
IS BUSINESS AS MISSION (BAM) A FLAWED CONCEPT? A RESPONSE TO CHILDS

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I am appreciative of Childs' contribution to this dialogue on BAM, and I agree with his characterization of Rundle's context-setting article herein as providing a fine, overarching view of the BAM movement. I find Childs' writing to be clear and compelling, and his knowledge of the BAM literature to be quite admirable. Indeed, his engagement with the BAM movement and literature is arguably much closer than mine. Put simply, he is a BAM enthusiast in both an advocacy sense and a scholarly sense, and I am not. And this fact is perhaps central to my willingness and capacity to view the movement quite differently, from the admittedly "safe" position of an outsider looking in. In doing so, I am compelled to point out the following most salient points of disagreement relative to Childs' response to my paper and position.

ON THE PURPOSE OF BUSINESS AND "PROFIT-MAKING"

Childs appears to oversimplify my concern with organizational hybridization, and BAM in particular, by commenting that I would propose that any business with a purpose beyond "solely profit-making" is in violation of God's good design for business. I question this characterization of my thinking. It's obviously not that simple, as I discuss at length in my paper (relative to business as an agency of shalom and common grace). Business must be about much more than "solely profit-making." Yet clearly profit-making must be

a central mandate for any sustainable business. On this last point, Childs and I appear to be in agreement.

ON THE CORE DOCTRINES OF BAM AND IMPLIED DUALISM

Childs posits that I have "misread" the literature in asserting that BAM organizations place evangelism and discipleship at the core of their purpose, and that BAM (ironically, given the effort expended by BAM enthusiasts to encourage readers to *not* reach this conclusion) reinforces the false secular/sacred dichotomy. I suggest that a close and fresh reading of the BAM literature leads to exactly these two conclusions. That is, evangelism and discipleship must be core purposes (not necessarily *the* core purpose, but core purposes nonetheless) of a BAM business, and by very definition this forces non-BAM businesses and business-persons into the "secular" camp. I assert that it is not possible to interpret the BAM literature and movement any other way. In that sense, I suggest that a close and fresh reading of the BAM literature involves "reading" what is not said (but implied). It involves taking the implicit (i.e., "BAM must include evangelism and discipleship," and "BAM is more sacred than is Business as Business") and making it an explicit part of the dialogue. In short, I suggest that I have not only not "misread" the BAM literature, but I have appropriately "read between the lines."

In doing so, I hope to catalyze further dialogue around these two concerns. I believe this dialogue will be critical to engendering wholeness and collegiality among the Christian business academy, and even to protecting the very legitimacy of that academy.

ON SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY AND GOD'S GOOD DESIGN FOR BUSINESS

Childs agrees with my general assertion that “God’s design for business is equally as good as the Church,” thereby generally supporting the Kuyperian construct of sphere sovereignty. However, I would question his characterization of Kuyper’s thinking extending to the extreme of the “state having no sovereignty over the Church,” or, put more squarely into the context of the BAM dialogue, the state having no sovereignty over business. Clearly there are critical ways in which this must not be the case. Consider the work of the SEC relative to the governance of publicly-traded businesses, or the work of the EEOC relative to the employment practices of U.S.-based businesses. The interjection of the state into the sovereign sphere of business through these mechanisms is not only wise, but often warranted. Where I believe it becomes a bit more troubling is when the Church extends its core mandates (evangelism and discipleship) into the sphere of business, a concern that Childs does not address at all. And while I agree with Childs that the BAM movement must continue to evolve and even be evaluated through a cross-disciplinary lens, I believe that such investigation will lead to an increasingly troubled/muddled picture of what BAM is really about, and an increasingly troubled picture of whether BAM is itself a legitimate academic discipline (especially as a “pre-professional” discipline like business or education).

ON BAM AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE AND MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY

Lastly, I am troubled by Childs’ proposition that BAM academic programs be codified and launched at Christian colleges and universities. I suggest that doing so undermines our very purpose as a unique part of the larger business academy: that is, to produce well-equipped Christian business practitioners who extend shalom and common grace and prosper God’s creation through their calling as business professionals. I of course also believe that Christian colleges and universities must produce well-equipped and mature Church members who embrace the Great Commission and proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. But that is in many ways a separate (although clearly interdependent) endeavor when it comes to the core mandates of the Church relative to evangelism and discipleship. Put simply, when Bank of America hires graduates from the business major here at Covenant College, it doesn’t hire them to evangelize and disciple the “nations” at Bank of America. It hires them to prosper Bank of America. I would go so far as to caution against establishing “businesses” in line with BAM thinking, and even worry that counseling/“equipping” students in this direction may distort right discernment of their occupational calling and minimize their role/impact in revealing God’s kingdom. I suggest that perhaps the work of such students and the work of BAM “businesses” are best left to NGOs, the Church, and the state. And counseling students into academic programs (i.e., Community Development, Missions, Social Work, Public Administration) consistent with such occupational callings is (in my mind) doing right by them, and right by our God.