

# Toward a Marketplace Missiology

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*God is moving in a dynamic, fresh, new, and powerful way in the world, according to many observers. Surprisingly, this new movement is occurring in and through the marketplace, and it may become the most influential, effective mission field of the twenty-first century. These observations are not only being made by distinguished, theologians, evangelists, and pastors, but by the secular press as well. This article gives an overview of the many facets of this new phenomenon and suggests a new area of missiology called marketplace missiology. The author challenges the academic missiological community to add this new dimension of the missio Dei to their curricula if they are to remain vital and relevant in today's ever-changing, complex world.*

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*The marketplace is the last mission frontier.* – Ed Silvano<sup>1</sup>

*The commercial business marketplace may well be the primary mission field of the twenty-first century.* – Charles Van Engen<sup>2</sup>

*Christianity in the marketplace is salt and light in a dark world...The greatest possibility of revival is corporate America.* – Henry Blackaby<sup>3</sup>

The July 16, 2001, cover story for *Fortune* magazine was entitled “God and Business: The Surprising Quest for Spiritual Renewal in the American Workplace” (Gunther 2001:cover). It stated:

Bringing spirituality into the workplace violates the old idea that faith and fortune don't mix. But a groundswell of believers is breaching the last taboo in corporate America...These executives are in the vanguard of a diverse, mostly unorganized mass of believers – a counterculture bubbling up all over corporate America – who want to bridge the traditional divide between spirituality and work. Historically, such folk operated below the radar, on their own, or in small workplace groups, where they prayed or studied the Bible. But now they are getting organized and going public to agitate for change. (2001:59,61)

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The January 11, 2002, *Washington Post* "Style" section headline read, "Prayer and Profits: These Business leaders Seek Regular Counsel from Their Silent Partner – God" (Parker 2002:C-1). Similar articles recently have appeared in *Business Week*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Inc.*, as well as in a variety of business and industry trade journals.<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon is not only gaining attention in the secular press, but also in the evangelical press. For example, the August 6, 2001 cover story for *Christianity Today* led by saying, "The Silicon Valley saints – Christian execs such as Michael Yang – are bringing biblical values to California's high-tech heartland" (Carnes 2001:cover).

Laura Nash, a senior research fellow at Harvard Business School and Scotty McLennan, dean for religious life at Stanford University, both committed Christians, recently explored this trend in a book entitled *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life*. They discussed the creation of the book as being in the forefront of a massive movement toward the integration of faith and the workplace, and they noted the growing body of literature already addressing this subject:

In all, we reviewed *more than 125 books* in the areas of new spirituality, science, and religion, or management and religion...from which we drew our main conclusions about the content, underlying assumptions, and techniques of the new spirituality and business movement. (Nash and McLennan 2001:289-290, emphasis added)

In addition, thousands of business owners and chief executive officers (CEOs) are actively seeking effective ways to integrate their faith into the lifeblood of their companies and into their daily business practices. Hundreds of church-based, para-church, and independent marketplace ministries are sprouting up worldwide. Scores of faith-in-the-workplace Web sites are now on the Internet. Christian business schools are starting to add faith integration discussions and courses into their curricula. One magazine, *Faith@Work*, is making an open bid to be the "trade journal" for the emerging faith-in-work phenomenon. Another, *Business Reform Magazine*, is endeavoring to become "the Christian think tank" journal that "can be used as a tool for Christians being disciplined, to seriously think through how God's work specifically applies to all areas of business." (Cochran 2002:1).

As these and other sources underscore, the faith-in-the-workplace phenomenon is taking on the shape and dynamic of a new, powerful, global mission movement. Thus Henry Blackaby notes, "God is moving in a powerful way in the marketplace": (2001) And yet, this new mission movement is "below the radar screen" of even the foremost schools that are dedicated to studying Christian mission and missiology.

This emerging new form of Christian mission in and to the marketplace is related to other emerging global phenomena. Though, at first blush, these other developments appear to be unrelated to the discussion above, in reality they forge a remarkable convergence that has broad implications for missiology. Consider the following examples from a virtually inexhaustible list:

- The enormous technological advances in communications, travel, and computerization; in science, medicine, and agriculture, in digitalization, robotics, and miniaturization.
- The emerging threats to the earth's fragile, interdependent ecosystems.
- The rapid, complex economic integration of the world.
- The growing power of transnational governing/regulatory institutions and regimes/constructs.
- The rise of global terrorism, its identification with Islamic extremism, its financing by the economic power of Osama bin Laden, and the warrior cries of jihad heard during the attacks of September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States – and the subsequent unprecedented use of anthrax and other biological weapons.

- The militant cries of defiance heard in the proclamation of the War on Terrorism launched in retaliation.
- The resulting new levels of political/military interdependence and the concurrent rise of formidable new alliances.
- The plague of grotesque poverty that is sweeping major portions of the globe.
- The increasing pluralistic (ethnic, cultural, religious) nature of human society in virtually every nation on the planet.
- The growing visibility (and undeniability) of horrendous human rights abuses, especially against women and ethnic minorities; of ethnic cleansing efforts, and of widespread religious persecution – often in the name of one god or another.

When one considers these earth-changing matters and realizes the profound direct and indirect nexus between the commercial business community and each of them, one is nearly overwhelmed with the radical implications they have for global Christian mission. Globalization in all of its facets, - economic, political, social, environmental – is a fast-growing reality of the world we live in, the world we seek to serve, the world Christ commanded us to “go” into. He told us to take the good news of the gospel to that world, to demonstrate incarnationally the all-encompassing, caring love of Jesus, and to do so with a sensitive, listening servant heart and attitude.

Whether it is mission *of* the way (of Christ’s way-redemptive), *in* the way (in the streets – incarnational), or *on* the way (on each of our personal spiritual pilgrimages – in process), the bottom line is that it must become mission to the “world” (Van Engen 1999:xviii). Missiologists are quick to point out that the study of mission is the study of the relation among the Word, the world, and the church, integrated through our personal experiences (Van Engen 1996a:23; 1996b:219-226).

However, I suggest that in academic missiology we too seldom speak about the “real” world. Granted, much is said, studied, and taught in missiology about anthropology, world religions, urbanization, intercultural studies, and leadership. We also give intellectual and theoretical recognition to the multidisciplinary nature of missiology. As Edgar Elliston stated:

Missiological education may emerge from a single discipline, but more often is multi- or interdisciplinary. Theology, history, education, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, *economics*, geography, psychology, and *political science* all contribute to an understanding of God’s revelation and of the world to which we have been commissioned as the people of God (1996:234, emphasis added; see also Van Engen 1996a:18-22)

When I look at the “real” world, the world that we live in, I see an infinitely complex maze of formal and informal power centers. And I find it discouraging that within the missiological educational process itself, in the application of mission theory, many of the major forces shaping the world’s true character are seldom, if ever, discussed. They seem to be nearly invisible missiological curricula. This is especially true of two power centers: the economic and the political.

Much missiological reflection today centers around the concept of contextualization. That is, we say that mission, to be effective and to give the target population true “ownership” of Jesus as their Lord, must be culturally appropriate to its worldly context. But we mostly think here of anthropology and culture. Having considered contextualization from a cultural point of view, we fail to analyse, consider, and prepare intercultural missionaries (whether domestic or international) to understand the basic economic and political power centers that they will confront when they set foot in their mission field.

This failure has the potential of leaving missionaries dangerously ill-equipped for their service and sets the stage for possibly disastrous consequences. Related costs are high, not only for the church, the mission, and the individual missionaries, but also for the unreached lost souls and the hurting and needy communities to whom we have failed adequately to bring the saving grace and love of Jesus Christ.

To avoid these difficulties and to maximize the potential for positive results, I believe missiology needs to make a radical change in its thinking and in its curriculum. What we currently teach and study is good and, for the most part, healthy. My proposal is not one of elimination of curriculum, but one of expansion. It is not about repairing the fence, but about adding to the fence – so that a gapping hole is recognized and filled with fresh, new construction. If the missiological community of scholars is faithfully to fulfill its roll in the mission enterprise in today’s real-world context, there needs to be a major addition to the discipline. We must engage in an expanded, all-encompassing understanding of the economic and political realities of the world from a Christ-centered, Christ-led, *missio Dei* perspective. And the world to which I refer must not only be the world of mission “over there,” but must also include the intercultural mission challenges next door, in the cultural milieu called the marketplace.

My purpose in this article is to call upon the academic missiological community to join with me in creating a new discipline within our current curricula. I call it “marketplace missiology.”

As I envisage this new missiological arena, I see that it is comprised of three primary components: (1) a marketplace mission component, (2) a contextualization component, and (3) a biblical theology component. Interestingly, the first two components involve a course of study in which the same material simultaneously serves two fundamentally different purposes, demonstrating the remarkable convergence mentioned earlier. The third component deals critically with issues of biblical theology that are raised in the first two components.

### **Marketplace Mission Component**

The marketplace mission component approaches the commercial marketplace as a mission field in its own right. It is the place highlighted in the opening quotations from *Fortune* magazine and other publications. This place has traditionally too often been seen as off-limits to the church and its mission. But it is a place that has a distinctive culture, a unique worldview, and a remarkable capacity to touch virtually every person on earth.

The marketplace mission component is comprised of three tracks: First, there is mission *into* the marketplace by outsiders, those who are not participants in the business community, who seek to convert and disciple nonbelievers within that community. The impetus for this approach may come from the church at large, from denominations, local congregations, parachurch organizations, Christian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or special organizations that have a business-focused ministry (such as Christian business schools). On the other hand, the impetus may come from committed individual lay Christians, prayer-walkers, missionaries, or tentmakers, who are often assisted by a variety of Christian support organizations.

The efforts of these various groups at penetrating the business community for Christ often takes differing forms, ranging from major economic development projects to micro-enterprise development or micro-finance projects, and from Christian venture capitalists to small business Bible studies and individual witnessing.

The course of study under this track would examine who the players are, what they are doing, and how they are doing it. It would measure effectiveness, sustainability, and replicability. It would also collect information about strategies and best practices, and what, if any cooperative links and synergies exist among them, and between them and the church.

The second track of the market place mission component is mission *within* the marketplace, in which Christians who are participants in the marketplace, and thus insiders, seek to evangelize and disciple, and to network and encourage one another within their own work environment. The impetus for this approach may come from tentmakers, from special Christian organizations created by and of business people, or from private businesses or individuals who are moved by the Holy Spirit to be salt and light within their work world.

The third track of the marketplace mission component is mission *through* the marketplace. Mission *within* the marketplace involves crossing barriers of many kinds within the myriad and diverse corporate cultures; and it addresses marketplace participants such as business owners, executives, employees, suppliers, customers, competitors, and trade associations. On the other hand, mission *through* the marketplace addresses marketplace participants who are actively engaged in a Christian outreach function. It is mission wherein Christian marketplace insiders reach outside the marketplace, utilizing their enormous, God-given influence, resources, and expertise for Christ.

This type of mission may take many different forms, from businesses that reach out into their local communities with holistic people projects – individual or group – such as social services, educational support, employment training, health care, youth service, or family assistance. It may mean providing airplanes, money, and doctors to fly into neighboring nations; or motoring into the inner city to conduct medical and dental clinics. It may mean teaching business courses from a Christian perspective in an otherwise secular MBA program, or providing technical computer or business support to mission agencies or churches. It may be an auto repair business in Pasadena that supports a missionary in Armenia, or a Christian farm implement dealer in Tennessee who donates equipment and expertise to Kazakhstan farmers. It may be a Christ-called Dallas banker who helps Asian entrepreneurs start a development bank, a Korean merchant who underwrites a Bolivian micro-loan program, a German manufacturer who hires the mentally challenged to give them a chance in life, or a Swiss consortium that sets up a job factory to train unemployed youth. The possibilities are endless.

The point is that the business community – because of its enormous power base of influence, resources, and expertise – is in a unique position to undertake mission for Christ: worldwide and next door. Christian believers in the business community can do this mission effectively and efficiently. The heart of mission is helping hurting people holistically through the love of Christ. And what matters is not who *does* it, but who *receives* it; not *who* does it, but *how* and *why* it is done. In these instances, it is the business community itself that is replacing the traditional “sending agencies” of earlier Christian mission paradigms. It is the business community utilizing the resources God has placed in their hands to become a major part of the *missio Dei*.

As with the first track, the course of study under the second and third track would not only explore the theological underpinnings for such mission efforts, but also would study the historic and contemporary practices as well. Hopefully, it would also become the think tank, the intellectual center, for examining the enormous potential of this mission methodology. Such a course of research and study would require knowing who the players are, what they are doing, and how they are doing it; measuring effectiveness, sustainability, and replicability; and investigating strategies, best practices, and possible links between these persons and between them and the church.

## Contextualization Component

The second component of marketplace missiology is the contextualization component, needed because mission is carried out within a give context. That context is defined by many factors: cultural, anthropological, historical, sociological, geographical, environmental, and religious. But overriding every person's context are the prevailing economic and political power structures in that society. In terms of basic survival necessities, every person must make a living or be supported economically, and every person is subject to a prevailing economic and governing regime.

To study contextualization without studying the realities of those prevailing power structures is folly. It is equally unrealistic to strategize with mission agencies or individual missionaries about effective mission methodology without an in-depth understanding of the human and institution powers that comprise the reality of the target people-group's world.

The contextualization component of marketplace missiology is made up of three tracks. Each represents a major power center with which Christians must reckon in mission: (1) the private-sector economic power center track (perhaps better thought of as the commercial business track), (2) the public-sector economic power center track, and (3) the political power center track. While the first two tracks relate directly to the functioning of the marketplace and are easy to visualize within the setting of marketplace missiology, the third, the political track, will require a greater explanation.

First, the *commercial business* power center track involves the study of the broad, private-sector, economic power structures that exist in every village, community, city, and nation of the world. It means studying the business community in each mission context. This track stems from a recognition that not only is the marketplace a mission center of its own; it is also a power center that strongly impacts the reality of every person living in a given mission context. Understanding and engaging this power structure is often essential for people's survival strategy and, as such, directly and forcefully impacts mission to that people group. Missionaries must understand firsthand the important nexus between the economic status/viability and evangelistic/holistic ministry to hurting people. So too, should those who teach and train missionaries.

Second, the *public-sector* economic power center track involves the study of the economic policies and practices of powerful national and transnational economic groups, as they impact mission to and within their spheres of influence. At first blush such a study may seem trivial or esoteric, but when one realizes the impact that these economic policies have on the individual human beings who are the subject of our mission effort, such thoughts are quickly dismissed. For example, a missionary or NGO can work for years to establish a viable community development plan, or help with microbusiness development, or create a women's small-loan program, only to have those gains instantly wiped out by macroeconomic decisions and practices of the nation's central bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or the world Bank (WB). Look closely, for example, at the Jubilee 2000 effort to provide debt relief to struggling, Two-Thirds World countries. At the heart of the debate are those macro-economic issues that greatly impact mission and need to be studied in schools of mission and missiology.

Similarly, consider the issues on relieving world poverty, as raised by both the rioters and the delegates at the November 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle, by the debaters on the admission of China to the WTO, or by the organizer of the round of the General Agreement on Tariffs, and Trade (GATT) in Doha, Qatar. The participants in each venue are earnestly, often desperately, seeking solutions to the very issues that are on the hearts and minds of Christian missionaries. Faced with the realities of the world, both participants and missionaries have no doubt about the nexus between macroeconomics and holistic ministry to hurting people. Neither should we who teach and train missionaries for the challenges of that world.

Third, the *political power* center track involves the study of politics and governments, and policies and processes, as they impact mission. The missiological aspects of these topics should not be studied apart from marketplace missiology. They should be included in marketplace missiology because of the inseparable, entwined relationship of the policies and practices of political institutions with the economics of the marketplace, both at the micro and the macro levels. In the “real” world of mission, these are connected symbiotically, even organically. One only needs to examine a few of the topics below to see the futility of trying to understand the impact of economics on mission without understanding the political environment in which the economics is practiced:

- IMF and WB crisis intervention practices and history
- Asian economic crisis
- WTO admission of China
- Poverty and famine
- Migration and population
- Rural and urban missions
- International development, economic development, and advocacy
- Humanitarian relief efforts
- Jubilee 2000

In addition, a host of other political-sector issues directly impact the people who are the focus of mission, the people who are in the marketplace, and consequently the focus of marketplace missiology. These issues include religious freedom, religious persecution, human rights, immigration, law enforcement structures and practices, international relations, war, and peacemaking.

### **Biblical Theology Component**

The third component of marketplace missiology is the biblical theology component. It consists of two quite distinct tracks of study. The first track, *contemporary issues of marketplace missiology*, seeks to define and develop a biblical understanding of issues that are critical to Christians in the workplace, such as biblical theologies of work, of business, profits, income, lifestyles, leisure, and rest, as well as broader issues such as globalization<sup>5</sup> and the roll of the church in market societies.<sup>6</sup> The second track, *the worldview of the contemporary capitalist*, involves an inquiry into the nature of worldview and the methodology for discovering it, as applied to the capitalist mid-set and business context. Of necessity, it will also involve an inquiry into the relationship between capitalism and Christianity, between the capitalist worldview and the Christian worldview, as well as biblical perspectives on modern capitalist cultural trends such as materialism and consumerism. In addition, it requires an in-depth understanding of the political and economic forces (power centers) that impact not only the market place context of the mission effort, but also the individual capitalist within that marketplace context.

Since these forces also impact the context of every other non-marketplace-oriented mission effort, this study overlaps the contextualization component. If we are to be effective in our mission to, among, and through capitalists, we must understand their primary assumptions, allegiances, values, and worldview. The individual capitalist’s many different cultural layers exacerbate the matter. This study thus involves discovering the worldview of the capitalists within their particular business or industry culture that itself interfaces or overlays the individual’s broader ethnic and cultural worldview.

## Capitalism: A New Global Religion?

In conclusion, I note that while the three components of marketplace missiology discussed in this paper may seem to be focused primarily on a domestic, American mission agenda, nothing could be farther from the truth. Not only is capitalism a dominant reality in virtually every corner of the planet, but also, with the headlong spread of economic globalization, capitalism is being propagated like a new religion around the world. Further, the “trend now to elevate the market into a supernatural power is making the church irrelevant” (Nash 2001). We must not allow that to occur.

With the fall of Communism, the socialist model of governance and economic viability is giving way to capitalist ideals. Privatization and transnational free enterprise are being pushed globally as the panacea of the world’s problems. Regrettably, the model being pushed is a new capitalism, far from the original American-style capitalism that made the United States the economic envy of the world. This new capitalism is devoid of the Judeo-Christian ethic that formed the underpinnings of the legendary United States prosperity.

Through the three components of marketplace missiology, I hope that we in the missiological community may become God’s catalytic agents to bring about change.

On these matters, sadly, missiologists stand virtually mute. Meanwhile, the world press is seeing and commenting on the powerful way in which God’s people in the marketplace are turning to God as an ally in their businesses. Literally hundreds of marketplace ministries are now actively involved in taking Christ into the business community. And secular reporters and Christian marketplace activists alike see the marketplace as a mission field in its own right.

I advocate the inclusion of marketplace missiology in the curricula of schools of world mission and missiology. It is a major, noticeable vacuum in the current approach to the study of world mission, and the absence of these inquiries raises questions of institutional credibility and relevance in today’s “real” world.

### Notes

1. Remarks made by Dr. Ed Silviso while sharing his missiological vision for marketplace Christianity, Singapore, 1999.

2. Remarks made by Dr. Charles Van Engen, Professor of Biblical Theology of Mission, School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, to the author personally, January 12, 2002, in Pasadena.

3. Remarks made by Dr. Blackaby during a sermon keynoting the FCCI (Fellowship of Companies for Christ International) conference on “Experiencing God Through Your Business”, Hawaii, 2001.

4. A sampling of such articles includes a cover story on “Religion in the Workplace,” *Business Week*, Nov 1, 1999; “Shush – The Guy in the Cubicle is Meditating; Spirituality Is the Latest Corporate Buzzword,” *U.S News and World Report*, May 3, 1999; “A Spiritual Approach to Success,” *Inc.*, Jan 1, 2000; reportage from an interview with me, *Inc.*, an upcoming issue; “A study of Spirituality in the Workplace,” *Sloan Management Review*, summer 1999; “The Spiritual Side: Many Executives Embrace Religion in Their Businesses,” *Industry Week*, Feb 1, 1999; “Prayer Groups on Company Time,” *Industrial Distribution*, Feb 1, 2000.

5. The list of potential contemporary marketplace issues that are ripe for biblical research and reflection is virtually endless. Consider, for example, the development of biblical theologies on these capitalist topics: wealth and possessions; private ownership of land and other property; business ownership – who really owns the business – and stewardship; Christian business leadership principles and methodologies; a calling to business as a ministry; income sources, distribution, uses, and inequalities; consumption; money and markets; debtor-creditor relationships – lending, borrowing, and interest; marketplace behavior vis-à-vis clients,

customers, suppliers, vendors and competitors; employee-employer relations – just wages, hours, working conditions, work environment, safety, child labor, hiring, firing, discipline, promotions, discrimination, unemployment, trade unions; classic international, intercultural issues of human rights, oppression, exploitation, justice, and fairness, to name a few such matters; community relations – corporate social and civic responsibilities reflecting biblical social ethics, as well as issues relating to local poverty, local environmental impact, local economic and political impact; governmental relations – corporate biblical ethics regarding local governmental and military officials/authority, including biblical responses to and/or participation in corruption, bribery, local politics, torts, contracts, crimes, kidnapping, terrorism, violence, and injustices, governmental intervention in the economy from a Christian perspective; special concerns regarding biblical ethics of those engaged in corporate portfolio investment and direct foreign investment; freedom as it impacts economic contexts and decision making; and, of course, economic marketplace issues of continual economic growth, efficiency theories and practices, and free trade. This list is only illustrative! The sheer scope and magnitude of such studies underscores the need for serious, thoughtful study of contemporary marketplace issues.

6. Although the church-universal's role in marketplace missiology is a multifaceted, demanding, and complex one, Schweiker is emphatic about the church's core role in market societies. He sees

the churches as ecumenical, worldly forces that can and may and must counterbalance transnational, global agents....*The root mission of the churches is to work to inform the moral sensibilities of market societies* so that the respect and enhancement of the integrity of life are basic to the self-understanding and ethos of a society. One ought not to be naïve about this task. It is, quite simply, unending, and will have to take concrete institutional form (and constant reform). And, yet, it is the task through which the churches leave the tracks of moral history under God and for humanity. (2000:138, emphasis added)

7. Such a study would require serious consideration of the various forms of capitalism. For example, distinguishing among Adam Smith's original theories (Smith 1776; see also Solomon 1998); contemporary free market capitalism, which has been called "a new economic world order" (Halteman 1995:7, 210); democratic capitalism (Novak 1992); crony capitalism; and other modern aberrations found on the mission field. While there are myriad volumes addressing these issues, additional suggested reading on this topic would include Weber (1930), Tawney (1926), and Opitz (1992).

8. This aspect to the inquiry might well evolve into a third track of the third component of marketplace missiology, Christian economics, which would delve into the nature and history of a broader range of economic thought, systems, and practices as they relate to Christianity. Sherman and Hendricks (1987:178) have alluded to the need for a discipline of "Christian economics." James Halteman (1995) has explored that term more broadly in a controversial and provocative work, and so does Hay (1989) under a different rubric.

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