

Dialogue I

A Radical, Reformed Christian Rejoinder to Martinez's "Teaching Strategic Management from A Christian Perspective"

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Introduction

Dr. Richard Martinez wrote an excellent paper (which appeared in the Fall 2003 issue of *The JBIB*) titled "Teaching Strategic Management from A Christian Perspective," examining "strategic management topics chosen according to their prominence in the leading strategic management textbooks" (Martinez, 2003, p. 71). His goal was to "spark discussion in the pursuit of developing a Christian framework for analyzing business principles" (Martinez, 2003, p. 69), and he felt his "framework [would] be amenable to further development by Christian scholars and teachers who will want to add their insights to the discussion" (Martinez, 2003, p. 95).

This rejoinder is a testimony to the fact that Martinez succeeded in his intent. As a possible pedagogical approach, in an effort to get students,

faculty, and scholars to reflect on the integration of faith and strategic management, I offer a point of reference or a direction on Martinez's structure. This point of reference is based on two scholarly works I highly recommend to Christians interested in integrating faith and business: *Just Business* (Hill, 1997) and *The Fabric of this World* (Hardy, 1990).

In *Just Business*, Alexander Hill begins with the proposition that we are created to "emulate God" and that God exhibits the characteristics of holiness, justice, and love (Hill, 1997, p. 13ff.). He then explains that this leads to a "creative morality in an imperfect world," meaning that "we are often forced to struggle between what is 'realistically attainable' and what is 'ideal'" (Hill, 1997, p. 19).

In *The Fabric of this World*, Lee Hardy outlines a Reformed Christian view of work and

vocation, first tracing the philosophical origins of work beginning with the Greeks and emphasizing the contributions of Martin Luther and John Calvin. He then discusses the process for individuals to consider when seeking their vocation. Finally, he considers what a Reformed Christian view of work means for job design. I believe Hardy's discussion on individual calling and career choice and Hill's discussion related to "creative morality" can serve as an analogy for strategic management from a Christian perspective.

Biblical Foundations

Concerning seeking a vocation, Hardy notes that "the primary, if not exclusive meaning of the term 'vocation' — or calling ... — pertains to the call of the gospel, pure and simple" (Hardy, 1990, p. 80). However, considering, for example, I Peter 4:10, we are also called to "love and serve our neighbors with whatever gifts God has given to us" (Hardy, 1990, p. 80). Thus, God's call is of twofold character: the "general" calling to be a Christian, taking on the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) as virtues, and the "particular" calling to a specific occupation (cf. I Corinthians

12:28-31). In considering one's calling, one must remember, according to God's providence, that one is not a mere "cosmic accident." Each of us must say, "I was placed here for a purpose, and that purpose is one which I am, in part, to discover, not invent" (Hardy, 1990, p. 83).

Because God did not create us to be self-sufficient individuals, but created us with needs "which we alone cannot meet," we must begin by ascertaining "which gifts God has bestowed on [us]" (Hardy, 1990, p. 85). To start, we have to reflect upon and determine what we are good at, experimenting with various occupations and seeking the advice of others. The list of possible occupations can be narrowed down by considering the concerns for others God has given us. The list can be honed even further by our "lively interests" or passions (Hardy, 1990, p. 90ff.).

In addition to choosing an occupation, we must also choose a place to practice this occupation — where our "native abilities and acquired skills can be put at the disposal of those who need them" (Hardy, 1990, p. 93). Hardy notes that existing demand is "not necessarily a reliable guide to legitimate need" (Hardy, 1990,

p. 94); that is, we cannot assume that the careers offering us the highest pay are “at the same time those careers that best serve our neighbor” (Hardy, 1990, p. 94).

In *Just Business*, Alexander Hill outlines principles for integrating Christian faith and business practice, starting from the proposition that Christians are to “emulate” God’s character and that God’s character, according to the Bible, is holy, just, and loving. Hill defines holiness as a “single-minded devotion to God and absolute ethical purity” (Hill, 1997, p. 22) and argues that it consists of four elements: “zeal for God, purity, accountability, and humility” (Hill, 1997, p. 23ff.). Hill defines justice as “reciprocal sets of rights and duties for those living in the context of community” (Hill, 1997, p. 34ff.) and states that there are four elements of justice: “procedural rights, substantive rights, merit, and contractual justice.” Hill describes love in terms of three aspects: “empathy, mercy, and self-sacrifice” (Hill, 1997, p. 48). Hill’s definition of love in terms of self-sacrifice is particularly poignant: “The final characteristic of love is its very willingness to give away the very rights that justice bestows” (Hill, 1997, p. 51). So even though we

may merit our economic wealth as Christian managers because of our hard work, love is the willingness to give away those rights of merit.

Hardy and Hill jointly emphasize love of neighbor, which I believe should be both an individual and corporate calling, because “all things are under Christ’s dominion” (Martinez, 2003, p. 72).

Reflecting on these books and scholars, I can offer one point of reference to students, faculty, and scholars in terms of “transforming” strategic management principles.¹ Although radical, this point of reference will hopefully enlighten discussions regarding the “Analysis of Environment and Assets” (Martinez, 2003, p. 74ff.), “Scope of Operations” (Martinez, 2003, p. 79ff.), “Boundaries and Relationships” (Martinez, 2003, p. 84ff.), “Facilitators and Constraints of Implementation” (Martinez, 2003, p. 88ff.), and “Forces of Creation” (Martinez, 2003, p. 91ff.).

A Radical Reformed Christian Perspective on Strategic Management

Using Hardy’s discussion of personal calling and career

choice, the Christian manager, according to this radical, Reformed Christian perspective, must ask, “What good works has God prepared in advance for my company² to do?” (Ephesians 2:10). To answer this question, a Christian manager must first ask, when analyzing the environment and assets, “What are we good at? What are we passionate about doing? And, what concerns about others has God laid upon our hearts?”

Through Hill, God has laid one significant concern on our hearts: our neighbors have “substantive rights” (Hill, 1997, pp. 38-39). Hill states,

“Substantive rights are what procedural rights seek to protect. They may be universal ... or they may be unique to each

society.” Some hold that “we can conclude from the Mosaic laws that a society, in order to be economically just, must provide all with access to the basic necessities of life in that society, and must provide all with opportunities for producing for their own needs in a context which gives them control over their own labor and a portion of

the other resources of society” (Monsma, 1989, p. 54). In other words, our neighbors have substantive rights to provide for their subsistence needs. Of particular relevance here is the idea that all people need access to the basic necessities of life.


Thinking of substantive rights and subsistence needs reminds us of what Christ said concerning our duties (Matthew 25:31-46). Are the poor being taken care of? Are the hungry being fed? Are the naked being clothed? Are the sick and imprisoned being visited?

The concern of substantive rights and subsistence needs spills over into a discussion of “Business Level-Strategy” and

“Competitive Dynamics” (Martinez, 2003, p. 77ff.). In fact, if our firm is in the business of providing access to

the necessities of life and our firm has competition, there is in fact no market there for our firm.

Yet, in addition to serving those with physical subsistence needs, we are duty-bound to serve those with spiritual needs. Christ talks about making disciples and teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19-20), which leads a firm to



... our neighbors have substantive rights to provide for their subsistence needs.

consider the spiritual needs of both the economically rich and poor. Hill specifically mentions the spiritual need for “purity of communication” (we say exactly what we mean) and “purity of sexuality” (Hill, 1997, p. 25) in order that we may reflect God.

Thinking of markets in terms of substantive rights and subsistence needs crosses over into the discussion of “scope of operations” (Martinez, 2003, p. 79ff.). No market, then, is potentially off-limits. For example, practicing purity in communication and purity in sexuality would go a long way toward transforming the brewery and entertainment industries and at least would not hinder consumers from meeting their spiritual needs.

On the other hand, meeting subsistence needs of the economically poor would likely lead a Christian manager to look internationally to developing countries, look domestically to our inner cities, or partner with churches and non-government organizations. Christian managers have a choice, then: compete in competitive markets over satisfying spiritual needs and/or seek non-competitive markets where subsistence needs are not being met.

In addition to discussing this radical, Reformed Christian perspective on strategic management, one could generate discussion by reflecting on the inherent perspective in Milton Friedman’s (1970) famous paper “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits” and to what strategies this perspective leads.

Such reflection would force deep thinking on the topic of “Facilitators and Constraints of Implementation,” particularly the direction of “Governance” (Martinez, 2003, p. 88ff.). The radical, Reformed Christian view makes God the “ultimate Principal” and us “His agents” (Martinez, 2003, p. 89), while Friedman’s view makes managers the agents of stockholders and claims that the only social responsibility corporations have is to make money.

Clearly, in Friedman’s perspective, Christian managers have a heavy cross to bear if they are working for non-Christian stockholders and/or non-believers, who would consider their acts of social responsibility a “tax.” On the other hand, Christian managers could avoid the burden of working for shareholders who insist on their rights if Christian

managers themselves were the principle stockholders. But even then, profits are needed for reinvestment purposes.

To survive, Christian managers will have to think creatively as image-bearers of God, making the “creative aspect of business ... important and exciting” (Martinez, 2003, p. 92), because “humanity and its various systems, including the market, are imperfect.” What Christian managers must attempt to do is align “the three lenses of holiness, justice, and love” (Hill, 1997, p. 19) with the corporate need of sustaining profit. Thus Martinez rightly concludes that the faith of the Christian manager could be severely tested. On the other hand, someone once said, “If you don’t act on your faith, you lose it.”

Conclusion

Martinez has written an excellent article outlining a structure with which to discuss strategic management from a Christian perspective. I have tried to offer a radical point of reference in an effort to get students, faculty, and scholars to reflect on the integration of faith and strategic management in order to “spark discussion in

the pursuit of developing a Christian framework for analyzing business principles” (Martinez, 2003, p. 69).

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ENDNOTES

¹Even to use the term “transforming” biases the discussion. Some Reformed Christians believe that “Christian” and “business” are not dialectically opposed because not only is Christ Lord of all, Christ is also Creator of all. In other words, there is at some level something good in all things, even though all things are negatively impacted by sin. Therefore, Christians are to find and accentuate the good in all things and minimize or eliminate the evil.

²Martinez rightly notes, “Any discussion on this subject breaks down if the discussants are not in agreement on the context in which strategic management is said to take place” (Martinez, 2003, p. 71). This paper assumes a Christian manager context.

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