

WHAT TO TEACH ABOUT WAL-MART

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Introduction

One hundred million people shop at Wal-Mart in the United States each week (Enright, 2006, p. 13), or around one-third of the American population. Yet, according to Zogby International (2005), the majority of Americans (fifty-six percent) think that “Wal-Mart is bad for America.” Given these numbers, it seems likely that many people who feel Wal-Mart is bad for America shop at Wal-Mart anyway. We believe many people, including Christians, simultaneously hold conflicting feelings or are uncertain as to what their attitude toward Wal-Mart should be. While the purpose of this paper is not to statistically summarize the feelings of Americans and Christians toward Wal-Mart, it is to offer Christians, especially students, a process, a framework, and a strategy for answering the question: “What to do about Wal-Mart?” To satisfy this purpose, we will first discuss what we perceive to be attitudes toward Wal-Mart among Christians. Second, we will discuss what to teach about Wal-Mart, which involves helping students to develop a

process, a framework, and a strategy to answer questions of this nature. In essence, we want to teach students how to approach the important economic issues of the day.

Apparent Ambivalent and Ambiguous Attitudes Toward Wal-Mart

We believe that many Christians hold conflicting feelings or are uncertain regarding what their attitude toward Wal-Mart should be. From informal observation, we sense there are at least six different reactions that Christians have to Wal-Mart. These include:

- Active embrace of Wal-Mart. Christians in this group welcome Wal-Mart because it gives them what they want: low prices. Because Wal-Mart helps them conserve their funds, some Christians rationalize this decision by arguing that shopping at Wal-Mart is an exercise in stewardship of the money that the Lord has given them. For poor people especially, Wal-Mart allows them to make ends meet, something they might not be able to do otherwise.
- Active embrace of capitalism. For believers in this group the capitalistic system is the best way for countries to develop and to provide the goods that are necessary for humankind to flourish. Wal-Mart therefore should be appreciated for its ability to deliver goods efficiently and at very low costs. In this case the benefits again outweigh the costs, but both are seen solely within an economic context.
- Ambivalent embrace for Kingdom ends. These Christians shop at Wal-Mart despite some misgivings about their methods. They believe that the extra money they obtain by shopping and saving at Wal-Mart (compared to other shopping possibilities) can be used for “kingdom causes.” This argument is also heard from Christians when they choose jobs which provide higher salaries (but may have some questionable ethical issues involved), or when Christians invest in the stock market while giving priority to the financial returns of the firms whose stock they choose to purchase.
- Distrust of Wal-Mart. Christians in this fourth group have a general distrust of Wal-Mart based on reports that they have heard, and choose to avoid this store while still shopping at similar (and, ironically, “Wal-Mart wannabee”) stores such as Target and Kmart. In this case there is some notion that Wal-Mart is more ethically challenged than these other stores,

although this knowledge may be based solely on the fact that Wal-Mart is in the news more.

- Distrust of “big box” stores. A fifth group of Christians believe that Wal-Mart is an unethical company due to its size. Such a belief is based on the underlying assumption that small businesses can not become large enterprises without sacrificing some moral standards; they also prefer to keep their money “close to home.” These Christians attempt to live out their ethical convictions by shopping at small businesses wherever possible, and believe that this is a good way to support the community.
- Antipathy toward consumerism. Finally, some Christians actively oppose Wal-Mart because they see it as the embodiment and cause of consumerism and materialism, and respond by promoting “simple lifestyles.” They desire to reduce the consumption of goods wherever possible, while being good stewards of the resources that they possess. This type of behavior is often believed to be very beneficial to the environment and to the poor of the world because it consumes fewer resources.

Students seem to have a similarly ambivalent and/or ambiguous attitude toward Wal-Mart. Of those whom we polled:

- 18% say, “I shop at Wal-Mart and have no misgivings about doing so because Wal-Mart saves me money and allows me to be a good steward of my resources.”
- 41% say, “I shop at Wal-Mart and have some misgivings about doing so. Yet I think the benefits of saving money outweigh the costs.”
- 41% say, “I don’t shop at Wal-Mart because of my misgivings, but shop at other stores such as Target, K-Mart, and Meijer instead.”
- 0% say, “I refuse to shop at any “big box” stores because of my misgivings about large companies.”
- 0% say, “I tend to avoid shopping altogether because of my misgivings about materialism and consumerism.”

A Process

Although all of these responses by Christians are understandable reactions to the ethical issues that emerge from the existence of large discount retailers such as Wal-Mart, it is difficult to know whether they are legitimate. For one thing, we don’t have perfect

information, so it is hard for us to know what is going on and what “cause” leads to which “effect.” But more significantly, we don’t seem to have developed a systematic framework or model for determining whether our attitudes toward Wal-Mart are proper. Any framework that we do develop and communicate to our students should be based on a biblical perspective.

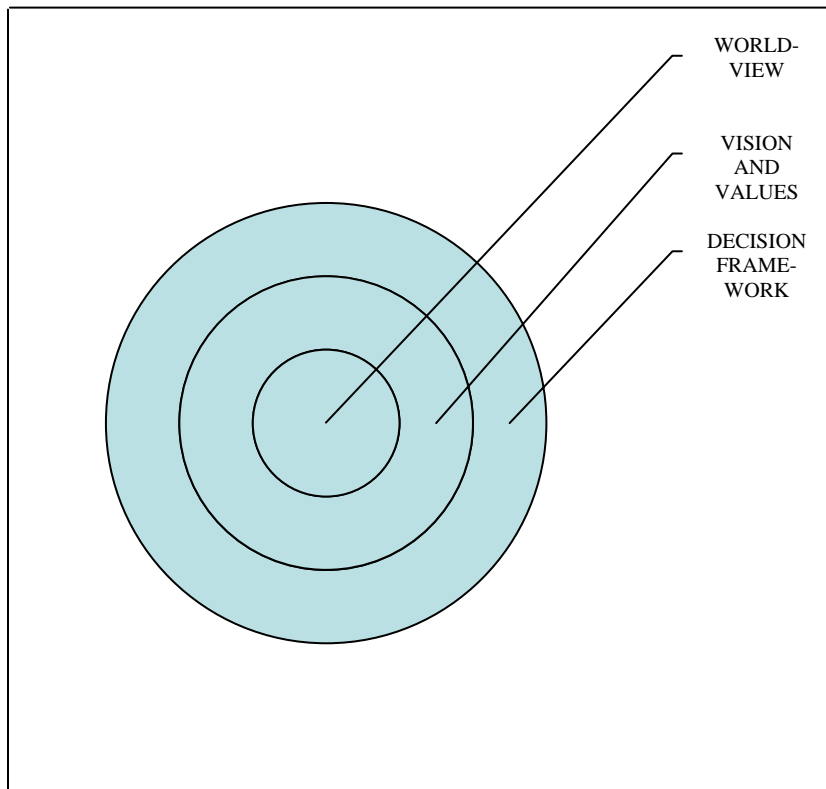
We explicitly and implicitly use models or frameworks to help us make decisions (see Figure 1). For example, when car shopping, we might go to *Consumer Reports* to not only explain to us what characteristics of cars are important to consider, but also to tell us how the various brands of cars rate and rank on these characteristics. If we don’t use such an explicit framework, we implicitly develop one. Once we know how a brand of car measures up, we develop an attitude toward that brand of car. Likewise, before we can determine whether we should have misgivings about shopping at Wal-Mart, we need a framework that helps us understand what characteristics of shopping at Wal-Mart are important to consider and how Wal-Mart rates and ranks on those characteristics. Currently, most of us probably use an implicit framework to guide our decisions, and we don’t think too much about Wal-Mart. However, given the complexity of this issue and our call to be good stewards of the resources that God has entrusted us with, it can be helpful to develop an explicit framework and discuss our framework with other Christians. This framework or model can also give us guidance in a variety of economic issues that we deal with on an everyday basis.

Figure 1: Decision Frameworks and Worldviews

DECISION FRAMEWORK FOR CARS

Characteristic	Weight	Rating of X
Acceleration	High	??

DECISION FRAMEWORK IN CONTEXT



Supporting decision-making frameworks are values, or ideals, that give weight to certain characteristics in proportion to their importance. Even the list of attributes, or

characteristics, used by *Consumer Reports* is not as innocuous as it first may seem. For instance, we may value the time it takes to accelerate from zero to sixty miles per hour because speed and quickness are ideals. Why speed and quickness are ideals may relate to vision. In other words, acceleration time from zero to sixty may be related to our vision of the perfect automobile. Maybe we imagine ourselves driving a car that pins us to the back of the seat when we step on the gas, or one that safely passes trucks on undivided two-lane highways.

Underlying this vision, whatever it is, is a set of beliefs. We may believe that driving a car must first of all be fun, or we may believe that keeping our family safe is of primary importance. On the other hand, we may think that caring for our environment is important, which would then change our vision from driving a “muscle car” to a hybrid. Our implicit beliefs about having fun, caring for the environment, and protecting our families may hinge on deeper, core beliefs about who we are and who God is and how we relate to God. This example may be a bit simplistic, but it does explain how vision and values are connected to beliefs. It also suggests that some beliefs – such as fossil fuel emissions harming the environment – are more verifiable than other beliefs – such as who we are and who God is.

We call these implicit and core sets of beliefs that influence our values and, eventually our behaviors, our “worldview.” At the base of our worldview are beliefs about who we are, what’s wrong with the world, and what we can do to fix it (Colson and Pearcey, 1999, p. xiii). For instance, we might believe that we were created in the image of God to have a relationship with him. As a result of sin we believe that we tend to do things that not only impede our relationship with God but also with other people and with

our ability to care for creation. The solution – our purpose – then is to make better, more informed choices that will, in effect, improve relations, such as choosing an automobile that keeps our family safe and limits harmful emissions. We may now envision ourselves driving past gas stations and holding limited fossil fuel consumption as an important ideal. Given this vision and ideal, we may have a different decision-making framework for making car-buying decisions – one that values miles per gallon and ranks brands on this attribute. Our worldview, then, influences our visions and values in such a way that it influences the framework we use to determine our attitude toward shopping at Wal-Mart. Our behavior relative to Wal-Mart, then, is an explicit manifestation of our implicit worldview.

To determine whether we have a proper attitude toward Wal-Mart, we could, then, utilize the following process.

- First, consider our worldview (the overall perspective of how we see and interpret the world); a worldview collects and integrates our beliefs about who we are, what’s wrong, and what the remedy is.
- Second, consider our vision (a mental image) and values (ideals) that concurrently give our lives purpose and direction.
- Third, develop a framework based on these values to help us evaluate phenomena such as shopping at Wal-Mart. This evaluation will influence our attitude toward Wal-Mart.

What to Teach About Worldviews

To begin, we need to help students understand that all people, including the students themselves, have faith and a worldview. Our faith is important because it is the cornerstone of our worldview. Worldviews are important because they influence our vision and our values which, in turn, influence the frameworks we use to evaluate phenomena. How a phenomenon stacks up to our framework influences our attitude

toward that phenomenon. We can also enhance our integrity as Christians by making our worldviews more explicit and transparent to ourselves and others because by making them transparent we can test not only our values but also our evaluative frameworks, attitudes, and actions.

But students should also know that worldview beliefs – such as beliefs about who we are, what’s wrong, and what’s the remedy – are beliefs that we hold on faith – that is, without supporting evidence. It is not that our worldviews, values, and evaluative frameworks are irrational, it is that they are grounded in faith – which by definition involves what we hope for and what we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1).

For instance, Christians in the Reformed tradition believe that “the entire universe was created good by God in the beginning” and that humans were created in the image of God, capable of having a relationship with Him (Creation). However, because of humankind's sin, all creation now experiences the damaging effects of the fall (Fall). But with Christ's redeeming work, we can recover the good present in all aspects of creation (Redemption), while understanding that sin still leaves its mark (Redemption) (adapted from VanderLeest, Nyhoff, and Zylstra, 2005).

These ideas about creation, the fall, and redemption are core beliefs. As Christians we believe there is evidence for these beliefs, but the evidence requires faith. Is Jesus God? Christians say “Yes.” Jews and Muslims say “No.” Such knowledge is both terrifying and humbling. It is terrifying because people have an option whether to believe; it is humbling because it is by the grace of God that Christians make the choice to believe that Jesus is Lord. Can these beliefs or beliefs about beliefs be verified? The

point is that many foundational beliefs are not verifiable and can't be considered to be true (they can't be justified) unless one believes in the evidence. Believing is seeing.

The study of knowledge or a justification for knowledge claims is called *epistemology*. Reformed Christians base their knowledge claims on the sovereignty of God and hold that since God is the author of both Scripture and science, the accounts of creation given by the Bible and science can't contradict each other. Again, not all Christians hold this view. For instance, a recent bumper sticker seems to argue that only special revelation matters. It read: "God said it. I believe it. Period."

Yet, in a sense, the bumper sticker has it right. In the end, epistemology rests on faith. For instance, we believe that creation gives evidence of God. In fact, Reformed epistemologists affirm "that belief in God can be rational even in the absence of evidence for God's existence" (Philosophy of Religion.Info, 2006). In the end, then, what we need to teach students about worldviews is that they hinge on faith. We should never underestimate the importance or power of faith, nor should we assume that others have the same foundational beliefs as we do. We will probably better understand the worldviews, values, evaluative frameworks, and attitudes of others if we realize that they have different foundational beliefs.

What to Teach About Vision and Values

In addition to helping students understand they have faith and a worldview, they also must understand how this worldview is connected to particular visions and values. Furthermore, many Christians do not agree on what are the basic tenets of the faith, and because of this, may not share the same vision and values. On the other hand, sometimes

people share the same visions and values, but have different worldviews. A serious concern for the health of the environment, for instance, is shared by many (but not all) Christians as well as non-Christians. Part of the reason why Christians have different worldviews, visions, and values is that they don't share the same *hermeneutics*, or theories and methods of biblical interpretation: a "community's biblical hermeneutic goes hand in hand with its worldview" (Spykman, 1992, p. 532).

For example, many Christians do not believe there will be a radically new creation – a radical new heaven and earth – when Jesus comes again. Reformed Christians, for instance, believe that in the new creation all of creation will be "broken" much like a horse is broken – sin will be no more, and all of creation will bring glory to God (Mouw, 2002, p. 29). Other Christians believe that this world will be burnt up, and that nothing will remain of it. Our students need to understand the importance that biblical interpretation has in developing our responses to a variety of issues, and whether we see them as issues at all. Reformed Christians believe that the call of the Gospel begins in Genesis, when God commands us to "be fruitful," "subdue," and "rule" (Genesis 1:28) the garden and when God creates humans to "work" the garden and "take care" of it (Genesis 2:15). Normally, Reformed Christians use this passage to focus on the importance of work in vocation, or calling. But it is also important to focus on the importance of shopping in our vocation. Both involve fulfilling what is sometimes called the "cultural mandate" or our "cultural commission."

Given our Reformed understanding that the Bible's main themes revolve around creation, fall, and redemption, we therefore put special emphasis on the biblical vision of shalom. Many Reformed Christians believe that the vision of shalom not only describes

a future condition—the end of time when “justice and peace embrace” (Wolterstorff, 1983)—but also what we are to strive for now. According to the biblical vision of shalom, this includes goodness and delight in three inter-related sets of relationships. The first relationship we strive for is a right and harmonious relationship “to God and delight in his service.” The second relationship we strive for is a right and harmonious relationship “to other human beings and delight in human community.” The third relationship we strive for is a right and harmonious relationship “to nature and delight in our physical surroundings” (Wolterstorff, 1983, p. 70). Reformed Christians believe, then, that when God’s work of redemption is complete, shalom will be the norm. Out of a vision of shalom flows certain values, or ideals. If shalom is the way creation ought to be and will be, then what does that mean for our behavior today?

This vision of shalom has definite implications for the way Christians look at Wal-Mart. Does Wal-Mart need to be radically changed, as well as our economic system, or is there some good in it that can and should be recovered? Does Wal-Mart lead to harmonious relationships between God and humanity, between humans themselves, and between humans and the environment? This viewpoint will not be obvious for those Christians who open their Bibles and search for appropriate texts when thinking about whether to shop at Wal-Mart. Because the Bible doesn’t speak specifically about Wal-Mart or a market economy, finding the answer might be very difficult. This may explain why there seems to be much ambivalence and ambiguity surrounding whether or not to shop at Wal-Mart. On the other hand, if one follows a Reformed hermeneutic, one is looking at themes (creation, fall, redemption) and principles that exist in the Bible and apply for all time, from managing a business to

shopping in a store. This hermeneutic, then, flows from a particular worldview, or set of beliefs, and influences that particular worldview. It also influences visions and ideals (such as shalom and right relationships, respectively) which influence evaluative frameworks. In the following section we present an ethical evaluative framework based on our foundational beliefs and the biblical vision of shalom.

A Framework for Evaluating our Attitudes

Shalom describes not only a future condition—the end of time when “justice and peace embrace” (Wolterstorff, 1983), but also that which we strive for now. Shalom involves “right relationships” at three levels. As noted above, the first relationship we strive for is a right and harmonious relationship to God (Wolterstorff, 1983, p. 70). As the prophet Isaiah said: “In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains” (Isaiah 2:2 NIV), meaning that “shalom is perfected when humanity acknowledges that in its service of God is true delight” (Wolterstorff, 1983, p. 70). The second relationship we strive for is a right and harmonious relationship to other human beings (Wolterstorff, 1983, p. 70). As the Psalmist said: “Love and faithfulness meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10 NIV). The third relationship we strive for is a right and harmonious relationship to our environment (Wolterstorff, 1983, p. 70). As Isaiah prophesied, “My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest” (Isaiah 32:18 NIV).

Therefore, in terms of developing an evaluative framework as it applies to Wal-Mart, we could ask: How well does Wal-Mart promote shalom? We ask “how well”

because we know that no organization or person can perfectly promote shalom in our fallen world and that there will always be trade-offs. One way of dealing with this situation is to utilize a compensatory approach in which certain behaviors are weighed against others such that high ratings on some ideals compensate for low ratings on others. The cumulative answer to this question will help us determine what our attitude toward Wal-Mart should be.

In order to determine how well Wal-Mart promotes shalom, we might think about the following evaluative questions.

1. How well does Wal-Mart promote harmony between God and humans? How well does Wal-Mart promote idolatry or materialism versus holiness, or “single-minded devotion to God and absolute ethical purity” (Hill, 1997, p. 22)? How well does Wal-Mart promote the belief that we are to trust in God alone, submit to Him with all humility and patience, expect all good from him only, and love and fear and honor Him” wholeheartedly (Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 94)?
2. How well does Wal-Mart promote harmony among humans? How well does Wal-Mart promote holiness, justice, and love simultaneously among people (see Hill, 1997)?
 - a. Holiness such as purity in communication and integrity such as actually having the lowest prices.
 - b. Justice or the “rights and duties for those living in the context of community” (Hill, 1997, p. 34).
 - i. The right to be treated with dignity and the right to exercise free will” (Hill, 1997, p. 34) or in consistently doing the good things it says it does.
 - ii. Procedural rights such as due process and equal protection.
 - iii. Substantive rights such as the universal right to be told the truth, and the potential rights employees have to health insurance programs (Hill, 1994, p. 38).
 - iv. The right of merit such as being paid in accordance to the value employees bring the firm as opposed to discriminatory practices in hiring and compensating (and the right of Wal-Mart to make a profit).
 - v. Contractual justice such as respecting procedural justice, and fulfilling contractual promises (Hill, 1997, p. 42).
 - c. Love, or the practice of empathy, mercy, and self-sacrifice. In other words, when God says he loves us, this means he feels what we feel, he takes action on our behalf, and he gives us something we don’t

deserve by giving to us what he deserves (Hill, 1994, pp. 47-51). So how well does Wal-Mart empathize with its customers and employees, take action on their behalf, and make sacrifices for them? For example, how well does Wal-Mart promote the dignity of special needs people?

3. How well does Wal-Mart promote caring for creation? For example, how well does Wal-Mart preserve land opposed to contributing to suburban sprawl? How well does it promote clear water and air in terms of the products it sells and the incentives it gives suppliers? How well does Wal-Mart preserve or enhance the fabric of community? How well does it encourage proximity of businesses to neighborhoods such that sidewalks are used as much as roadways?

We aren't suggesting that shoppers not shop at Wal-Mart until it does everything perfectly; however, we are suggesting that shoppers consider how they as well as Wal-Mart align their attitudes and behaviors with the needs of society as described by the biblical ideal of shalom. Given this vision of shalom, it is clear that Wal-Mart has a long way to go, but so do most other retailers. How does Wal-Mart compare to other businesses?

How Wal-Mart compares to other retailers is a difficult question to answer, but with this framework we have some way to begin to weigh the activity of various retailers. It seems as if Wal-Mart may be overemphasizing obtaining profits for its owners based on offering low prices to consumers, while failing to meet a variety of other important responsibilities. To be fair, however, Wal-Mart has recently shown willingness to change some of its behavior. In a fallen world, one wonders if one can be as big as Wal-Mart and effectively pursue shalom. Currently it emphasizes low prices because that is the value that seems to please the vast majority of its customers. But should saving money be the highest ranking value for those who purchase goods? What role do consumers play in promoting shalom? Can a retailer emphasize price and promote shalom simultaneously?

A Covenantal Approach for Promoting Shalom

In order to promote shalom in the marketplace, students need to understand the interlocking relationships between four groups in our economy: consumers, businesses, investors, and employees. Wal-Mart, for instance, depends on consumers to buy their products. Wal-Mart also needs to have employees to produce and sell goods and services, as well as investors to finance the business. The decisions that Wal-Mart's managers make have significant implications on all of these groups, because all of these groups (including other businesses) operate interdependently. When one business, or even one employee or consumer, attempts to pursue shalom, this has implications for everyone involved.

For example, a Wal-Mart supplier may choose to spend more on a certain technology in order not to pass the costs of pollution onto the firm's neighbors. This can result in one or more of the following consequences: higher prices, lower profits, and lower wages and salaries. In fact, it may result in the supplier losing the Wal-Mart account. Further down the channel, Wal-Mart could attempt to make decisions more consistent with the vision of shalom everywhere it can, but if consumers will not buy products from it, Wal-Mart's efforts will be in vain. If employees will not work for Wal-Mart at lower wages (although most people feel employee wages at Wal-Mart are already too low), or if investors and suppliers will not accept lower monetary returns in exchange for higher levels of shalom, the competitive process that predominates in our marketplace will drive this company out of business.

In addition to the four groups mentioned above, the government also plays a major role in controlling the workings of the marketplace. While few of us are directly involved in government, we can vote for officials who will create an environment where shalom is possible. Currently in many cases, existing legislation and government institutions prevent businesses, workers, consumers and investors from making wise decisions. On the other hand, if politicians attempt to force companies such as Wal-Mart to provide better medical care, some shareholders may desire that Wal-Mart leave that state entirely.

In order to promote shalom in the marketplace, Christians need to recognize the seriousness of their roles as consumers, managers, investors, and employees as well as citizens. Businesses will not rise to the high expectation of advancing shalom without the efforts of all of these groups together. We believe that as Christians we need to develop covenantal relationships and commit to working with businesses that want to work in this direction. When people make covenants with each other, as opposed to contracts, they tend to go beyond what is normally required of them. In other words, people who make covenants are willing to make sacrifices in order to bring about a larger vision. While contracts can be made with people with diverse worldviews, covenants rest on “shared commitment to ideas, to values, to goals, and to management processes” (DePree, 1989, p. 60).

An Additional Evaluative Question for Promoting Shalom

It would be easy for us to accuse Wal-Mart of not promoting harmony between God and humans, between humans themselves, and between humans and God’s creation.

However, students need to know that in many ways, Wal-Mart and its practices are merely a response to our preferences as we express them in the marketplace. We, as consumers, are “sovereign,” and we search for the lowest prices on goods while rarely considering other aspects of the product (how it was made, its impact on the environment, etc.).

At the same time, we, as investors, often focus in on companies that generate the highest financial returns. As employees at various companies we also tend to emphasize our own self-interest. It is unreasonable for us to expect businesses to exercise good stewardship on their own if we care only about obtaining the greatest returns, the lowest prices, or the highest wages and fringe benefits. The simple answer to the question “What to do about Wal-Mart?” is to broaden our decision-making criteria to include more than shopping at the store with the lowest price. But this is a most difficult answer to implement, for it requires consumers, businesses, investors, and employees with the same overarching commitment to the biblical notion of shalom.

Suppose we decide to shop at the neighborhood store, where we know we will pay more for toothpaste than we would at Wal-Mart. The question is: “What is the benefit of paying the extra cost?” Perhaps that store owner just hired an at-risk youth so, at least initially, the owner is sacrificing some efficiency which leads to higher prices and/or lower profits. Unfortunately, the owner likely already paid more for that toothpaste because she buys in smaller quantities than Wal-Mart. Then we have to imagine what the surrounding neighborhood would look like without the store. If the owner charges extra high prices, we have to determine whether those extra dollars are lining the owner’s pockets or being reinvested back into the neighborhood. Likewise, we

need to think about other related businesses: what is the banker doing with the interest income that he earns from the mortgage on the building, and what is the manufacturer of the toothpaste doing with its profits, etc.? Obviously, the choice to expand our decision-making criteria beyond price makes shopping much more complicated, but if we have a vision for shalom, we must try. Therefore, a fourth evaluative question to ask if we desire to promote shalom might be **“How well does Wal-Mart promote covenantal relationships?”**

We believe that Wal-Mart, as well as many other large organizations, has chosen to conduct business using a more narrow “contractual” approach as opposed to one that promotes covenantal relationships. This approach emphasizes just one attribute of a product (the price) and attempts to deal with customers who are also primarily just concerned with the price of a good. Other aspects of economic activity that could be considered in the promotion of shalom are left to the side. In some sense, the values of Wal-Mart match that of its consumers. The customers’ vision of the perfect product is the product that gives them the most short-term value for their dollar; it does not consider what happens behind the scenes in the production and distribution of products or its long-term impacts on communities, workers, culture, or the environment.

Conclusion

We have indicated that many people, including Christians and our students, have misgivings about shopping at Wal-Mart. We believe the source of these misgivings is ambivalence and the ambiguous nature of the phenomenon of shopping at Wal-Mart. Given these apparent misgivings, we have offered a process and a framework for

answering the question: “What to do about Wal-Mart?” Our first priority is not to tell students what to think, but show them how to think so that they can deal with phenomena such as shopping at Wal-Mart. Our hope is that in learning how to think about how to pursue shalom, we can be more effective at being Kingdom builders.

We also hope to demonstrate to students that shopping should be more than fun-- it should be meaningful. First, shopping could be meaningful because it is an investment in time and energy: it takes time and energy to be a well-informed shopper and to develop a legitimate attitude toward a retailer such as Wal-Mart. Second, shopping could be meaningful because shopping, like an occupation, should be part of one’s vocation. Perhaps technology will help allow us to gather information in order to make better decisions about the products that we buy. But more important than information is the need for a covenantal community built around a shared vision of shalom. Absent these relationships and this vision, there is always Wal-Mart and the apparent misgivings, ambivalence, and ambiguity associated with shopping there.

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