further magnified in the *indivisible unity* of His divine attributes. God would cease to be God if any of His attributes were alterable even in the slightest way. His immutability is an essential property of His divinity. Without His immutability He would cease to be God. He would suddenly become "made in the image of mankind," with all of the implications associated with such a terrifying notion. "Human nature" would suddenly become the standard for assessing life's eternal verities. Thank God such a ghoulish thought has no place in reality.

Think for a moment about God's holiness: His purity, moral

perfection, and separation from all that is unholy. God's holiness is the crown of His glory. It is His singularly most defining and important attribute. Now try to imagine the altered possibilities if God were mutable rather than immutable. He could become unholy in His thoughts and deeds. God could "fall" from holiness. His decrees could become contemporary preferences, subject to unholy possibilities. Unholy justice might be forthcoming. God, for instance, might become an arbitrary "respector of persons"—for example, only the extremely poor and extremely rich might be saved. Or all those with red hair could have a "providential hedge" placed around them so they would never experience a financial bankruptcy. A changing, unholy God could begin to "play games" with His creatures as it suited His every whim. The perverted possibilities would be endless in the absence of His having an immutable character and, in the examples just cited, an immutable holy character.

If God were mutable rather than immutable there could be no guarantee that He would remain omnipotent (infinitely powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (present

everywhere), or even infinite and eternal. His power, if mutable, could diminish to the point of ineffectiveness where His sovereign rule was not maintainable. That could mean God might cease to be either sovereign or omnipotent. Satan might even emerge as a threat to God's rule as God's power fluctuated—He could get tired and need time to recuperate.

God's memory could fail Him if He were mutable—there goes God's omniscience. He might forget the grand and perfect design He had planned for the future so that ad-libbing the future would become necessary. He might suddenly desire to "make up a new future" as time marched on. The really sad aspect of this "make-believe" scenario, however, is the fact that there are people who have this kind of world/lifeview concerning God. They make Him in their own fallen image.

Scripture frequently uses the metaphor of God being like a *rock*, signifying His unchangeableness—His immutability.<sup>43</sup> (There is no other natural, physical, created element as hard, stable, and unchanging as a rock.) Scripture uses this metaphor for several reasons. First, and foremost, it describes a

reality of God—He is unchanging. Second, God's immutability signifies His absolute dependability to His image bearers. There is nothing else in the created order that is changeless and absolutely stable. Only the eternal God is an exception to change. And finally, God being the only authentic and unchanging reference point makes Him a true haven of security and rest for the regenerate image bearer who recognizes his or her desperate *need to be changed into the likeness of Christ* by God.

### **Personal Beliefs and Conduct Derived from God's Immutability**

God's immutability screams out at His image bearers to be people whose word is their bond. Trust is an essential component of integrity. When God says He will do something, we trust Him to do it because He cannot lie. He is immutable and cannot change His mind. The account of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac is extremely informative at this point. The narrative proceeds as follows:

*God tested Abraham ... and He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of*

*Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” So Abraham rose early ... and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son ... and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham ... saw the place from a distance. And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here ... and I and the lad [Isaac] will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you.”<sup>44</sup>*

The account continues and reveals to us: (a) Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, and (b) God’s intervention in stopping the sacrifice at the last moment. A question, however, begs to be asked, “How could Abraham have *trusted* (had faith) in God to such a degree as to be willing to sacrifice his son whom he loved so much?” God most graciously provides the answer to this question:

*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendents shall be called.” He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead.<sup>45</sup>*

Abraham knew God would do what He had said He would do. God had already revealed the immutable character of His promises when Sarah bore Isaac in her extreme old age. Note that Abraham told the two young men who accompanied him and Isaac on the trip to wait, and that He and Isaac would return later. The second passage informs us that Abraham knew God would bring descendents forth from Isaac—He had promised it—and that in order for that to be done, God would have to raise Isaac from the dead. And hence, Abraham told the young men to wait and that he and Isaac *would return to them*—Abraham thought they would return after Isaac’s resurrection. The immutability of God’s Word had been demonstrated to Abraham in and through the birth of Isaac, and it was on the strength of this conviction that Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac at God’s request.

All trust in the human relationships of life is grounded in the keeping of one’s word. God’s Word is His bond, His guarantee. Our word ought to be our bond, our guarantee. Scripture gives us a number of illustrations to reinforce the importance of keeping our word. This is

pungently illustrated in the Old Testament account of Joshua and the elders of Israel entering into a covenant agreement with the people of Gibeon to let the Gibeonites live, unharmed, in the land of Israel.<sup>46</sup> Hundreds of years later King Saul sought to exterminate the Gibeonites in his misplaced zeal. During the reign of King David the Lord sent a three-year famine upon the Israelites as a pronouncement of His total disapproval of Saul’s ungodly behavior.<sup>47</sup>

The Israelites were known to be God’s people. They had made the covenant with the Gibeonites in the name of the Lord. When they broke the covenant, the act contradicted the character of God, whose name they bore. *They had taken the name of God in vain*, a violation of the Third Commandment.<sup>48</sup> Those of us who identify with the name of Christ are to never break our word. To do so is to drag Christ’s name through the mud. Such behavior contradicts the name of Christ. It is a rejection of Christ—probably unintended, but nevertheless the reality.

Psalm 15 asks, “O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill? He who walks with integrity ... *He* [who]

*swears to his own hurt, and does not change.”<sup>49</sup> At the very core of integrity is the unfailing routine of keeping one’s word even when doing so works to one’s disadvantage—financial loss, personal inconvenience, or disappointment. “Swearing to one’s own hurt and not changing”*

### ***The immutability of God’s Word had been demonstrated to Abraham in and through the birth of Isaac ...***

was lived out before many of us, in a dramatic way, in the 1930s and 1940s. A number of families who had lost their farms in bankruptcy foreclosures continued to pay the banks for decades. They did this although the courts had removed all legal requirements for repayment. Why would they do this? It was their sense of Christian duty—their word was tied to their profession of faith in Christ.

There is no biblical justification ever set forth for breaking one’s word. There is, however, a biblical remedy given whereby one may seek to be released from a foolish or damaging commitment. It is found in the Wisdom literature:

*My son ... if you have been snared with the words of your mouth, have been caught with the words of your mouth, do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; since you have come into the hand of your neighbor, go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor. Do not give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids; deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hunter's hand, and like a bird from the hand of the fowler.*<sup>50</sup>

The admonition is clear—"go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor." God's children may ask, beg, or plead for a release from an obligation with the person to whom they made the verbal or written commitment. But the "right of release" resides with the person to whom the commitment was made. It is in the response to the request for release, however, that the *merciful* or *demanding* providence of our Sovereign Lord is revealed.

It is precisely at this point, the point of considering the possibility of encountering "demanding providence," that most people decide to take matters into their own hands to avoid the risk of having an "unwelcome outcome." This typically begins with a

rationalization process. "I made a verbal commitment. It is not in writing. I will deny it." Or, "I will see if my lawyer can find a loophole or flaw in the contract, and avoid the consequences that way." Perhaps the most popular avoidance procedure in business today, however, is to seek protection under the bankruptcy laws—we will let our creditors suffer our financial hardships.

"Demanding providence" may take more subtle forms, though. People may say something as "inconsequential" as, "Great, I will meet you at the library this afternoon at 4:30," and then *conveniently* forget the commitment when a more attractive opportunity comes along. We may even cover the first sin of failure by telling our "friend" a lie—we simply got distracted and forgot. The real problem, however, is that we often take what we say so lightly that we do not even consider our commitments to be an obligation. God, however, sees it differently. We forget or ignore the truth that we are accountable to Christ for everything that proceeds from our mouth—all we say shall be revealed and shouted from the housetop.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

But what if God were not immutable, as some individuals' hermeneutics allow? Then God could change His mind. He could make a promise and then decide not to keep it. If that were possible, people might be justified in breaking their promises under certain conditions. All that would be needed to change would be a good justification based on our feelings, circumstances, likes, dislikes, situations, or whims! The entire outlook on keeping one's word would become "situational" in character. So-called "situational ethics" is antithetical to biblical ethics. It can create "evil" that can become "good," and "good" that can become "evil," a gross perversion of moral thinking that fails to root itself in the character of God. It does this by varying the situation while placing the human participant in the role of a "god." It ignores the "fallen nature" of humanity, assumes perfect foreknowledge for its participants (in many of the contrived situations), and ignores the absolute principles and standards set forth in God's Word.

The biblical conclusion that flows from the hermeneutic subscribing to the "whole counsel

of God," however, is obvious. God is immutable and consequently absolutely trustworthy. His promises and testimonies are unalterable. We who bear His name should plead with Him to enable us to always be faithful to our word. By keeping our word in small matters, and large ones, we bear witness to the reality that we are Christ's disciples. O Lord, help us to always keep our word, and by doing so glorify You.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Malachi 3:6; Psalm 102:25-27; Hebrews 13:8; etc.

<sup>2</sup>James 1:17

<sup>3</sup>Exodus 3:13-15

<sup>4</sup>Acts 5:20

<sup>5</sup>Acts 20:27

<sup>6</sup>Acts 20:20

<sup>7</sup>Matthew 6:14-15

<sup>8</sup>Matthew 18:35; Mark 11:25-26

<sup>9</sup>Psalm 25:11; 79:9; Isaiah 48:9-11;

<sup>1</sup>John 2:12

<sup>10</sup>Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 18:21-35

<sup>11</sup>John 17:22-26

<sup>12</sup>Ephesians 1:18

<sup>13</sup>Ephesians 1:4-14

<sup>14</sup>Luke 7:47 [To be "forgiven little" shows an attitude of ingratitude. A "small sin" infinitely offends a holy God.]

<sup>15</sup>Matthew 18:35

<sup>16</sup>Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 40:28; 11:2 The word *understanding* used in both of these referenced

passages connotes that God's knowledge is always related to His "meaning" and "purpose" for something's existence. God's knowledge is not disconnected or knowledge of irrelevant trivia. There is no irrelevant trivia before God. All is relevant to Him.

<sup>17</sup>I Corinthians 13:12

<sup>18</sup>Isaiah 14:24; 46:10

<sup>19</sup>Psalms 139:1-6, 16; Isaiah 46:9-10

<sup>20</sup>Isaiah 40:28 This entire chapter of Isaiah speaks of God's incomprehensible greatness.

<sup>21</sup>Isaiah 43:25 (emphasis added) [Also consider the same idea in Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 38:17, and Micah 7:19.]

<sup>22</sup>Jeremiah 31:34 (emphasis added)

<sup>23</sup>Hebrews 8:12 (emphasis added)

<sup>24</sup>Hebrews 10:17 (emphasis added)

<sup>25</sup>Some people may contend that what is needed is a "qualified" (new) definition of "immutable." To qualify the classical and historical definition is to become a "theological taxidermist"—one who stuffs a substitute meaning into an authentic doctrine by ignoring, and thus subverting, the "whole counsel" of God.

<sup>26</sup>Isaiah 53:11

<sup>27</sup>Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20; Romans 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; I Thessalonians 1:4; II Timothy 2:10; II Peter 1:10

<sup>28</sup>John 3:3-8; II Corinthians 5:17; II Peter 1:3, 23

<sup>29</sup>A personal note: the author does not believe that any true contradictions are to be found anywhere in the Bible. The "whole counsel" of the Scripture is required in this case to meaningfully resolve such *apparent* contradictions without either superficially "sweeping them under the rug" or doing violence to the rest of Scripture or to one's logic and common sense.

<sup>30</sup>By "disposition of affairs" is meant the *administration, arrangement, and settlement* of the affairs in question.

<sup>31</sup>Romans 10:13-15

<sup>32</sup>Philippians 2:13

<sup>33</sup>Romans 8:34

<sup>34</sup>Romans 8:26-27

<sup>35</sup>This entire treatise is grounded on the presupposition that God's truth is not, and indeed cannot be, contradictory in character. Therefore, the Bible does not contain irreconcilable, contradictory revelation. If this is so, then God has provided, in the Bible, sufficient revelation of His mind for His children to discern the *consistent* and larger

truth contained in the "whole counsel" of His Word. It is certainly reasonable to believe that any single passage or verse contained in the Bible may well be unable to either fully or clearly communicate the fully disclosed truth on a particular matter.

<sup>36</sup>Romans 12:3; I Corinthians 12:9;

II Corinthians 4:13; Ephesians 2:8

<sup>37</sup>Luke 17:5-10

<sup>38</sup>Luke 17:5-10

<sup>39</sup>Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20; Romans 8:26-27

<sup>40</sup>James 4:3

<sup>41</sup>John 4:34

<sup>42</sup>Matthew 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42

<sup>43</sup>Deuteronomy 32:15, 18, 30, 31; II Samuel

23:3; Psalm 18:31, 46; 28:1; 42:9; 78:35;

89:26; 92:15; 94:22; I Corinthians 10:4

<sup>44</sup>Genesis 22:1-5 (explanation added; emphasis added)

<sup>45</sup>Hebrews 11:17-19

<sup>46</sup>Joshua 9:1-27

<sup>47</sup>II Samuel 21:1-9

<sup>48</sup>Exodus 20:7

<sup>49</sup>Psalms 15:1, 2, 4 (addition and emphasis added)

<sup>50</sup>Proverbs 6:1-5 (emphasis added)

<sup>51</sup>Luke 12:2-3



## Dialogue II

### God's Immutability: Business Implications and the Uncertainty of Scripture A Response to Richard Chewning's Paper

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#### A Fine Foundation

"Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: God's Immutability and Human Integrity" is precisely what we have come to expect of Richard Chewning—provocative writing that is biblically grounded and intellectually rigorous.

Chewning implements his strength of tackling challenging issues with refreshing straightforwardness. In this endeavor, the topic courageously pioneered is God's unchanging character (i.e., immutability) and the implications thereof (e.g., prayer does not change God). Rather than making biblical integration in business the main thrust of his paper,<sup>1</sup> Chewning provides a fine seminal piece that others may debate further; others may also discuss the ramifications for Christians in business. Given that the issues Chewning explores are nebulous and his positions clear, there is ample opportunity for one to embrace,

extend, and contend what he writes. This brief response will, first, support and extend one of Chewning's postulates for Christian businesspeople. Second, it will argue that knowing God's will is not as easy as Chewning implies.

#### God Does Not Need Successful Businesspeople

For many of his positions, Chewning has chosen not to theorize on their ramifications when integrated with business. Though interesting discussions are possible for all of Chewning's assertions, one is particularly useful to contemplate as to its relevance for Christian businesspeople. Chewning writes that "God's children share in the work of God—not because God needs anybody, (He needs no one) ..." (Chewning, 2000). This point, though seemingly benign and uncontroversial, often seems forgotten in business.

Christian businesspeople, probably motivated by pride, sometimes behave as if God is limited and is in dire need of what a successful businessperson is able to provide. Visibility, power, and wealth, all at the disposal of a successful businessperson, can be used to God's supposed advantage!

Unfortunately, the inherent danger of the false paradigm "God needs our help" is that we frequently justify improper means to achieve a perceived righteous end (i.e., business success). For example, as Albert Carr persuasively argues in his timeless piece "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?," Christian businesspeople, though they refuse to accept the fact, tell half-truths, compromising their values to achieve business success. Though humbling to accept, we offer God nothing with our business success that God is not capable of achieving alone or via less significant vessels, such as an ass<sup>2</sup> or rock.<sup>3</sup> Christian businesspeople who understand this are less apt to succumb to the compromise often necessary to achieve success (e.g., bluffing and telling half-truths). They realize that, frequently, business failure, rather than business success, is to be sought and

lauded. As Chewning astutely observes, "At the very core of integrity is the unfailing routine of keeping one's word even when doing so works to one's disadvantage—financial loss, personal inconvenience, or disappointment" (Chewning, 2000).

### **Bible Is Unclear**

Chewning writes with such bold confidence that it induces apprehension in one who might offer a different interpretation of Scripture. Though certainly not intentional, Chewning's writing occasionally conveys to the reader that anyone who disagrees with him is ignorant, less of a Christian, or both.<sup>4</sup> Chewning's concept of seeking the *whole counsel of God* when attempting to understand God and God's will is wise. For example, knowing that God epitomizes love should be foundational and shed light on any biblical interpretation. However, even with the whole counsel of God, the Bible remains a mystery on many issues. As evidence, there exist many denominations in the church, all equally legitimate, as well as contrasting interpretations of Scripture on various issues (e.g., wealth, baptism, giving, marriage).

Because the Bible is often unclear, trusting God is more complex than Chewning suggests, such as when he writes, "When God says He will do something, we trust Him to do it because He cannot lie" (Chewning, 2000). Even Chewning's example of trust is also an example of a godly person misinterpreting God's word. Chewning's illustration is of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. However, by Chewning's own account (Chewning, 2000), Abraham misunderstood God, erroneously trusting God to resurrect Isaac from the dead, rather than provide a ram in lieu of his son (Genesis 22:13) for sacrifice.

Scripture is replete with examples of godly people who have found God's Word to be unclear, often with consequences more unfortunate than Abraham's. Today, fatalities occur when Christian Scientists turn to prayer alone, refusing medical attention for physical healing (I Peter 2:24, Acts 14:9-10, Matthew 17:20) or when churches in Appalachia confirm the Word of God by fondling rattlesnakes (Mark 16:18, Luke 10:19, Acts 28:3-6). Though it may be argued that the Bible is being misinterpreted (Ramrus, 2000), both are

examples of Christians trusting God subsequent to having sought the whole counsel of God. Albeit Chewning's article, "Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: God's Immutability and Human Integrity," is full of insight with supporting explanations, many of his conclusions are not obvious and can be countered. Because we see through a glass darkly (I Corinthians 13:12), and because the Bible is often an enigma, we must tread softly, acknowledging that differing interpretations of God's Word are possible and equally plausible, even when utilizing the *whole counsel of God*.

### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Near the end of his paper, Chewning suggests that because God is immutable, Christian businesspeople should be also. "God's Word is His bond, His guarantee. Our word ought to be our bond, our guarantee ... Those of us who identify with the name of Christ are to never break our word" (Chewning, 2000).

<sup>2</sup>Examples of God's chosen vessel being an ass include Numbers 22:28 and Matthew 21:2.

<sup>3</sup>Examples of God's chosen vessel being a rock include Exodus 17:6 and Luke 19:40.

<sup>4</sup>A few of Chewning's statements, written with bold certainty, are the following: "... the answer to every one of these questions *must be NO!*" "Scripture is plain ...," "The biblical conclusion that flows from the hermeneutic subscribing to the 'whole counsel of God,' however, is *obvious*."

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## Dialogue II

### **A Rock in the Whirlwind: A Changeless God in A Changing World A Response to “Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: God’s Immutability and Human Integrity” by Richard Chewning**

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“May you live in interesting times” says the ancient Chinese curse. We do indeed live in interesting times. Technology, particularly the Internet, is driving a paradigm change in our society that is so profound that a new economy has sprung up seemingly overnight. Futurists tell us there is likely to be more social change in the next ten years than there has been in the last century (Bell & Gray, 1997). In the context of this whirlwind of transformation, it is a jerk into reality to be reminded that God is immutable, that He does not change.

In his paper “Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: God’s Immutability and Human Integrity,” Dr. Chewning has ably set out the key issues and arguments involved in the doctrine of the unchangeableness of God. He has shown how this

attribute is important to God’s character and to our personal salvation. He has also discussed how personal faithfulness and integrity should be an outcome of a proper understanding of God’s immutability. This application has immediate salience to Christians in business because human resource professionals note that integrity and trustworthiness are key ingredients of long-term success in the new economy (Allred, Snow, & Miles, 1996). Because our God is faithful, Christians are encouraged to develop their personal faithfulness.

However, the article did not discuss what may be one of the most important reasons that business practitioners and scholars find the doctrine of immutability worth studying: change. The change in the business world is so rapid that the

turbulence seems as fierce and destructive as a whirlwind. In response to forces unleashed by the Internet, companies and industries are reinventing themselves. People are losing the benefits of stability. The rules for individual success are reversing. These chaotic alterations affect both business practitioners and professors. We need to understand how God is our unchangeable Rock so that we can gain courage and stable footing in the face of the whirlwind.

In the next few pages, I will briefly outline three consequences, not necessarily related, of the technological and social revolution we are living through. Because many of my readers are academics, I will give examples of these changes in the university industry. In response to Chewing's discussion on immutability, I will show how the unchangeableness of God matters in times like these.

***God is a Rock when the rules for success change.*** One of the most dramatic shifts in the business arena in the past five years is the change in rules for individual success in a firm. As recently as 1996, it was highly desirable for employees to have experience and expertise in an industry. Firms paid well for

those qualities. Since experience is accumulated through time, age had a certain value to a company. Many supervisory positions were held by people in their 40s and older.

However, in industries affected by the Internet, almost overnight age and experience became liabilities. Old ways of doing business are suddenly anachronistic. The traits needed in the new economy are innovation and flexibility (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999). Many employers feel that experience and stability are barriers to change and creativity. "If the economy is new, who needs experience" is the latest watchword (Munk, 1999, p. 50). Years of experience are not only irrelevant, they are actually negative.

In the next few years, many people over 40 who think they are reaching the pinnacle of their career will find that a 28-year-old is getting the promotions and bonuses they assumed would be theirs. This sea-change is a direct result of the whirlwind speed with which new technologies are emerging. The younger generation has embraced the new technologies; the older generation, in general, has not. Companies that want to succeed

in the new economy tend to woo the younger employee.

Even higher education is not immune to these influences. With students demanding training for the new economy and distance education booming, universities also look for people who are innovative and flexible (Becker, 1999). The rules of personal success, even in academe, are changing. Many professors, including me, are over 40 and full of experience and expertise. As much as we may dislike the necessity, if we want to teach successfully we can no longer teach in the old ways. Students can find information easily; the role of the professor has changed from information provider to resource guide. To teach students in the new economy, we must be flexible and embrace new methods and attitudes or we, too, may become obsolete.

In such circumstances it is not merely a nice doctrine to understand that God is immutable; it is an absolute necessity. When the rules for success that we have lived by for years start reversing, it is a joy and relaxation to know that our God is an unchangeable Rock, that He will not reverse Himself. From that sure point, we can begin to learn the necessary new

skills. If God is our foundational Rock, we can cope with and adjust more easily to the new rules for success, whether our job is teaching business or doing it.

***God is the Rock for people that embrace change.*** The older generation may face a change in the rules, but our students face a world without rules. According to the business press, people that work in the new economy must be able to embrace turbulence, reinvent themselves constantly as free agents, and be willing to move from company to company without looking back.<sup>1</sup> To some, this sounds exhilarating and liberating—and it can be.

However, there is a dark side to the unremitting pressure for change. Some scholars argue that if people move incessantly from one shape to another, they will ultimately have lives without substance or stability (Rifkin, 1995; Sennett, 1998). Those that embrace the whirlwind can be caught in a mindset where being quiet for a few moments is perceived as dropping out of the loop, losing the edge (Bunting, 1998). They can become constantly active automotons, pursuing pleasure or riches without pause. The embrace of turbulence contributes to the relentless busyness and lack of

peace so prevalent even in our churches.

If younger Christians do not learn to properly understand the immutability of God, they will have difficulty developing into whole people, rather than restless pursuers of elusive “hipness.” However, if their life core rests in an unchanging God and their identity is in Him, they can change their activities as necessary to thrive in the new economy but keep a center of peace from which to build personal stability and wholeness.

I have some idea of the pressures that constant change engenders. For example, I moved 17 times before I was 21. However, I found the ability to thrive on change because a center of stability was given to me by the immutable God and the people who consistently loved me. Because God does not change, we who desire to become like Him are able to find our rest in Him. This allows us to cope with constant surface change. Our students can do the same.

***God is the Rock during industry change.*** Many of the changes in the new economy are occurring because the economics of physical things is being uncoupled from the economics of information.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the

traditional link between information and the physical way it is delivered—the book, the broadcast, the professor—is being loosened (Evans & Wurster, 2000). Digital networks have created a world where proprietary information is difficult to hold on to and anyone who searches the Internet can find expert knowledge.

Uncoupling information from its physical delivery systems is forcing dramatic changes in the ways knowledge is created and transmitted to the next generation (Dunn, 1994; Becker, 1999). It is not only the rules for personal success that are changing in higher education; the entire industry is transforming. For example, seamless and instantaneous communication has created a demand for instruction delivered directly to the student. In response, by this fall (2000) tens of thousands of accredited courses from major universities will have been placed on the Internet (Symonds, 2000). General education classes are becoming commodities (Dunn, 1994). Traditional classrooms are being replaced by learning communities (Bunting, 1998; Lin et al., 1996). After 200 years of industry stability, the forces of the whirlwind are requiring even the

most bureaucratic university to change form and structure.

Like many CBFA members, I teach in a university that has a mission linked to the immutable God. In my university, the purpose is formulated as “Biblically-centered education, scholarship and service—equipping men and women in mind and character to impact the world for the Lord Jesus Christ” (www.biola.edu/info/mission). It is comforting to know that as my industry and university transforms, its purpose need not. In five years, our teaching venues and organizational structure may be very different, but because God is the same, our mission will remain the same.

Business people, professors, and students need to deeply understand the immutability of God so that they can cope with the new world. “Interesting times” can be good when they force us to remember Who we serve. We do not primarily serve the university that is changing form after centuries of stability. We do not serve our careers, whatever strange directions they may take. We do not even primarily serve our students, though they will have to balance in the whirlwind. As Christian professionals, our allegiance is to

God, the Creator, the Sustainer of all things, Who is the Rock. In a world faced with whirlwind change, He is unchangeable. It is a comfort and joy to remember that.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 See any issue of *Fast Company*.
- 2 For further thinking in this area, see Paul M. Romer, 1993. Idea gaps and object gaps in economic development, *Journal of Monetary Economics* (32), 543-573.

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## Dialogue II

### Response to Chewning's "Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: God's Immutability and Human Integrity"

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#### Abstract

Chewning argues that God's immutability is clearly taught in Scripture and that apparent contradictions to this doctrine can be reconciled by considering the whole counsel of God. He then applies this truth by arguing that humans, as image bearers of God, are required by God to be absolutely trustworthy, which means, among other things, that seeking bankruptcy protection necessarily is a violation of God's law. In this brief response, I argue that while God is immutable, there remains a significant element of mystery in our ability to understand that attribute. In addition, persons who invoke bankruptcy protections are not necessarily sinning.

I concur wholeheartedly with Chewning's exegesis of Scripture and his conclusion that Scripture teaches that God is absolutely immutable. Chewning is on very firm theological ground in

making his argument. I have two limited responses; the first is theological in nature and the second concerns application. However, it should be clear from the outset that my disagreement is with the periphery of Chewning's analysis, not the core of his argument.

#### Theology

Chewning argues that Scripture teaches that God is absolutely immutable, notwithstanding several historical incidents described in Scripture which appear to be instances when God changed His mind. Chewning states several times that these issues are difficult for our limited and fallible human minds to comprehend. However, the tone of his argument is that in the end, if we are careful and thoughtful enough, the apparent difficulties fade away. In contrast, I find that this is one of many elements of the Christian faith

where I really feel as if I am looking in a distorted mirror (I Cor. 13:12), and no matter hard I look, the picture is still fuzzy. Scripture seems to indicate that God did “change His mind” in biblical history, albeit on very rare occasions. As Chewning correctly points out, rarity is no defense; even if it occurred only one time, then the principle of God’s absolute immutability would founder. Chewning presents an analysis as to how these examples can be reconciled with the clear teaching of Scripture that God is immutable. In contrast, while I suspect that Chewning is on the right track with his analysis, I remain uncomfortable coming to a firm, dogmatic conclusion about how God’s immutability and these instances of an apparent change in God’s purpose can be reconciled.

Similarly, Chewning appears to be more comfortable in understanding the relationship between God’s immutability and prayer to a greater degree than I am. I do not disagree with the conclusions drawn in the paper. I just am less certain that the argument can be made quite as neatly as it is here. Chewning argues that God foreordains the prayer and the consequences of

the prayer, so that in effect God has not changed. In partial contrast, it seems to me that there is an element of unexplainable mystery here. For instance, Jesus prayed to His Father as follows: “O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; Yet not what I want but what you want” (Matthew 26:39). Jesus asked for something that He knew was not His Father’s will. What exactly was going on in the Garden of Gethsemane? I know that Jesus did not sin in this act, and I don’t believe that the will of God was at all uncertain in His mind, yet He asked that it not come about nonetheless. My point is not to contend with Chewning’s conclusion about the immutability of God; only to indicate that there are aspects of this doctrine that I find unexplainable and which remain for me a mysterious element of God’s power and grace.

Let me stress that I am not saying Chewning’s work here is of no theological value. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. Relying on mystery and wonderment can sometimes cover for the failure to engage in clear and precise theological thought. I very much appreciate Chewning’s willingness to tackle this hard issue head on. He has

not avoided the hard questions as some writers do. And he does say on multiple occasions that these are difficult issues for us to grasp. I very much appreciate his willingness to grapple with these complex issues.

### **Application**

For the audience of this journal, the integration of biblical truth with the practice of business is paramount. Chewning makes a general application and then several specific applications. The general application is that all humans are commanded to be holy as God is holy, and that based on God’s immutability, we are required to be constant. Our word is to be our bond. There is abundant scriptural evidence that truthfulness is required of God’s children. This requirement is certainly not relaxed in business relationships; in fact, Scripture makes it clear that dishonest business dealings are an abomination to God.

Therefore, I heartily concur with Chewning’s conclusion that honesty, integrity, and keeping one’s word are all commands in Scripture and are as required in business as they are in other human relationships. Further, I agree that these behaviors also promote trust in organizations and

that trust is an important component of a well-run business. However, one of the specific applications that Chewning makes to current business relationships concerns bankruptcy law and practice. If I understand correctly, Chewning concludes that it would be sinful for Christians to ever utilize bankruptcy protections. I disagree with him at this point.

A logical conclusion of Chewning’s position is that governmental bankruptcy laws are in and of themselves sinful and that Christians ought not to take advantage of them in any circumstance. In contrast, I think that it is perfectly permissible for the government of a society to advance a social policy that protects individuals from complete economic ruin in certain circumstances. Not only is it permissible, one could argue that it is mandated by God’s commands for social justice. Further, I think it is perfectly permissible for certain individuals or firms to take advantage of these protections. Of course, there are legitimate questions about the appropriate parameters of this protection. For instance, I think that it is reasonable to argue that the current parameters of U.S. bankruptcy law are weighted too

far in favor of lenders at the moment. I also think that the legality of bankruptcy in a particular situation does not automatically make it legitimate in God's eyes.

How can I reconcile the legitimacy of bankruptcy protection with God's command that we are never to break our word? There are three lines of argument that combine to serve as a justification for this position.

The first, and strongest, argument is that Scripture gives us an example where lenders were compelled to

rescind their financially legitimate right to repayment of a debt. This example occurs in the story of Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem. One of the

many problems that Nehemiah encountered was a complaint from some of the resident Jews who had avoided captivity but now found themselves in financial bondage to their fellow Israelites. While the details recorded in Nehemiah 5 are somewhat murky, it appears that some of the Jews had mortgaged their property to tide them through a famine and then found themselves in over their heads. Further, the lenders were refusing

to extend mercy and in fact were ratcheting up the pressure. Nehemiah, in his position as governor of the territory, commands the lenders to rescind the debt and return title to the land and crops that had been mortgaged (Neh. 5:11-12).

This seems like a clear case when God's standard of mercy overrides the terms of a financial contract. The oppressed Jews do not contend that they did not voluntarily enter into the terms of the loans, only that their situation had become desperate. Chewing

*Scripture gives us an example where lenders were compelled to rescind their financially legitimate right to repayment of a debt.*

contends that the only legitimate recourse is for the borrowers to throw themselves on the mercy of the creditors, relying on Proverbs 6:1-5. In contrast, Nehemiah does not request that the lenders show mercy; rather, he compels them to relent in the strongest possible language.

The second argument is that lenders have a responsibility to appropriately screen people to whom they lend. Banks and others who promote the

irresponsible use of credit through aggressive promotion of credit cards and other sources of "easy" credit are at least as accountable to God for their misdeeds as are individuals who through lack of financial acumen, or through bad decision-making, get in over their heads. When an individual in this situation opts for bankruptcy, and does so within the legal parameters laid down by the proper governmental representatives, then I do not think that they have necessarily broken God's law. Further, I do not think that it is appropriate to place an additional burden of guilt on these people, some of whom are Christians, by saying that they are guilty of sin by taking advantage of these protections.

Now, there are certainly abuses of bankruptcy protection, and it is difficult to separate abuse from legitimate use in many specific instances. It is undeniable that many individuals intentionally run up large credit bills with no intention of repaying the debt. This is sin. Further, there are individuals who too easily opt for bankruptcy protection when they still have the wherewithal to pay what they owe although it would be painful. This too is sin. The underlying

motivation of the heart is of paramount importance in determining what is and is not sinful. Of course, it is difficult or impossible for us to know the true motivation of other people's actions. In fact, it is often difficult to ascertain the motivation for our own actions. Therefore, it is quite legitimate to counsel Christians generally, and specific Christians specifically, about God's law with respect to breaking one's word and making responsible financial decisions.

The third and final argument that bankruptcy is sometimes justifiable is that in the case of business debt, lenders are taking a risk that they understand all too well. Lenders gain a return on their money higher than they might otherwise because they understand that their money is "at risk." One risk is human sin. But there are other kinds of risks as well, including macroeconomic variables such as the level of consumer spending, unemployment rates, taxation policy, as well as innumerable market risks such as shifting consumer tastes, new technology, changing housing choices, and so on. It is a well-established financial practice to charge higher interest when risk is greater and lower interest when risk is small.

When a particular loan is not repaid due to business failure, it may very well be seen by the lender as a cost of business, a cost that was anticipated and is covered by the higher interest that was charged initially. Thus, when a lender is not repaid, s/he has not necessarily been harmed, and sin has not necessarily occurred. A market economy is based on the assumption of risk. By definition, not all risks will turn out well. Again, I am not contending that bankruptcy should ever be taken lightly or pursued frivolously, only that its use is not necessarily a violation of God's character and thus a sin.

### Conclusion

I end as I started. Chewning's analysis is rigorous, thought-provoking, and important for thinking Christians to consider. I agree with his main conclusions. Specifically, I agree that God is absolutely immutable and that one implication of this aspect of God's character is that we are to be true to our word. Lying and other forms of deception are sin. I differ with Chewning in two limited areas. I do not think that it is possible to reach as clear an understanding of what it means that God "changes His mind" as Chewning does. I think that there

is a mysterious element here that escapes human understanding. Second, I think that Chewning goes too far in implying that all bankruptcy situations are sinful. I think that there are situations where Christians can take advantage of bankruptcy protection and not sin in doing so.

**JBIB**

## An Honors Course in Economic Philosophy and Policy Development

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*Dotterweich proposes and details an honors class in economics. This non-traditional course develops the student's understanding of various worldviews of economics, allows the student to determine his or her personal view, and then assists them in forming economic policy prescriptions which are consistent with those personal perspectives.*

### Abstract

Economic policy cannot be crafted in the absence of individual values. This honors course in economics is built upon the premise that students must develop an understanding of various views of the world and then adopt their own viewpoint as a necessary prerequisite to developing economic policy prescriptions that are consistent with those perspectives. This is accomplished by emphasizing that moral philosophy is the foundation for the development of sound economic policy. The background material for the course consists of readily available Internet resources as well as small, inexpensive economics issues/readings books. The course is structured around lectures, class discussions, classroom policy debates, economic issue papers, and

student presentations. Teaching in this environment forces students to evaluate several policy alternatives and to determine for themselves those choices they might find to be acceptable or unacceptable based on their view of the world. This course outline is certainly not traditional and is rather labor intensive. However, both instructors and students can take great satisfaction in realizing that strong course performance requires more than just memorization and recitation of economic concepts or theory on examinations.

### Introduction

Media commentators, politicians, ordinary citizens, and even economists constantly make economic pronouncements. Even a casual observer can recognize that different individuals possess a variety of

opinions or insights regarding the same political or economic issue. The recommended policy prescriptions of several analysts are often inconsistent with respect to the same economic issue. How is one without any formal training in economics to make sense of all of these viewpoints? Are some perspectives correct, while others are wrong?

Many classroom instructors of college principles of economics courses may feel uncomfortable spending class time discussing reasons for discrepancies in economic policy recommendations. This may be due to a variety of factors. First, they may feel constrained by time limitations in covering the necessary economic theory, and therefore unable to spend class time on philosophic issues. Second, they may feel uncomfortable in leading the class in considering the philosophical foundations that underlie the development of economic policy recommendations. Empirical investigation or statistics can verify a positive economic statement, one which “focuses on facts and avoids value judgments. Such factually based analysis is critical to good policy analysis.” Such statements describe “what is.” Normative economics, on the

other hand, focuses on statements about what “the economy should be like or what particular policy actions should be recommended to get it to be that way” (McConnell & Brue, 1994, p. 10). Such statements imply judgments concerning what is good or bad, right or wrong.

In recent years, there has been a great proliferation of honors courses and programs, particularly at those state universities attempting to compete with top-notch private institutions for outstanding students. This paper argues that honors courses should provide majors and non-majors alike with the ability to evaluate policies through the integration of their own values and philosophy of life. The ability to draw policy conclusions consistent with students’ life perspectives should be an invaluable prerequisite to obtaining leadership positions in a democratic society. Students with this skill will be able to function as informed citizens and voters. To accomplish this goal, students must be exposed to positive economic theory as well as moral philosophy. Positive economics involves values concerning how things ought to be, while moral philosophy requires an understanding of the

linkages between espousing particular normative positions and the theoretical underpinnings on which those viewpoints are based. Such an approach will enable students to see the relationships between their view of the world and the creation of consistent policies. Only a student whose philosophical position is based on truth can be expected to produce sound policy.

### **Course Goals and Objectives**

The course is offered to sophomores who are part of the University’s Honors Program. The class enrollment is limited to 20 students per term. The small class size allows significant opportunity for student writing and oral class presentations.

The initial goal of the course is to provide an understanding and appreciation for three worldviews which are dominant in Western culture today: secular humanism, Marxism/Leninism, and biblical Christianity. It is certainly true that a significant number of evangelicals adhere to socialism, while some atheists favor capitalism. However, in general, biblical Christians favor a capitalistic system, while secular humanists tend to find a socialistic system to be most compatible with their worldview.

Marxists see the Communist economic system as the key to bringing about their utopian world. Students are not expected to agree with every aspect of one of the philosophies being examined; however, upon completion of the first segment of the course, students are expected to select, define, and explain the elements of a worldview that they find most convincing from their perspective.

A second goal of the course is to illustrate the linkage between one’s view of the world and the development of economic policy through use of classroom debates. The professor assigns students a specific worldview that they must assume while debating an economic issue. They are required to utilize economic theory in developing and articulating a position consistent with their required philosophical view. In this way, students gain an appreciation for other viewpoints and can see how their view of the world alters their economic policy prescriptions.

Finally, course participants are required to research policy alternatives relative to an economic issue and to write well-documented position papers. Students are free to choose their own topic, upon consultation with

the professor, and are expected to advocate policy alternatives consistent with their own philosophy. Differences in values between students and the instructor are quite common due to varying philosophical/economic/political viewpoints. Therefore, papers are evaluated primarily upon the extent to which the authors' policy conclusions are consistent with economic theory and their chosen philosophy.

#### **Methodology and Resources**

The goals outlined above are not effectively delivered via the traditional textbook/lecture notes/exam mode. To be effective, this course requires both the instructor and students to be active and creative learners.

Some of the readings and text materials for such a course can now be obtained at little or no cost by accessing them on the Internet. These materials can be supplemented with small macro or microeconomic issues or readings books, many of which encompass conservative, liberal, and radical views of these economic issues. Internet materials that can be particularly helpful include "Humanist Manifestos I and II" from the American Humanist Association

and "The Manifesto of the Communist Party" by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. To provide some insight into the biblical worldview, *The Christian Manifesto* by Francis Schaeffer is available from Crossway Books. Issues/readings books that have been helpful include: *Leading Economic Controversies of 1997*, edited by Edwin Mansfield (1997, New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company); *Economics of Social Issues*, by Ansel Sharp, Charles Register, and Paul Grimes, Thirteenth Edition (1998, Boston, MA: Irwin McGraw Hill); and *Economic Issues Today: Alternative Approaches*, by Robert B. Carson (out of print, 1991, New York, NY: St. Martins Press).

Students are required to read each of the three manifestos prior to class. The professor uses the active voice while providing an outline of the key elements of the perspective being studied that day. Issues discussed under each philosophy include the nature of God, the nature of man/woman, the role of history, and the meaning of life. Class discussion is a key component in the process of understanding each worldview. The professor addresses questions by assuming the position of a proponent of that particular view.

Following the presentation of all three views, a subjective essay exam is given to ascertain student understanding of each of the views, and students are asked to explain in detail the view they find most compelling.

Upon completing the study of the three worldviews, debates are organized around three or four current economic issues chosen by the instructor. Each worldview is represented by a group of two or three students. Prior to the debates, reading material from each of the three perspectives is provided to students and is supplemented by course lectures outlining the basic elements of each view on a given issue.

The debates themselves are structured by allowing timed opening arguments, rebuttal, and closing statements in turn from each group. Following the debate, the floor is opened to comments or questions from the other members of the class.

The instructor evaluates the groups' performance based on the consistency of their arguments with economic theory and the philosophical perspective assigned to the team. A helpful resource in organizing the debates and choosing debate topics is *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on*

*Controversial Economic Issues*, by Thomas R. Swartz and Frank J. Bonello, Ninth Edition (2000, Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw Hill).

The third segment of the course involves writing an economic policy paper on a subject chosen by the students. By midterm, students submit a paper topic and indicate the perspective they are going to use to analyze that topic. (A detailed outline of the structure of the

***This course requires both the instructor and students to be active and creative learners.***

paper is stated as part of the course syllabus.) Required elements are an executive summary, an introduction to the issue, a literature search, the policy options considered, the recommended policy choice, the worldview basis for the policy, and the economic implications of pursuing that policy. Students are required to submit a draft to the instructor about three weeks prior to the end of the semester. Along with the draft, students must provide their own brief evaluation of the current strengths and weaknesses of the papers as they perceive them. The instructor

uses a checklist to summarize strengths and weaknesses and provides written comments concerning directions for further development and improvement. Final papers are due on the last day of class, and students present their papers orally to the class. The papers are graded based upon their clarity and presentation, as well as consistency with economic theory and the perspective they assume.

### **Issue Illustration**

One important aspect of each of the three worldviews concerns the attitude that a proponent is likely to have toward the distribution of income. In the first section of the course, it was explained that the Marxist believes that all persons should “produce according to their abilities, and receive according to their needs.” Such a philosophy theoretically requires income to be distributed rather evenly based on similarity of needs rather than productivity. The Marxist does not expect this to happen through private ownership of resources, since the bourgeois (resource owner/managers) are expected to exploit the proletariat (workers) by paying them as little as possible. In the short-run, this goal of equal income distribution

may require coercion by government or outright revolt by the masses. In the long run, when communism arrives, no government will be needed and the perfect economic system will produce citizens who produce in order to share with others voluntarily.

The socialist recognizes that differences in abilities and motivation exist among workers, and therefore the motto should be “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their work.” Those who espouse this view see a major continuing role for government in redistributing the spoils of work, while retaining some economic incentives to encourage productivity.

The capitalist, on the other hand, believes income is dependent upon worker productivity. Since people are inherently motivated by self-interest, inequity in the distribution of abilities and motivation should be expected to produce differences in income levels. Income redistribution should be voluntary and should be done in a way that encourages others to be more productive and independent, rather than creating a dependency on others.

The issue of income distribution and the use of a minimum wage law as a means of impacting that distribution was the subject of one of the classroom debates. The three perspectives summarized above were used during the debate. The classical or biblical Christian perspective argued that government should play little role in the process of income redistribution, as workers should be paid based on the value of what they produce. Those workers should also be free to choose where and for what wage they desire to work. Job training and education would be appropriate roles for government in striving to increase worker productivity. This viewpoint does not advocate a goal of income equality, but rather equality of opportunity.

The communist, at the other extreme, sees workers as the source of wealth generation and believes those workers are exploited by property owners. Therefore, minimum wage laws would protect workers by providing a minimum level of subsistence wage. However, persons holding this perspective view minimum wages and even income itself as short-run phenomena. Ultimately, no wages

will be paid because the perfect communist system will produce workers who need no economic incentive in order to be productive. Goods will be produced in order to share with those in need, rather than for one’s own benefit.

The socialist believes that individuals will have to be rewarded personally in order for the economy to be productive. However, better economies are those in which fewer and fewer resources are privately held and an increasing number of decisions are made collectively. The result is increased dependence on government for decision-making. Income redistribution and the minimum wage laws are simply steps in the right direction. The several essays on minimum wages and economic dependency in Chapters 5-8 of Mansfield’s text were particularly helpful in supporting these positions.

One student extended these concepts by writing her position paper on government regulation of the tobacco industry. She claims this industry has been under increasing political pressure in recent years due to concerns about the potential for lung cancer, health concerns from secondhand smoke, and the joint desire to penalize the big tobacco

companies, while at the same time helping to support the incomes of farmers. How can these goals be reconciled simultaneously? The “best” policies to pursue in this situation are dependent upon one’s worldview.

The Marxist would see tobacco companies as property owners (bourgeois) whose goal is to exploit their workers (proletariat). Therefore, any reason to penalize the company would be justified. The socialist desires to increase government’s role in the economy so that income redistribution and increased dependency of individuals on government would result. The capitalist, on the other hand, would be concerned about the freedom of individuals or companies to consume or produce a product of their choosing. Consumer sovereignty would determine product price and the level of income for producers. The market structure in which a firm operates, as well as the presence of externalities in the consumption of the good in question, are legitimate reasons for government intervention in the market.

Lawsuits against the tobacco companies and even efforts to shut down or nationalize the

companies would be acceptable goals for the socialist. Such policies would increase public sector control over resources and would provide opportunities for income redistribution in “acceptable directions.” Price supports and quotas for farmers would also be favored because these policies would benefit farmers by boosting their incomes and increasing their dependence upon government, while simultaneously providing crop surpluses that could be used by government to garner favor or increased exports to other countries (Houchins, 1997).

### Conclusions

Organizing and teaching a course similar to that described in this paper is a labor-intensive process, requiring a significant investment of time, energy, and creativity by the course instructor and his/her students. However, the benefits far exceed the costs. Perhaps most important, this approach alters the way in which teaching and learning take place. Students cannot perform well in this course by memorizing concepts or economic theory which they recite for an examination. Rather, students are forced to wrestle with such issues

as the meaning of life and the purpose of existence, and they must adopt a particular perspective as their own. This type of thinking has long been part of the historic mission statement of universities. This method of instruction allows students to become aware that the selection of an “optimum” economic system is largely dependent upon one’s moral and political philosophy rather than stemming exclusively from the application of positive economic theory. Finally, a course taught in this way forces students to evaluate policy alternatives and to determine why particular choices are or are not acceptable to them. In the process of espousing an economic policy in their papers, students come to understand the relationship between their view of the world and their perspective on economics.

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**JBIB**

# The Christian Business Scholar and the Great Commission: A Proposal for Expanding the Agenda

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*According to Rundle, missionary work has evolved from a donor-supported work to workplace evangelism. Rundle presents a number of implications of this change and suggests some topics for further research and discussion.*

## Abstract

There has been a dramatic change over the last two decades regarding how missionary work is conducted and supported.

The emphasis has shifted away from the career, donor-supported missionary toward workplace evangelism, particularly in areas of the world that are closed to traditional missionaries.

The implications of this paradigm shift and the needs and opportunities that it creates have been the topic of much discussion within mission circles. This shift is also creating significant new opportunities for the Christian business scholar. These include new areas for research, possibilities for new degree and certificate programs, and new opportunities for business-related field support. The purpose of this paper is to raise the profile of this

topic and to suggest some directions for future research and discussion.

## Introduction

Often the term “tentmaker” or “kingdom professional” is used to describe the mission strategy that uses business and other professional skills as a vehicle for cross-cultural evangelism. However, precisely what it means to be a tentmaker is a subject of ongoing debate.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many people believe that *all* Christian professionals are tentmakers. Within mission circles, and for this paper, the term is defined more narrowly. Following the model of the Apostle Paul, a tentmaker (1) works in a cross-cultural context, and (2) deliberately *chooses* this people group or location because it has been historically unreached

by the Gospel. Like Paul, these Christians could have worked anywhere, certainly in a friendlier and more comfortable environment. But they *choose* to go into an uncomfortable and often unfriendly environment in obedience to God’s will for their lives. It is the combination of this intentionality and the cross-cultural aspect that distinguishes a tentmaker from other Christian professionals.

Until recently, many mission agencies have treated tentmaking mainly as an “entry strategy,” that is, as a way of getting missionaries into restricted-access countries. The people they send are often ambivalent about their “secular” job and view it as a distraction from ministry. Oddly, this ambivalence is one of the main reasons many of them choose business entrepreneurship as their mode of entry. In their view, entrepreneurship is an ideal entry strategy because it gives the most freedom to choose between work and “ministry.”<sup>2</sup> Predictably, many of these businesses perform poorly, if at all.

The incentive to take their business seriously is further undermined by the fact that they are often fully supported financially by individuals and churches. According to Lai (1998,

p. 42), the benefit of such financial support is that it “reduce[s] the actual number of hours they [the tentmakers] need to work.” More defensible reasons also given for donor support is that it establishes a system of accountability and/or it protects the tentmakers and their families in the event they get expelled from their host country. Regardless of the actual motivation for donor support, the pernicious effect on the level of importance placed on the business is the same.

When this “work vs. ministry” mind-set is present, it gives rise to what Gibson (1997) calls “ministry schizophrenia,” in which the tentmakers find themselves struggling with their own identity and integrity, ultimately jeopardizing the credibility of the very Gospel they are trying to present. Ruth Siemens, founder of Global Opportunities, is even more critical, claiming that “phantom businesses sooner or later bring shame to the name of Christ” (Siemens, 1997, p. 5).

Overcoming the work vs. ministry mind-set is an area that is being addressed by many scholars and organizations.<sup>3</sup> Yet, even those with an integrated view of work and ministry can

falter as a tentmaker. The truth is, living and working in these “emerging” economies is a difficult challenge for any entrepreneur, Christian or non-Christian. Aside from the language difficulties, the customs are strange, the bureaucracy is confusing, and the communication and transportation infrastructures are often unreliable.<sup>4</sup> Peng and Heath (1996, p. 493) observe that “[d]espite the attractiveness of these newly opened markets, stories of business failures resulting from lack of understanding of local firms abound; increased interactions with indigenous firms in these countries are frequently accompanied by frustration and failures.”

Whether it is caused by ministry schizophrenia or the difficulties associated with entrepreneurship in these remote and unstable parts of the world, tentmaker attrition is a problem that is getting more attention. Although the magnitude of this problem is difficult to quantify, a recent study by the World Evangelical Fellowship (Taylor, 1997a) finds that in the case of missionary attrition overall, an astounding 47 percent leave the field during their first five years.

The overwhelming majority of these (71 percent) leave for preventable reasons.<sup>5</sup> Although the study does not distinguish between tentmakers and traditional missionaries, and therefore does not inform us as to whether the problem is more or less severe for tentmakers, it nevertheless gives a first approximation of the magnitude of the problem.

In response, the mission community has been giving more attention to the need for better training. For example, at the annual meetings of Intent (May 21-23, 1999), Tentmakers International Exchange (March 21-26, 1999), and the Antioch Network (September 28-30, 1998), a significant amount of time was devoted to the topic of improving the track record of tentmaking entrepreneurs. Clearly, the Christian business scholar has an important contribution to make in this area. However, proper training is only one of three major contributions the business scholar can make toward a well-functioning mission infrastructure. The other two contributions, which are rarely discussed but may be equally as important, are business-related field support and research.

Our perspective as business scholars is particularly valuable because the problems being encountered by tentmaking entrepreneurs are strikingly similar to those being identified in the International Business (IB) literature. Lessons learned in the mission field may be worth sharing with an IB audience, and lessons learned in IB may be useful to the mission community. Thus we have an even greater opportunity to participate in the Great Commission and to engage in cross-disciplinary scholarship.

Following a brief description of the origins of the modern tentmaker movement, this paper will elaborate on the additional contributions that can be made in the areas of training, field support, and research. The examples used throughout the paper are based on my own firsthand information which was gathered either from personal visits of tentmakers in the field or by corresponding with them by e-mail. For the sake of their own privacy and safety, the names and details are altered.

### **The Origins of the Modern Tentmaking Movement**

Prior to the Industrial Revolution and the Colonial Period, the Gospel was spread

primarily by “ordinary” Christians, often as an unintended consequence of military overthrow (Winter, 1999) or through friendships developed between merchants, soldiers, or refugees (Cox, 1997). However, the dramatic increase in wealth and income that resulted from industrialization made it possible (and even efficient) to create a professional class of missionary that was supported financially by the donations of these same “ordinary” Christians. This model of a donor-supported, professional missionary has since become entrenched in the mind-set of the evangelical church.

The rejection of capitalism that followed the Colonial Period also led to the banishment of the donor-supported missionary in many countries. Switching to a strategy based on workplace evangelism was scarcely an option because most of these countries severely restricted foreign residency, travel, and ownership of capital. These countries essentially became closed to the Gospel, which set the stage for strategies based on Bible smuggling and other almost James Bond-like activities.

The subsequent fall of the Iron Curtain has dramatically changed the mission landscape

once again. These countries are now experimenting with their own forms of capitalism and are trying to attract the very entrepreneurship and capital that they repudiated in the past. However, they remain suspicious of the West and, in particular, of its religion.<sup>6</sup> Many of these countries profess to tolerate other religions, but what this usually means is that it is lawful to *be* a Christian, but not to try to convert others or to say anything negative about the country's dominant religion. This obviously rules out the professional missionary, but leaves open many opportunities for tentmaking.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, it is now easier than ever before to get tentmakers into these so-called restricted access countries. Helping them *stay* long enough to become effective, however, has proven to be far more difficult. Statements regarding the troublesome problem of tentmaker ineffectiveness and attrition can be found in many places, such as Gibson (1997), Hamilton (1987), and Christensen (1997). However, a comprehensive empirical study of the problem would be difficult

to carry out because of the difficulty of identifying and locating tentmakers who are not affiliated with any agency.<sup>8</sup>

The best empirical information available regarding tentmaker effectiveness and attrition can be found in Hamilton (1987) and Taylor (1997b), respectively. In his classic study of tentmaker effectiveness,

***It is not enough to simply focus on cross-cultural ministry skills.***

Hamilton (1987) finds that effectiveness depends on (1) prior experience in leading small group Bible studies, (2) an ability to cross cultural boundaries and to share one's faith in a culturally relevant way, and (3) a strong relationship with one's home church. Similarly, within a broader study of overall missionary attrition, Taylor (1997b) briefly comments specifically about tentmaker attrition, identifying (1) unrealistic expectations, (2) cultural adjustment problems, and (3) lack of accountability as important factors in tentmaker attrition.

Regarding the missionary force as a whole, Brierley (1997) found that American missionaries have a greater propensity to leave

for "preventable" reasons than do missionaries from other countries. From most to least important, these reasons include

- (1) problems with peers,
- (2) marriage and family conflicts,
- (3) poor cultural adaptation,
- (4) inadequate supervision,
- (5) inappropriate training, and
- (6) language problems.

By comparison, missionary attrition from other countries is more likely due to unpreventable reasons, such as (1) political crisis, (2) marriage to someone outside the agency, (3) care for elderly parents, (4) health problems, (5) children issues, and (6) death.

The mission community has placed most of the blame on inadequate training in Bible, theology, and cross-cultural evangelism. However, succeeding in these foreign markets is a difficult challenge even for non-Christians. Perhaps equally as important is the need for a more coordinated support system for tentmaking entrepreneurs while they are in the field. When a business struggles, the family and the ministry itself will often struggle as well. Therefore it is not enough to simply focus on cross-cultural ministry skills. Nor will new training programs address these problems entirely.

Long-term success in these markets will also require new directions in our research and new types of field support projects for our business faculty and students.

### **Training**

One of the pitfalls of earning a business degree from a Western university or college is that the education received is based almost exclusively on our own Western experience and orientation. Although this may be appropriate for the average student who plans to follow a "traditional" career path in a Western, capitalist economy, it is inadequate for the student who desires to work in a non-Western context. Western-style business practices do not transfer well into these emerging market economies. These countries are immensely different institutionally and until recently have been hostile to the idea of profits and free-market economics.<sup>9</sup> The tentmaker must therefore be able to manage and motivate people who have different attitudes about work, relationships, self-initiative, and customer service.

One response has been to create training programs which address the need for more

practical training in cross-cultural ministry. An example of this type of program is the innovative two-month cultural immersion program of the Los Angeles Missionary Internship (626-797-7903).

What the studies by Hamilton and Taylor do not reveal, however, is the relationship between a tentmaker's effectiveness or attrition and the type of business-related problems being encountered. Many problems may have relationship symptoms, but have causes that are more closely related to a struggling business or a successful but over-extended entrepreneur. The fact that even non-Christian entrepreneurs are struggling and failing in these remote and unstable regions suggests that a solution will require more than cultural and Bible training alone.

Some business-related training programs are beginning to emerge. For example, the business and ministry seminars offered through Marketplace Ministries ([www.scruples.org](http://www.scruples.org)) promise to provide students with the tools for business and mission, all within the context of an integrated view of work and ministry, and all in a few short days! While short-term training

programs such as these may be necessary for those who are preparing to leave in the near future, it can hardly be viewed as adequate training for the long haul. According to Christensen (1997, p. 134) "too often ... we throw in a couple weekend courses, pack a correspondence course in their bag, and wave their plane good-bye." Instead, the mission community needs to recognize that tentmakers "need training that is just as well-planned, just as balanced, and in many cases, *just as extensive*" as that expected of those preparing for a more traditional career in missions (Ibid, emphasis added).

For Christians interested in relief and development, several well-respected programs are available. For example, Wheaton's HNGR program (Human Needs and Global Resources) and the economic development programs at Eastern College nicely combine culture- and business-related courses. However, relief work limits the location choices and usually requires specific training in agriculture, medicine, or education. Entrepreneurship opens up many more opportunities for tentmaking. When done well, a business can give Christians access to people

who are often unreachable by other mission platforms.

Even if we disregard tentmaking, there are at least two reasons why the timing is right for more training in cross-cultural entrepreneurship. First, many of these markets are poised for economic growth in the near or medium term and are attractive investment opportunities in their own right. Second, the production process is becoming increasingly global and "disintegrated." More than ever before, the stages of production are being carried out in multiple countries, and much of it is being done by firms that are only loosely affiliated with the U.S. parent. Our current supply of corporate managers has little training or experience with doing business in these markets. Therefore, even on the basis of keeping up with the needs being created by globalization, a cross-cultural entrepreneurship program makes sense.

What would such training look like? The answer obviously depends on whether it is a graduate, undergraduate, or certificate program. Nevertheless, some basic cultural and business courses should be the foundation of any curriculum. Many of these courses are already offered on the Christian campus and need only

to be packaged in a way that is attractive to the tentmaking entrepreneur.

Based on the findings of Hamilton (1987) and Taylor (1997b), as well as the studies by Drogendijk (1998) and Suutari and Riusala (1998), we know that there should be significant coursework in cross-cultural ministry. For example, courses such as evangelism and discipleship, world religions, cross-cultural ministry, cross-cultural communication, and church planting models and strategies would be good candidates. Likewise, business training for the tentmaking entrepreneur would have a distinctly Third World or global orientation. Such a curriculum should include courses such as global entrepreneurship, global marketing, and courses covering the economic, political, and legal environment of the Third World, as well as some of its history. In addition, a course in organizational and/or personnel psychology should be included to expose the student to problems related to group dynamics, human resource management, and so on.

### **Field Support**

Clearly many problems encountered by tentmakers can be

blamed on inadequate training. However, poor planning or inadequate training is not the entire source of the problem. Indeed, mission agencies deserve much credit for their ability to evaluate tentmaker candidates and ensure that they have the appropriate experience and training. Nevertheless, circumstances almost certainly will change once the tentmaker is in the field, and when this occurs, particularly when it involves an unexpected business-related problem, the agencies are poorly equipped to respond.

Tentmakers need the same sort of counsel and resources that any business owner requires, but they live in parts of the world where these resources are particularly scarce. Sometimes the assistance required is as basic as answering a question about how to use a spreadsheet program or how to determine the value of a business and buy out a partner. It is often possible to find this kind of assistance locally, but because of the sensitive nature of their residence in the country, they often prefer, and sometimes require, the advice of a mission-minded Christian.

An example of a one-time project that would accommodate both faculty and students is a

tentmaker couple I recently met whom I will call Priscilla and Aquila. This energetic and college-educated couple is planning to open a small-scale eating establishment in the Middle East. They know that if the business locates in the tourist district, it stands a good chance of becoming profitable. But they feel called to live and work among a people group that lives off the beaten path. If they locate in this alternative location, it is almost guaranteed that the business will never become profitable. Helping them solve or mitigate this problem would be a fascinating project for both faculty and students.

Other problems require longer-term relationships between faculty, students, and tentmakers. For example, Simon owns and operates a small export company in Asia. In order to maintain legal status in the country, he must meet minimum revenue and profit targets. Achieving these targets would not be particularly difficult, were it not for the fact that he is a music teacher by trade and has no business background. He was evaluated by his sending agency and granted a visa by the country based on his credentials as a music teacher. But to remain in the country, it eventually

became necessary to obtain a business visa. Simon has been struggling ever since, both on the professional and personal levels. Recently his visa status was rescued with the help of concerned friends and prayer partners from his home church, as well as a significant investment by a mission-minded angel investor. This investor is

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quite concerned, however, about the viability of the current business plan, and exploratory steps are now being taken about a possible collaboration with the business faculty and students of Biola University to develop and implement a new business plan.

Similarly, Matthew went to great lengths to prepare himself for a career as a tentmaker. In addition to Bible training and experience with cross-cultural evangelism and discipleship, he earned a master's degree in an up-and-coming technical area that many developing countries are demanding. To his great disappointment, however, he has not been able to gain employment in this field and has instead obtained permission to stay as an

entrepreneur. He is beginning to have an impact for Christ among his neighbors, but his business has yet to record a single transaction, leaving the duration of his ministry in question.

As the examples of Simon and Matthew show, despite the best planning, circumstances can,

and usually do, change once the tentmaker is in the field.

While

agencies excel in evaluating their candidates' spiritual qualifications and progress, they fall short when it comes to providing even basic evaluation or advice in the area of professional qualifications, business strategies, and economics. To supplement this weakness, they rely on a network of mission-minded business professionals who are willing to serve as advisors and investors.

Oddly, the full range of resources available at Christian colleges and universities often goes untapped. We have allowed our role to be narrowly defined as one in which we simply provide the initial training, whereupon churches and agencies take over and provide the accountability structure and resources necessary

to support the tentmaker while in the field. While there is some truth to this, the difficulties being encountered in the field are an indication that something is wrong with that approach. The error is that our roles as consultant and scholar are often overlooked.

### **Great Commission-Driven Research**

Perhaps the most unique, and therefore valuable, contribution the Christian business scholar can make is in the area of research. The kingdom orientation of tentmaking businesses creates some unique and interesting problems that are not addressed in the business or mission literatures. Although there are practitioners such as the Business Professionals Network ([www.bpn.org](http://www.bpn.org)) who can, and do, fill the gap in the areas of training and field support, practitioners are much less likely than we are to assimilate or produce research regarding how firms and employees behave in these countries and how the tentmaker can simultaneously increase their effectiveness as an evangelist and as a business professional.

Specifically, what are the financial and management issues that arise when profit is

dismissed as a secondary issue? For example, in the above mentioned case of Priscilla and Aquila, I first met them while they were in the process of trying to raise start-up capital. In a case like this, when they are almost assured to lose money, what can be done to ameliorate the obvious concerns investors will have?

Or consider the following hypothetical problem. Suppose a tentmaking entrepreneur starts a business within an unreached people group and begins to see meaningful relationships established because of the business. As expected with any start-up, it may take several years before the business becomes profitable. But suppose this period of time continues longer than expected? Hypothetically, suppose after ten years the business continues to require a cash infusion of \$50,000 per year, but over this period five Muslims have made commitments for Christ? How should the investors, contributors, or church respond? Should the tentmaker/manager be replaced? Does it reflect a flawed business plan? Or should the church simply sit tight and rejoice that the cost per soul is averaging a mere \$100,000?

Some of the people I pose this question to are offended that I

would even think about world evangelism in these terms. Yet, one of the commonly-touted advantages of tentmaking is that it is a cheaper means of world evangelism because it is at least partly self-supporting. Yet, if a significant number of these businesses are money-losers, and we must therefore support a family *and* a business, this claim is unsupported by the facts.

And why should profits be dismissed as secondary? What if we were to make it possible, even desirable, for the best and brightest Christian entrepreneurs to become successful tentmakers? One of the most interesting questions I ever ask tentmakers has to do with their views on the subject of profits. Many seem embarrassed or even ashamed to admit that they have ever thought about it. The subject is often switched to "What would I do with profits?" I have learned from this experience that microenterprise development is apparently one of the few respectable uses of profits, should someone ever be so blessed. One tentmaker admitted that if he ever started to earn profit, he would never volunteer that information to his home church for fear that his financial support would drop!

The mission community, which obviously has not been involved in the debate about the compatibility of Christianity and capitalism, needs to be taught a biblical view of business, profit, and wealth.<sup>10</sup> Assuming that this may take some time to accomplish, we need to also be available to counsel them about the management and financial issues raised when profits are viewed as unimportant. A theory of tentmaking entrepreneurship would resemble in many ways the theory of nonprofit corporations, but since the tentmaker is presumably also trying to make a profit, a new twist is added to the problem that has not been carefully explored.

Lastly, one important element for good scholarship is a venue for discussing it. Many of these topics would be well beyond the scope of most mission journals, although the *Evangelical Mission Quarterly* could accommodate some of it. Nor will the topics always be appropriate for secular journals which focus on emerging market economies. For a truly integrative and multidisciplinary discussion about the economic, social, and political problems unique to world evangelism, it might be worth creating a multidisciplinary association of

Christian scholars and even a multidisciplinary journal dedicated to this purpose.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

The end of Colonialism, combined with the recent collapse of the Soviet empire and remarkable advances in technology, have dramatically transformed the global economic landscape. More than ever before, firms are interacting with people from other parts of the world, people who often have enormously different attitudes about work, the value of time, and the importance of customer service. These differences are creating significant challenges for business programs across the country regarding how to prepare the next generation of business professionals.

For similar reasons the mission paradigm has also been changing dramatically, and Christians are using the new openness as a vehicle for evangelism. Perhaps more than any other tentmaking strategy, a for-profit business provides the most flexibility in terms of location, hiring, and time allocation decisions.

The disadvantage, however, is that their success in ministry is critically dependent on their

ability to develop a successful, or at least viable, business. Even those with business degrees can struggle because Western-style business practices do not transfer easily to these emerging markets.

I believe these problems are creating an opportunity for the Christian business scholar to play an even more vital role in the Great Commission. Moreover, this can be achieved by becoming even more deliberate about preparing students for success in an increasingly globalized and cross-cultural economic environment. The resources necessary to address both sets of concerns are located in one place—on the campuses of our Christian colleges and universities. By drawing from the disciplines that make the Christian university unique—theology and Bible training, cross-cultural communication, anthropology, missiology, and *business*—our graduates will not only be among the most well-rounded and effective professionals, but they will be at the forefront of the modern mission movement.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Clarke (1997), Gibson (1997), Price (1997), Siemens (1997), Taylor (1998), Wilson (1979), and Yamamori (1987, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>See Lai (1998), for example.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Chewning, Eby, and Roels (1990), Hamilton (1987), Novak (1996), Sherman and Hendricks (1987), and Volf (1991), as well as *The Life@Work Journal* (www.lifeatwork.com) and the Global Opportunities and Scruples Web sites (www.globalopps.org and www.scruples.org, respectively).

<sup>4</sup>A common complaint I heard from tentmakers during a recent trip to the Middle East was how long it takes to do even simple tasks, like buying a piece of office furniture or paying the monthly garbage tax.

<sup>5</sup>Preventable attrition is defined as that which “could have been avoided by better initial screening or selection in the first place, or by more appropriate equipping or training, or by more effective shepherding during missionary service” (p. xvii).

<sup>6</sup>Their image of Christianity is based largely on what they see in American-made movies and other forms of media. Their impression is that this is how all Christians behave. It is hardly surprising that they want no part of it. Hence the need for “ordinary” Christians to live and work among them.

<sup>7</sup>See Yamamori (1987) for a ranking of each country’s restrictiveness with respect toward overtly evangelical activities.

<sup>8</sup>According to Hamilton (1987), this could be 70 percent or more of all tentmakers. I suspect that the percentage of agency-affiliated tentmakers has increased since then, but confirming this would nonetheless be difficult or impossible to do.

<sup>9</sup>In a pair of studies of the problems being encountered by expatriate corporate managers in Central and Eastern Europe, Drogendijk (1998) and Suutari and Riusala (1998) find that expatriate managers tend to be over-optimistic, impatient, and have insufficient training in the areas of language, culture, and in the challenges associated with working in these countries. These are strikingly similar to the problems identified by Taylor (1997b) regarding tentmaker weaknesses.

<sup>10</sup>See Rundle (1999) and Swarr (1999) for two initial steps in this direction.

<sup>11</sup>According to my interpretation of the statement of purpose, the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* would not be able to accommodate much of this research.

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