

RESPONSE TO RICHARD CHEWNING ON AUGUSTINE AND AQUINAS

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I am not keen on taking the CBFA back to early theologians. Explorations of what they said might be useful for Christians wanting to study early systematic, Biblical commentary and historical theology. But I'm unconvinced that their theology could assist the CBFA in developing perspectives on modern business in relation to the Bible. Neither Augustine nor Aquinas practiced systematic analyses of Bible texts to arrive at their conclusions.

One of the strengths of the CBFA has been to undertake its analysis in relation to the Bible. If a methodology of using Augustine and Aquinas started to gain influence in the CBFA, contributors may then want to present papers relating to all manner of early (and current) theologians. Augustine and Aquinas are just the thin end of the wedge. If this were to happen, something will suffer, and it is likely to be the Bible. The main concern of the CBFA is how and whether the Bible can be interpreted to understand and help focus Christians on all manner of business issues. This requires the assistance of Biblical exegetes to interpret Biblical texts. But it does not require assistance from the likes of Augustine and Aquinas, or other past philosophical theologians. Nor does it require the assistance of contemporary theologians who, by and large, do not use the Bible as one of their resources, or discuss its content to formulate their positions.

In proposals to introduce BAM-type courses, there is no reason why these could not be based on the Bible. Consider two examples of how this could work. The fine papers presented in the last decade at CBFA Annual Conferences, and in the JBIB, on how the Bible regards competition could well constitute a unit of such a course. Since the concept of competition is so well-established in the business literature, there's plenty of meat here to discuss Christian and secular understandings of the term. An aim of such a course segment might be to see if finally the question could be resolved of whether compe-

tion conforms to normative Biblical teaching. Another example could be to do a similar thing for the concept of capitalism. Here, Richard Chewning's fine paper in the *JBIB* would serve as an important input. Numerous business and economic issues, in addition to capitalism and competition, still have to be assessed in relation to the Bible.

The best way of doing this, in my view, is to start with the Bible, and Dr. Chewning's valuable books on Biblical principles from the late 80s and early 90s. His books have not been equalled in subsequent discussion of Biblical principles, but they are in urgent need of updating (Beed & Beed, 2012). If this path were taken, there is more likelihood that greater consensus could emerge on the relation of normative Biblical principle to modern business. As things stand, Christians wanting to consider how Biblical principles relate to aspects of modern business have to turn back to the 1980s and 1990s. Few Christians have endeavoured to bring the earlier literature more up to date. Having to reach back over 20 to 30 years makes it difficult for Christians to relate contemporary business analysis to the Bible.

One of the aids to which CBFA participants need to turn, in my opinion, is to the interpretations of Biblical exegetes. Using proper exegesis reduces hermeneutical bias and simplicity in explaining texts, supplementing one's own interpretations, as proposed by Fee and Stuart (2003, p. 267). Since dozens of books exegeting each book of the Bible have come forth in the last 40 years, examining each one can help develop a common understanding of a text. Relying on one or two exegetes, or none, as often happens, will not necessarily yield the true comprehension of a text.

A first stage would be to look at sayings/actions of God and Jesus in both Testaments to interpret whether they are reliably directed to an all-encompassing guideline or principle. A second stage would be to evaluate

texts that might seem to controvert the normative precept discerned the first stage. Third, a selection of Biblical exegetes can be studied to see whether a consensus occurs in their interpretations. If this emerges, investigation could establish whether this agreement conforms to the “plain sense” reading of the texts in stage one. If the three stages produce consistent results, a reasonable deduction is that a normative Biblical principle thereby emerges. The common agreement helps to reduce the objection that Biblical scholars come to their analysis with differing theological backgrounds. Another feature about this methodology is that principle derivers/users need not bring in concepts from outside the Biblical texts. For example, the objection is sometimes made that liberation theologians have used Marxist concepts, like dependency theory, to strengthen their arguments. Derivers and users of principles users can establish their arguments explicitly on the Bible.

The matter of denominational distinctiveness need not be a major constraint in these sorts of exercises. As long as scholarly methods are used to interpret the Bible (such as the interpretations of Biblical exegetes), little mileage is gained by giving any attention to the particular denomination from which the analyst comes. Working from the Bible, with the aid of exegetical tools, helps mitigate denominational difference. “Theological distinctives” exist between all people, but play no part in a Christian’s salvation, as Chewning points out. Therefore, little is to be gained in relation to Biblical interpretation by ascertaining whether the analyst trends more toward Augustine than Aquinas, or vice versa; or to any other theologian, for that matter.

From the discussion above, the three reasons Chewning gives (p. 65) on why his comparison of Augustine

and Aquinas is necessary for CBFA members and the Business as Mission project does not strike me as compelling. Indeed, for the first 12 pages of the paper, no discussion occurs of the Bible or modern business. The largest section of the paper outlines Augustine and Aquinas’ theological perspectives, with some added theological material for the time after their eras (1650 to 1850).

All the discussion above might seem to have taken us a long way from Augustine and Aquinas. However, its purpose is to drive home my opinion of what I see as the necessary way forward for the CBFA. The view of theologians past and present are not to be regarded as a vital input to the enterprise of developing Business as Mission. This is mainly because they did not (and do not use modern techniques of Biblical exegesis, or necessarily call on the Bible at all. Richard Chewning’s eight theological questions can be derived without mentioning Augustine or Aquinas, but even they do not assist greatly in formulating Biblical principles. BAM can take from Dick’s eight questions, but more importantly in my view, it should be deriving its analytical apparatus from the Bible. The Faith at Work project does not seem to place much emphasis on Biblical exposition, if David Miller’s book, *God at Work* is any indication. More so does the Boston-based Theology of Work enterprise, at www.theologyofwork.org. These can serve as input to BAM, taking precedence over the writings of theologians.

REFERENCES

- Beed, C. & Beed, C.** (2012). “The Nature of Biblical Economic Principle, and Its Critics,” forthcoming *Faith & Economics*.
- Fee, G., & Stuart, D.** (2003). *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.