

The Role of Christian Led Companies in the Global Market

By Sergio Matviuk

Recently, I had the opportunity to serve as a judge in a business case competition. Several teams of MBA students were participating. The teams had to analyze a case and propose alternatives for a company facing the reality of moving part of its operations to a foreign country to reduce labor costs and remain competitive. The team that provided the most rigorous analysis and solid business strategy won the competition.

The case was about a Christian-led company that – from its inception – cultivated and developed a Christian, value-based culture. The dilemma for this company was that businesses in the country where its new operation would be located widely practiced child labor and bribery. The countries laws were also not favorable to outside religions including Christianity.

Most of the teams agreed that the company had no options but to move some of the operations to the foreign country if it wanted to survive. The

question then was, if the company wanted to maintain its Christian values, what kind of relationship should the company establish with the new business and social environment overseas?

The situation experienced by this company challenges us to think about the kind of relationship Christian companies have to establish with the social and cultural environment of the foreign country in which they need to operate to maintain, at the same time, acceptable level of profits and the integrity of their Christian identity and testimony. The result of such relationship will determine the role of Christian companies in the global market.

Mercenaries, opportunists or missionaries?

Companies can take different approaches to establish relationships within society and culture of a host country. One such approach might be what C. Wilson calls the *mercenary approach*.

Mercenaries do a job for profit without being concerned about the people and society in which they operate, focusing only on efficiency. A company uses the mercenary approach when the main concern is profit and there is not necessarily an interest on the transformation of the people or society in which the business operations occur.

As a management consultant, I worked with a Christian-led company on a two-year engagement in a country providing technical support to local mining companies. The business environment of this country was so overregulated and bureaucratic that it encouraged non-ethical behaviors. This company decided to avoid any kind of engagement beyond the strict technical support. The leadership decided the company will remain separated from the local community and only make an effort to provide the highest possible quality services while optimizing revenues.



These Christian leaders understood that the company involvement in the foreign community and culture could compromise its values. When the contract concluded at the end of the two years, the company returned home, having registered very good levels of profit. However it was unable to generate any substantial spiritual or societal impact.

Another potential approach is the *opportunistic approach*, which looks for immediate advantage or benefit of a business opportunity regardless of long term well-being and development of the

society in which the business is conducted. The opportunist differs from the mercenary in that the latter is interested in the business environment – at least temporarily. However, such an interest lasts only as long as benefits can be obtained. There is not a genuine interest for the people or the society in which the company operates because such an interest is transactional in nature.

For example, a company established its operations in a foreign country, making a multimillion dollar investment to develop alternative, vegetable-based fuel. The business opportunity was unique because of the country's abundance in natural resources to produce the fuel and qualified low cost labor.

However, the company found it difficult to receive favor from local government administrators to obtain the necessary permissions for operating a new production plant. To improve the relationship with local administrators, the company then made several investments in educational programs for disadvantaged youth. That strategy worked and the local government officials began supporting company operations by assigning more personnel to work with the company's new venture.

Three years later, new government officials were elected who were very favorable towards the company operations. Thus the company believed that no additional or sustained investment in youth education was needed. After all, its operations were politically guaranteed by the new government administrators. Or were they?

The educational program for disadvantaged youth was liquidated and never re-established. Until today, the company continues operating in the country, but the local community does not receive any reciprocal benefits other than local jobs created. This company uses an opportunistic approach because its focal strategy is to optimize the business opportunity and development of the local community only as

long as it produces some benefit for business operations. Investment in the development and growth in the local community is considered a business expense, and as such can be reduced at any time to improve profitability.

A third potential consideration is the *missionary approach*. Companies using this approach are not only concerned with the profit or benefit of business operations, but are also purposed to help with societal and spiritual development. The missionary approach can be understood “*business as a means*” for missions or “*business as missions*.”



A potential strategy for companies is to use this concept as a platform for missionary work. Missionaries and professionals use their business and professions to support themselves and their mission’s endeavors. The objective of doing business is to financially support the spiritual work of a missionary. Those who use business and professional practice to support their own missionary ministry are what author Grant McClung calls “tentmakers” in allusion to Apostle Paul, who made a living by making tents.

Ken Eldred comments that tentmaking is a legitimate strategy to combine business with missions, but has some limitations. Those who use this strategy to do missions are mainly focused in witnessing Christ and business is practiced only as a means to make a living, therefore limiting opportunities for economic development. Eldred

adds that tentmaking is a job *taking* rather than job *making* approach. It would not likely contribute to the economic development of the community in which the missionary develops his or her ministry.

Another variation of *business as a means* occurs when business is used by missionaries as an instrument to obtain a visa to live and minister in countries in which Christian witnessing is prohibited. As Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen indicate in their book, *Great Commission Companies*, this strategy uses business “merely as a ‘cover’ for people who, quite frankly, have little interest in business except for its usefulness as an entry strategy into countries that are off-limits to traditional missionaries.”

These authors suggest this strategy “has little to commend” and poorly reflects Christianity and Christian testimony. Furthermore, people using business as a cover often become associated with clandestine activities or at a minimum are viewed as untrustworthy.

More than 30 years ago Gary MacEoyn wrote how missionaries were associated with the CIA work in foreign countries, particularly because they live in foreign countries without having a traditional job to make a living, which raises questions about who supported their activities.

More recently, Alford Deann affirmed that old suspicions and accusation of the relationship between missionary work and CIA’s espionage activities are still present in some people’s mindsets in many countries. These accusations and the negative values connected with using business as a disguise of Christian missionary strategy, make this concept unacceptable and counterproductive from a business perspective.

On the other hand, *business as missions* is a concept that integrates business and missions in a single activity. In his book, *God Is at Work*, Ken Eldred indicates Christian companies that see business as missions constitute “Kingdom Business” (KB). Kingdom Business, affirms Eldred, “has several objectives...it is about

missions, successful business practices, the integration of work and faith, economic development, spreading the gospel, transforming nations and transforming lives.” He defines Kingdom Business as “for-profit business ventures designed to facilitate God's transformation of people and nation.” God’s transformation of people and nations is facilitated through kingdom business practices aimed at (1) profitability and sustainability, (2) local job and wealth creation and (3) advancement of the local church.

Rundle and Steffen offer a similar perspective on the role of Christian companies in the context of the global market. In their book *Great Commission Companies*, these authors identify Christian companies as “Great Commission Companies” (GCC), which have a “humanitarian and transformational purpose.”

GCC bring good news in word and deed to the neediest parts of the world by conducting exemplary business, which includes job and wealth creation. It stimulates value-based business practices aimed to open doors to present the spirit of the Christian testimony. The concept of Great Commission Companies involves the idea of doing business and by doing so, witnessing Christ in the marketplace.

Business as Mission. Whose Mission?

If we accept the concept of business as mission, we also need to define whose mission we are talking about. Georg Vicedom affirms that when we discuss mission from a Christian perspective we are talking about *mission dei* or God’s mission. Thus, Vicedom indicates, mission is “the continuation of the redemptive activity of God, through the demonstration of salvific acts. This is His highest authority and His supreme commission.” From this perspective, God continues working toward the redemption of humanity and that fact constitutes the essence of mission.

However, God also uses the Church to fulfill His mission. Along with the concept of *mission dei*, there is *missio ecclesiae* or the church’s mission.

Paul Bergsma affirms that *missio ecclesiae* is the participation of God’s people in the *mission dei*.

However, the church as an institution has limitations. The church cannot constitute a political party, or establish a university or run a business. But, as Bergsma says, the church is also understood as an organism composed of believers who represent Christ in all activities of their life. These believers are the missionaries, who do missionary activity outside of the institutional boundaries of the church. The believers are those who do mission by teaching, participating in public service, or doing business, among other activities.



In this context, *business as missions* are conducted by Christian professionals, who have received a call from God to do this kind of missionary work and have the skills to run a business with a missionary purpose in mind. Eldred calls them Kingdom Business Professionals. Kingdom Business Professionals, defines Eldred, “Are authentic, skilled business people who use their talents to further the worldwide mission of the Church through Kingdom business. They are called and equipped to use their spiritual gifts in a business context.”

According to Eldred, kingdom business professionals have the knowledge, passion and skills to grow not only business, but also the Church, and they are committed to meet the spiritual, economic and social needs in any place in the world. They are willing to live and work in these locations, representing what David Bosch, in his work *Transforming Mission*, calls an

incarnational model of missions. These kingdom business professionals are the missionaries who express the *missio ecclesiae* and contribute in this way to the *missio dei* by influencing employees, partners, suppliers, customers and the local community with the compassion of Christ. Some aspects of business as mission can also be framed as part of the *missio hominum*. Gergsma calls this form an expression through “humanitarian actions on behalf o the neighbor, aimed to the social good, reconciliation, liberation of oppression, justice and people’s rights in each human society.”

These actions, Bergsma affirms, reflect the Creator’s image in society and give indications of a Kingdom of God in a redeemed people that fulfill the great commandment “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

Mission hominum represents the social responsibility of Kingdom business in the context of the global market, particularly in places where Christian-led companies have the influence to make a difference and bring justice, peace and prosperity over exploitation and injustice.



Characteristics of the Great Commission Companies (GCC)

Rundle and Steffen define Great Commission Companies (GCC) as those Christian-led companies that understand business as mission and operate under that assumption. These authors state that GCC are:

- **Socially responsible:** GCC are profitable to reflect sound management and operations practice. Yet, they are equally concerned about fair wages, acceptable working conditions,

concern for the environment and observations of local laws. At the same time GCCs demonstrate concern for the general well being of the workers and the community in which they operate by investing back in education, healthcare and general societal development.

- **Income-Producing business:** GCC create wealth. They are legitimate businesses offering valuable products or services.”
- **Managed by kingdom professionals:** GCC are led by Christian professionals committed to excellence and to God’s mission to serve in key positions of leadership. These professionals become role models in the decision making process and witness in matter of faith for their collaborators and subordinates.
- **Bring glory to God:** “A GCC draws attention not to itself, but to the Lord and Ruler of the company- Jesus Christ.”
- **Promotes the growth and multiplication of local churches:** GCCs support the development and growth of local churches. As Rundle and Steffen state, usually GCCs establish formal alliances with local churches and Christian ministries in the area they operate to help these congregations and organizations to strengthen their ministries.
- **Main focus is on the least-evangelized and least-developed parts of the world:** GCCs main goal, like the apostle Paul’s, is to bring the gospel where the Christ is not known (Romans 15:20).

Conclusion

Christian companies that take the missionary approach to conduct and regulate their business operations understand business as mission. These companies have a integral role in the current global market because their business activity is not only aimed to profit-making but also the spiritual and societal transformation of the countries where they conduct business.

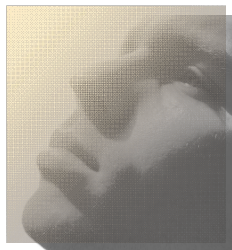
Great Commission Companies exemplify the non-institutional aspect of the mission of the church by witnessing Christ in words and deeds, particularly in places of the world where the Christian testimony is not known yet. They are led by kingdom business professionals who are not only concerned with profitable business, but also use their knowledge, experience and gifts to run exemplary, Christian value-based businesses as a way to present the Christian testimony and open

doors to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in cooperation with local churches and ministries.

In summary GCC are authentic businesses that create wealth and jobs, pay taxes and make a contribution to the social and spiritual development of the community where they operate – a role precisely intended for its unique transformational capability.

Dr. Sergio Matviuk is a specialist in global and cross-cultural leadership and holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership. Dr. Matviuk presently directs of the Doctor of Strategic Leadership program and teaches at Regent University in the School of Global Leadership and Entrepreneurship (GLE).

Dr. Matviuk also serves as a leadership development and global business consultant, trainer and coach for corporate, government and non-profit organizations located around the globe. He has provided training and consulting services to organizations such as: Texas Instruments, Lucent Technologies, Fleet Bank, The Paraguayan-American Chamber of Commerce (Paraguay), The Supreme Court of Justice of Cordoba (Argentina) and The First Vice-Presidency of Peru.



Emotional Intelligence

CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP

**For The Bar-On Emotional
Quotient Inventory® (EQ-i)**

May 6 – 8, 2007

Founders Inn & Spa
Virginia Beach, VA

Workshop Features:

- EQ-i Certification
- Personal EQ-i feedback
- Materials and resource binder
- EQ-i Technical Manual and *The EQ Edge*
- Numerous articles and handouts
- Relationship to MBTI®, FIRO®, teams and leadership
- One free administration of the EQ-i
- HPS Alumni membership
- International EI network membership

For more information visit:
www.regent.edu/eqi

School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship



REGENT UNIVERSITY

