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The Purpose of Business:  
The Viewpoint of Imitatio Dei (Imitating God)

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### Abstract

The thesis of this paper can be summarized with the following propositional statements: A) The image of God established at Creation has been marred; B) God's plan of redemption includes the restoration of His image; C) the restoration process involves imitating the character of God; D) the character of God is expressed conceptually in the Ten Commandments, visibly in the life and work of Jesus Christ, and through the "grand themes" of the Bible; E) business is a setting where God restores His image and where the grand themes can be expressed; F) the grand themes are the fundamental principles of business; and G) the purpose of business is directly related to this restoration process. Contemporary secular discussions about the purpose of business are dominated by concerns over maximizing wealth. These dominant ideas are contrasted with the biblical perspective as expressed in grand biblical themes. Twelve biblical themes emerge from the study of Bible passages that describe the character of God, passages that describe the identity and work of Jesus Christ, and passages that provide instructions to believers. Implications are drawn for business practice and for higher education.

*Keywords:* academic disciplines, agency, behavioral theory, business, business education, business model, character of God, covenant, creation, evolutionary theory, great controversy, holiness, imitation of God, managerial controls, Sabbath, shalom, Jesus Christ, justice, loving kindness, neoclassical economics theory, profit, purpose, redemption, resource-based theory, righteousness, stakeholder theory, themes, theory of the firm, transaction-cost theory, truth, wealth, wisdom

### The Purpose of Business:

#### The Viewpoint of Imitatio Dei (Imitating God)

This paper is based on the following Scripture-based thinking familiar to Seventh-day Adventists: The image of God established at creation has been marred; for humans to experience all that God had planned, this image needs to be restored. God's plan of redemption, in part, is to restore His image in us to prepare us to live for eternity in Eden restored. Restoring His image is a process of divine creation requiring divine power and human cooperation of imitating God's character as revealed in the Ten Commandments and in Jesus Christ. The elements in common between descriptions of God's character, assertions regarding Jesus' identity, and descriptions of human conduct the Bible presents in terms of several recurring "grand themes." Business is an important setting where God works to restore his image in humans through the expression of these themes.

It is the thesis of this paper that the "grand themes" of Scripture, representing the elements of the character of God, are important for understanding the purpose of all producing, selling, and buying activities. Within these themes we find the fundamental principles of business. Being the elements of Jesus Christ's character, these themes are also the foundation stones of education (Isaiah 28:16; Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 6:48-49; 20:17-18; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:20). Accordingly, the purpose of business must be seen in its relationship to the restoration-imitation process in terms of these themes.

To present this thesis, this paper will first consider representative secular views on the purpose of business. The distinctive contribution of this paper will be in evaluating the purpose of business through an understanding of the character of God, to be imitated, as expressed in several grand themes of Scripture. The purpose of profit and a few examples of biblical themes in action will be presented. Inferences will be drawn for business and for business education.

#### **Secular Views**

The question of purpose is fundamental to the whole idea of any social activity, including business. Everything else follows from this, including how we design a curriculum for education.

This question has been in the minds of thinkers of business for centuries. In Adam Smith's review of how nations get wealthy he addressed the question in this way, "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all

production....” (Smith, 1776, Bk IV, Chapter 8, Para 49). Freedley (1853; 1878) considered that the fundamental purpose is “mutual help, or, as it has been expressed, *ministry*, not gain” (pp. 34-35). [Emphasis in original] But by the turn of the last century, business theorist, Thorstein Veblen (1904), reflected what had become the prevailing view when he said that gain is the purpose of all business endeavors. A few disagreed. In their treatment of the controversial issue of the primacy of stockholders, Berle and Means (1933) commented that the interests of the larger community are paramount to the claims of stockholders or managers. This broader view was also taken by the Scientific Management expert, Henry Gantt (1919).

For Peter Drucker, the famous management expert of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and someone who seems to have followed Adam Smith’s perspective, business does not exist for the purpose of employees, managers, or even stockholders. It exists for the people outside the business who get the benefits of business activities, i.e., customers. In Drucker’s (1954) view: “Even the most private of enterprises is an organ of society and serves a social function” (p. 381). Drucker (1974) counseled 20 years later that the purpose of business lies outside business in the larger society. While Drucker’s view has been accepted by a few others (McGuire, 1966; Byron, 1988; Harari, 1992; Ewin, 1995; Sternberg, 1995; Duska, 1997; Kay, 1997; Daviss, 1999; Mintzberg et al., 2002; Handy, 2002; Kline, 2006, 2009; Veblen, 2007; Ahlstrom, 2010), prevailing practice suggests that the dominant view is that purpose is tied to earning a profit.

### **Theories of the Firm**

Scores of descriptive theories of the firm have been proposed over the last two generations. The dominant theories are: the agency theory of the firm (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), neoclassical economic theory (Veblen, 1904), the resource-based theory (Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984), the behavioral theory (Cyert & March, 1963), the evolutionary theory (Alchian, 1950; Chandler, 1992), the transaction-cost theory (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1971) and the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984). These theories, simplified in Table 1 below, with a few exceptions, are predominantly *egoistic* in perspective based on the assumption that business exists for the purpose of building owners’ wealth.

**Table 1. Dominant Theories of the Firm Are Explicitly or Implicitly Egoistic**

<b>Theory of the Firm</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>Transaction-cost</b>	Companies are formed for the purpose of producing when economic costs are less to coordinate production internally rather than externally.
<b>Behavioral</b>	Individuals and groups within companies have conflicting interests and goals. The behavior of the organization is a weighted result of these conflicting goals. Economic performance is driven by decisions to satisfice rather than optimize efficiency.
<b>Agency</b>	Owners (Principals) have a difficult time monitoring the behavior of managers (Agents). The structure of the Principal-Agent relationship and the financial structure of the firm's debt and equity are designed to minimize agency costs and maximize economic profits.
<b>Neoclassical Economic</b>	Firms exist to maximize economic profit. A firm's competitive advantage, and its economic performance, is driven primarily by the structure and dynamics of the external environment in which the firm operates.
<b>Resource-based</b>	A firm's competitive advantage and its economic performance is driven primarily by the tangible and intangible resources available to it that are difficult to obtain or copy by competitors.
<b>Evolutionary</b>	Firms exist to the degree that they are able to adapt or innovate at economic costs that are lower than the costs of other alternatives. In turn, this impacts the firm's wealth.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Companies serve many stakeholders (including shareholders) that must be taken into account when achieving organizational goals. Stakeholders should be identified and treated in ways that result in higher economic performance.
Theories of the firm attempt to explain why firms exist, what boundaries firms establish between themselves and the rest of the market, why firms are organized in particular ways, and most important, what explains the differences in economic performance of firms.	

Thousands of articles have been written and thousands of empirical research projects have been completed and published showing the degree to which these theories are powerful predictors of behavior. Most of the "theories of the firm" attempt to explain why firms exist, the nature of business organizations, and what contributes to economic performance of firms in highly-competitive markets.

In the world of business scholarship one might characterize much of the scholarship as a contest among competing theories of the firm to describe reality. Although one or more of these theories dominate the thinking of leading scholars in every business discipline, Christian business scholars seem content simply to teach the theories but not critically evaluate the "theory of the firm" in light of Scripture – at least through their published scholarship. A review of the publications of the *Christian Business Faculty Association* and the *Christ in the Classroom* monograph series resulted in finding no papers directly addressing these theories of the firm (General Conference, 2006). A thorough study of the dominant theories would require a multiple-author, book-length treatment since the scope of the issues is broad and the elements that deserve attention are deep. Recent work by

Sison and Fontrodona (2012) suggests that the time is ripe for such a thorough study. Their review of the theory of the firm is based on Roman Catholic social teaching founded on the ethics of Thomas Aquinas.

### **The Business Model**

The “business model” (Magretta, 2002; Schweizer, 2005), a story about what happens in a business in its market, can be expressed in terms of several standard financial statements and related analyses. Each of these has in view the concept of profit or gain; each implies the existence of purposeful activities. None reveals the purpose of the business in its context. Furthermore, none reveals the broader purpose of business in society.

### **Managerial Controls**

Operational controls emphasize short-term task-related activities. Examples of operational managerial controls include measures of efficiency such as the profitability-oriented financial measures and output – input productivity measures. *Strategic* controls focus on the organization as a whole in the long term and, in turn, come closer to revealing the effectiveness of the organization achieving its purpose. None actually reveals purpose but are tools of purpose.

### **Wealth Maximization**

Representing what might be considered the dominant view of our day, a standard principles of finance textbook puts the matter in openly egoistical terms: “The goal of the firm, and therefore of all managers and employees, is to maximize the wealth of the owners for whom it is being operated” (Gitman & Zutter, 2011, p. 10). This idea is offered in the Brealey and Myers (2000) statement that managers of for-profit enterprises are often given a simple instruction: “Maximize net present value” (p. 25). A standard managerial economics textbook takes the same point of view (Mansfield et al., 2002). Similarly, economists Samuelson and Marks (2012) state in their text that although there are other points of view on the firm, “value maximization is a compelling *prescription* concerning how managerial decisions *should* be made” (p. 13). [Emphasis in original] Yes, other stakeholders are briefly acknowledged by these scholars and ethics is considered in such books but very briefly and superficially. The rest of the content of these and similar books shouts loud and clear: *The raison d'être of business is primarily about building the “net present value” of future cash, i.e., **wealth***. Students in Christian business schools are

required to learn from these textbooks. We celebrate when our students score as high as other students on the national exams that test knowledge of these and related principles.

Overall, secular views on the purpose of business are mixed; however, the dominant view is that the purpose of business is to increase wealth for shareholders. This view is under attack by only a few scholars and social-minded practitioners. In practice, alternative views seem to be in the minority.

### **Christian Business Scholar Views**

The question of purpose is fundamental to everything else. Rhetorical question: If purpose is not clear, or if purpose is not biblical, what happens as a result?

Few Christians have approached the question of business purpose. To date, no Seventh-day Adventist business scholar has published an essay directly on this question of the purpose of business from a scriptural perspective. None has taken on the daunting task of critically reviewing the various theories of the firm from a biblical perspective. Accordingly, the major gap in the Christian dialogue regarding business is the theory of the firm and the biblical perspective.

Some Christian theologians have criticized the heavy emphasis on building wealth; however, these have not tackled the difficult task of carefully evaluating the theory of the firm. Christian business scholars who have addressed the question have done so only briefly and generally see a broad purpose rather than a narrow economic purpose of business. Alford and Naughton (2001) as well as Cortright and Naughton (2002) and Chamberlain and Dickens (2004) represent the Roman Catholic social tradition that one purpose of business is to foster social justice.

In his book on business, Protestant Christian business executive Pollard (2004) writes: "Profit is a tool for accomplishing our end goals of honoring God and developing people.... Profit is a *means* goal in God's world, to be used and invested, not worshipped as an end in itself" (pp. 142-143). Representing a variety of views of evangelical and reformed Protestant business scholars of the late 1980s Chewning, Eby and Roels (1990) describe business purpose this way: "Business ... affords us opportunities to plan, organize, lead, follow, and develop skills in a number of areas-all mirroring godly qualities" (p. 7). These authors assert that the managerial functions themselves mirror divine qualities; however, they do not provide any guidance as to how these functions are to be



carried out in a such a way that they imitate God's character. Until recently, no one has attempted to identify from the Bible all the "godly qualities" relevant to business from the Scripture and their implications for the practice of business. What these authors refer to as "mirroring" godly qualities, other authors discuss in terms of imitating God's character.

### ***Imitatio Dei (Imitating God)***

The restoration of the image of God is a process of divine re-creation but involves the cooperation of persons in community who intend to imitate the character of God in all contexts of life including marketplace activities (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10, 16; 2 Peter 1:1-5). The process of renewal is described in different ways in Scripture: establishing a relationship with God by faith (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24); letting the transcript of God's character restore us (Deuteronomy 6:6; Psalm 19:7); letting the word of Christ dwell in us (Colossians 3:16); having Christ live in us (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:20); putting on the clothing of Christ's character (Isaiah 61:10; Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27); beholding his character and becoming changed (Hebrews 12:2); and imitating God's character in our daily life (Ephesians 5:1).

The most direct, general statement about imitating God is in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1; see also Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 John 4:11). This paper asserts that business is one of the least recognized, but perhaps one of the most important settings, where God is at work restoring his image. Herein, it seems, the fundamental purpose of business is revealed. The image of God was created in the human race, and the work of restoration, it would seem, must embrace all of humanity. Whatever part Christians in business play in the restoration of God's image, such work must extend to all of humanity, not just to Christians.

The most succinct *conceptual description* of God's character to be imitated is the Ten Commandments. (Psalm 119:18, 97, 105) The clearest *visible* expression of God's character is Jesus Christ, his identity and his work (John 12:45; 14:9; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3; 1 John 5:20). It is by beholding God's character, as shown through God's actions in Christ in history, that we become changed (Hebrews 12:2).

In addition to these expressions, Scripture writers provide expositions of, or comments on, the architecture of God's character in the form of what is called here "themes" or dominant ideas that the Bible

writers identify as they reflect on God's actions. A theme is the main concern of a story. It is the main ideas or patterns of thought that dominate the Bible. For example, the following passage from the Psalms shows David commenting on God's rulership in the universe: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne; Loving kindness and Truth go before Thee" (Psalm 89:14). It is the cluster of these themes that is focus of this paper.

### **The Grand Themes of Scripture**

The Bible contains no explicit discussions about the purpose of business. However, certain fundamental biblical themes give us a lens through which to view the question. Looking at business through the lens of God's character expressed in biblical themes is not a new idea. Donald Hay (1990) derived eight business principles from the four biblical themes of creation, fall, judgment, and the people of God. Using what he calls the major theological themes from "credal Christianity," Higginson (1993, p. 26) explores basic principles for contemporary business. These themes are drawn from the major elements of the Anglican creed that are rooted in salvation history. They include the trinity, creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and so forth. McCann (2002) looked at all social organizations through the lens of the theme of trinity. Alexander Hill (2008) identified three themes of Scripture relevant to business practice: Holiness, justice, and love. More recently Cafferky (2015) explored how several biblical themes, drawn from biblical theology, are the foundation principles for business.

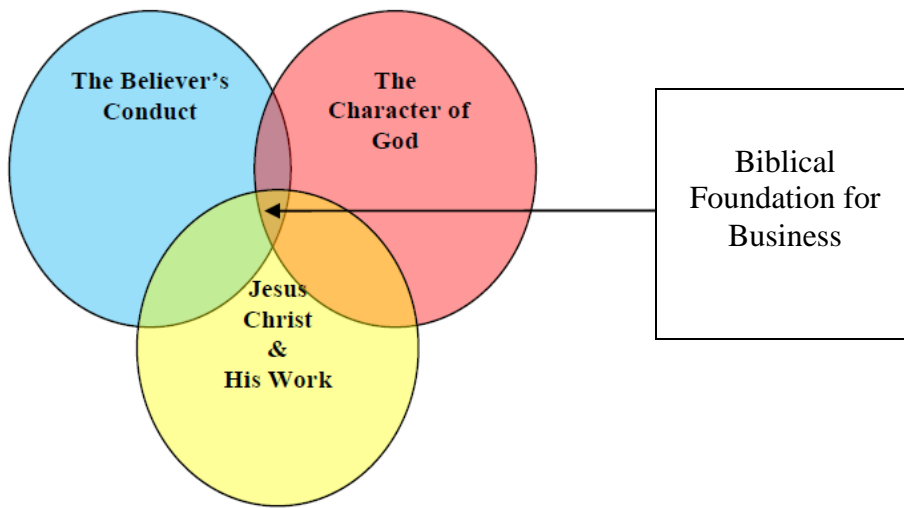
The themes presented below represent a comprehensive set of interrelated, interdependent and interwoven threads of biblical thought relevant to business. They are so closely related to each other that they are difficult to separate completely. Regardless of what other perspective one might take to understand the biblical point of view, these themes are the foundation. Biblical themes are grounded in the writings of Moses, but they are used from Genesis through Revelation. These themes are the basis of the prophets' messages. They are identified in the Psalms, wisdom literature, narratives, poetry, apocalyptic literature, gospels, and the epistles. They are mentioned together in groups (two or more themes in close proximity in the text) more than 570 times. Additionally, they are mentioned in groups in 58 (88%) of the books of the Bible. These statistics do not include the scores of biblical narratives where these themes are *implicit*.

These interrelated grand themes were not *imposed upon* Scripture. Rather, they can be observed directly *in* Scripture when considering the following types of Bible passages:

1. passages that explicitly describe the character of God;
2. passages that explicitly describe the identity and work of Jesus Christ; and
3. passages that explicitly describe the conduct of faithful believers.

Additionally, other Scripture passages relate the Holy Spirit to all but one of the themes. These three sets of Scripture passages are depicted in Illustration 1.

**Figure 1. Biblical Foundation for Business**



Where the sets overlap, the common biblical themes emerge as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Biblical Themes**

Great controversy
Creation
Holiness
Covenant
Sabbath
Shalom
Justice
Righteousness
Truth
Wisdom
Loving kindness
Redemption

The themes are the foundation for how God manages His “business” in the universe and the way of living a flourishing life in Heaven. But they are also relevant for our present life on earth; they are integral to all human social relationships, including the marketplace activities. Thus, just as Jesus Christ is the link between heaven and earth, so too are these themes the link between our worship of Jesus Christ and our business activities. They assume the validity of material and economic dimensions of life; yet, they are rooted in something much larger than this world. They are integral to flourishing life in the marketplaces of the world; but they are prophetic of life in the world to come. They apply to both buyers and sellers; they apply to non-profit organizations and government organizations. These themes are implicitly and explicitly present in and define other biblical ideas, such as stewardship. Embedded in these themes are the fundamental principles of business, whether for accounting, finance, leadership, management, international business, marketing, business law, business ethics, or any business function or context. All other business principles seem to be derivative. In short, these themes represent the essential teaching of Scripture regarding the *practice* of business.

From an education point of view, these themes apply to *all* academic disciplines and educational endeavors, not merely schools of business. They are just as relevant for curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities. They are relevant to classroom instruction, student assignments, internships, student clubs and organizations, student work on campus, and study tours. They comprise the core of the biblical worldview for any human profession or endeavor. They are the connective tissue between a biblical perspective and contemporary action. In my own work over the last 12 years they have become the implicit foundation for all of the courses that I teach.

While some work has been completed along these lines (Cafferky, 2015), much more is needed to explore the implications of each theme in terms of the purpose of business or any other academic discipline. The more they are studied in Scripture, the depth of the interrelationships among these themes becomes more apparent. In the Sabbath, for example, several other dimensions of God’s character are active. In the great controversy, all these themes are interconnected. In the idea of wisdom, the other themes live and move and have their being in Christ and the Law of God.

**Ellen White's view.** In pointing us to the Bible, Ellen White (1900) says that "religion and business are not two separate things; they are one" (pp. 349-350). Not only is the restoration of God's image the object of education, it is also the "great object of life" (White, 1903, p. 15). And, regarding the themes of Scripture she offers the following:

"In the Bible, a boundless field is opened for the imagination. The student will come from a contemplation of its grand themes, from association of its lofty imagery, more pure and elevated in thought and feeling...." (White, 1923, p. 189).

"Connected with God, every instructor will exert an influence to lead his pupils to study God's word, and to obey his law. He will direct their minds to the contemplation of eternal interests, and open before them vast fields for thought; grand and ennobling themes, which the most vigorous intellect may put forth all its powers to grasp...." (White, 1923, p. 40).

The Bible writers present the elements of God's character in the form of grand themes of Scripture, including the following explored here: how God manages the great controversy, holiness, creation, covenant, Sabbath, shalom, justice, righteousness, truth, wisdom, loving kindness, and redemption. Each of these will be addressed briefly.

**Great controversy.** (Genesis 3:15; Psalms 45:3-7; Ephesians 6:12-17; 1 John 3:8; Romans 19:11) The other themes intersect with this theme. Business provides people opportunities to reflect God's character. Business is to serve much higher purposes than exchanging things of value on earth. It is not just local or global; it is cosmic! In part, the purpose of business is seen in the answer to the question, "*How does God manage the universe when creatures disagree with his principles for a flourishing life?*" A core business principle emerging from the great controversy is that of fostering freedom within boundaries. Business purpose encompasses the challenge to Christians, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). True *net present value* is character and relational. Much more work needs to be done to explore how Christians in business can skillfully advocate on behalf of God's character, resist the evil in the marketplace, and at the same time remain effective.

**Creation.** (Psalm 104:24; John 1:3; Ephesians 2:10). Everything that a business uses when creating and delivering value to customers came from the hand of our Creator/Redeemer. Net present value is established not by any discounted future cash flow method but by God. In this we see a deep purpose of business: To serve in the capacity of co-worker, co-sustainer of flourishing life. For example, business activities are rooted in the commission

to subdue the earth and *rule over* it (Genesis 1:26-28) by creating social institutions to facilitate production, exchange, and distribution of goods and services. But business activities also should foster the *servicing* of the earth and its inhabitants (Genesis 2:15). Business is an organized means of fulfilling God's intent for us to work and serve each other. Those who work in commerce are the hands and feet of God's providential sustaining power for billions of people around the globe. Business fosters God-created community interdependencies from which everyone can benefit. To undermine these interdependencies is to undermine the basis of our fundamental relationships in society.

**Holiness.** (Exodus 15:11; Romans 1:4; Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 7:26; 2 Peter 3:11). The holiness of God involves two, seemingly opposite, qualities. On the one hand, God's moral purity is without sin and because of this he is far removed from it. On the other hand, it is God's holiness that drives him to come toward sinners. In following this principle, humans are asked to be separate from the world, yet living in that world (John 17:15). By inference, our buying and selling behaviors are to be distinctly different from the way the world buys and sells. Net present value is insufficient as the standard of success.

**Covenant relationships.** (Deuteronomy 4:13; 7:9; Psalm 19:7; Malachi 3:1). In the Bible profit is always seen in the context of covenant relationships. Covenant comprehends a wide network of interdependencies where much more is at stake than what one party wants. In covenant, the relationship is most important. In terms of covenant relationships, the purpose of business is for fostering such deeply committed, long-term relationships. Business is for revealing the character of the parties in the relationship. It is to serve the extended relationships that connect us all in the larger community. Accordingly, net present value must be primarily covenantal and communal rather than egoistical and individual. What one person or one company does to build economic wealth must have the wealth of the larger community in view.

**Sabbath.** (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Mark 2:27-28). The purpose of business, in terms of the Sabbath, is to promote the work-rest interdependent relationship. Although Sabbath is an important, particular day of the week set apart *from* work to be devoted to worship to God, at a deeper level Sabbath is a set of principles which should be taken *to* work (Cafferky, 2013a). It is in Sabbath rest that we also find contentment – rest from our natural inclinations toward acquisitiveness. Sabbath is indeed a test of loyalty, but it is not an

arbitrary, random test. Sabbath refers to faithfulness in the entire relationship with God where persons in community rest from human efforts to achieve reconciliation with God. It also refers to commitment to a set of principles designed to foster flourishing life. Thus, Sabbath is a miniature representation of all the principles of a flourishing relationship with God, namely, his Law. This test of loyalty is integral to covenant relationships. Sabbath represents 14.285% of productive time foregone for the sake of goals that are bigger than self. In this we can see that Sabbath calls us to constrain net present value.

**Shalom.** (Psalm 34:14; Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 54:10; Colossians 3:15). The purpose of business as an institution in society is not profit *per se* but rather is rooted in society's need for sharing common values related to living a flourishing life in its totality. To understand the Scriptural idea of profit we must understand the broader concept of prosperity (Cafferky, 2014). In the Bible, prosperity is primarily *communal* (but does not completely ignore the individual), it is *multidimensional* (prosperity encompasses the totality of life), and it is *multigenerational* (we are prosperous when our grandchildren are prosperous). The process of determining to what extent a business serves the greater good of society requires ongoing community dialog among suppliers, customers, employees, managers and regulators all of whom have slightly different perspectives on the issues. However much we might value profit some things have still higher value, including well-being and love in the home (Proverbs 15:17; 17:1), a good reputation (Proverbs 22:1), righteousness (Proverbs 11:4, 28; 16:8), integrity (Proverbs 28:6), wisdom (Job 28:16; Proverbs 3:13-15; 8:11), and the Kingdom of Heaven. From this point of view, profit is indeed something that should be pursued if, and only if, it is pursued as part of the pursuit of true prosperity. Business is the place where shalom can be extended to others. Business must be an active agent in fostering justice: "No justice, no shalom (peace)!" Net present value is primarily communal, multi-dimensional and multi-generational.

**Justice.** (Proverbs 21:3; Micah 6:8; Psalm 89:14; Isaiah 9:6-7). In the Bible justice is not merely how we *think* about others. It involves actions we take that open up the channels of shalom blessing to others. The most vulnerable in the land must have justice come to them. Justice flows down from those in positions of authority to others. It must flow through the marketplace nourishing all who benefit by business. Accordingly, the purpose of business is to be a channel of justice in the marketplace so that many can receive blessings. Marketplace workers

will act in just ways to everyone in the community, even to strangers who may be unfamiliar with local customs or standard prices. Justice is blind to net present value.

**Righteousness.** (Psalm 33:5; 106:3; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Titus 2:12). Humans are called upon to imitate God's behavior in the community. Righteousness is seen in God's actions, which show his faithfulness to his promises. Righteousness is blameless behavior that is evaluated by the community in terms of the 10 covenant principles. It means actions that promote justice. The core idea means to be straight and firm or steel-like rather than slack, to be strong and enduring in faithfulness to the principles of the Covenant. The biblical purpose of business in society is to lend stability to the larger community by acting in ways that support covenantal relationships. Business will not undermine firmness to principle but rather will encourage firmness. Economic wealth may be the popular way to judge performance. The Bible calls us to use a different standard to evaluate net present value.

**Truth.** (Psalm 111:7-8; Proverbs 23:23; John 14:6). Truth means faithfulness in action when tested by time and circumstance. Truth means that there is a close correspondence between our actions and what others expect from us. In other words, truth means that we are who we say we are: faithful in all covenant relationships. The purpose of business is to be one of the structures in society that encourages faithfulness, trustworthiness and consistency when values are exchanged. In contemporary terms, truth involves living a consistent life over time without hypocrisy. In essence, advancing truth means advancing the cause of faithfulness to commitments in and around the community. Activities in the market that result in gain are legitimate to the degree that they are consistent with covenantal relationships.

**Wisdom.** (Proverbs 3:13; 23:23; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 3:8-11). On their own, humans are limited in their ability to gather true wisdom for all of life. In this regard, the nature of wisdom is similar to the nature of shalom: It encompasses all dimensions of life envisioned in covenant relationships. Practicality, efficiency, productivity, and profitability are results of wise actions that are covenantal by nature. This is what makes it so practical! Wisdom is the ability to consider something diligently or closely and thereby have insight and understanding regarding it. Wisdom is not excellence in practical knowledge. It is knowledge about life in covenant relationships; it means being smart in terms of covenant relationships in the community. The purpose of business



is not only to be the repository of knowledge about how to efficiently exchange things of value in the market or the most practical ways of doing business. Activities in the market that result in gain are legitimate to the degree that they are consistent with covenantal relationships.

Shouldn't we strive to be the "head and not the tail?" (Deuteronomy 28:13; see also Deuteronomy 26:19; 2 Chronicles 7:20). Yes, but this is a *communal* experience not an *individual* goal to strive for. When we take merely an individual perspective, we expand the role of the one thing that we want to excel at (physical health, knowledge, wealth). This dwarfs the other dimensions of shalom. The children of Israel were seen as the head, not the tail, as they obeyed the covenant. Head and tail are primarily covenantal principles, not dimensions of life in isolation from the covenant. It was as the community kept the *moral* standards of the covenant that they would become healthy and prosperous as a community. As this communal prosperity developed, they would advance beyond the other nations around them and become known for their flourishing life.

**Loving kindness.** (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 117:2; John 1:14; Romans 8:39). Loving kindness must not be limited to an emotion or feeling of affection. Its root idea is that of deep, abiding loyalty even when wronged. Love is not limited to thinking and talking. Like the other grand themes, it is action oriented. We can only show love by acting, not by promising. Business is about fostering loyalty in relationships with the community. Businesses can support interpersonal loyalty by how they structure deals with customers and how they go about attracting customers. Offering deals to customers that tempt them to undermine their relationship with their family undermines loving kindness. Net present value must allow room for acting unselfishly to help someone else even if such help causes a loss for the one helping. In other words, net present value must be constrained by nurturing the interests of others.

**Redemption.** (Psalm 111:9; Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 6:20). The Bible portrays the understanding that God wants us to use our assets (possessions) to serve others, which includes serving the poor (Deuteronomy 15:8; Psalm 112:5-9; Proverbs 19:17; Isaiah 58:7; Matthew 5:42; Luke 12:33). God's plan of redemption comprehends everything he has created. As imitators of God, leaders in business act redemptively toward all of God's creation. The purpose of business can also be integral to the mission of the church, namely, that business is a support for a

setting in which the gospel of Christ can be extended around the earth. Simply put, the purpose of business, like any other human endeavor, is to be the means by which we glorify God.

#### **Additional Implications of These Themes**

With the biblical themes in mind we can see a little further regarding the purpose of business. First, business must be an integral part of the whole plan of salvation, not merely profession of faith leading to baptism. In business we are not only preparing people to receive the message about the Savior on the Cross, which leads to initial saving faith. We are also preparing people for and encouraging the lifetime process of sanctification and the consummation of the Plan of Salvation for all eternity. Second, business can also be the context in which unbelievers can question their worldview.

Third, the marketplace is a crucible in which new believers and all believers live out their faithfulness to God. In the evangelism process we see foreshadowing of what an unreserved commitment to Christ will mean in the whole life, the transformation of character that is envisioned. This will help those around us to count the high cost of discipleship but it will also attract them to the high value of discipleship.

Fourth, the purpose of business is to prepare others for the plausibility that the character of God is relevant to human well-being.

Fifth, in Jesus' great commission in Matthew 28: 18-20, an interesting phrase is often glossed over or reinterpreted to mean the 28 fundamental beliefs of the SDA church, i.e., v. 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." When we review the content of Jesus' teachings in the four Gospels, we conclude that, like Moses, Jesus was expanding on the Character of God and what it means for faithful followers. It is something larger and deeper than 28 doctrines.

If we compare the biblical perspective with contemporary, secular views we can see interesting contrasts as illustrated by Table 3.

**Table 3 Comparison of the World with the Bible**

The World	The Bible
<b>Purpose of Business</b>	
Maximizing wealth	The social setting to demonstrate the character of God
Serve the economic prosperity needs of the firm and the financial interests of shareholders	Foster “true prosperity” and the interests of God; embedded in grand themes
<b>Prosperity</b>	
Economic	Covenantal
Unidimensional	Multi-dimensional, multi-generational
Primarily individual	Primarily communal
<b>Wisdom</b>	
Smart management of cash	Smart management of covenantal relationships
Separates financial concerns from other concerns	Grounds economic concerns in true prosperity
Optimizing performance	Prudence; Optimizing shalom
Egoism, relativism	Absolutism; character of God
<b>Great Controversy</b>	
Competition for scarce resources	Christ vs. Satan
Humans save themselves via economics, technology, politics	Humans cannot save themselves; they can contribute to well-being
Business is local, national, global	Business is cosmic
Moral muteness	Moral leadership
Business is the proving ground for success	The earth is the proving ground for the divine principles of living
The market deals with “evil”	Resist evil
<b>Plan of Redemption</b>	
Humans create happiness through market efficiency	Humans are co-workers with God in the restoration of his image
Humans save themselves through economics, technology, and politics	The whole plan of redemption is the lens through which to view purpose of business

**Profit**

If profit is not *the* purpose of business, then what is the point of profit? Profit, when emphasized by itself, downplays the shared societal values that are at the root of why we enter into exchange relationships with each other in particular markets. If the purpose of entering into exchanges was to merely gain a profit, the means by which these purposes are achieved would quickly turn to violence, destroying the ability of society to realize its shared values.

Profit is a signal of how efficiently the business is meeting the needs of others in society. An often-used analogy is that of breathing. We don’t live for the purpose of taking in oxygen and expelling carbon dioxide. The purpose of life is larger than that, but we cannot live without breathing. Too much oxygen actually harms the

human. Likewise, generating too much profit causes problems for the organization: unwise and perhaps arrogant management decisions, unsafe working conditions, or short-changing customers on value.

Profit, if earned in a just manner, is the signal to investors and managers from the community that the community expects to support the business in the future.

Some might say that profit is good not only for the organization but also for society. Until a business earns an economic profit, it uses more resources from society than it returns as value back to society. A business operating at an economic loss destroys the wealth that otherwise could be used to develop and distribute new products and services.

Profit, while beneficial if earned by just means, paradoxically can become destructive if it is earned in excess. Leaders in an organization who are merely interested in making money would become hopelessly focused on short-term gain to the firm's long-term detriment. The pursuit of short-term gains would torpedo investment for the long run. Managers would stop looking for ways to make the organization better. They would have little need to innovate. Thus, even from a practical point of view making profit the purpose of business simply doesn't work very well unless you are willing to live a socially or economically destructive existence.

A business is not merely an economic entity. It is a community of people committed to providing products and services that are valued by the larger communities in society. By way of contrast, in the context of the modern corporation, the relationships of stockholders, board directors, and creditors generally do not produce the value. When the leaders of a corporation focus exclusively on the profit that is earned as a result of the collaborative effort of the people in the firm, the company actually begins to die even though the financial statements might indicate that it is thriving. Instead, when a corporation contributes to society by offering goods and services, by helping to minimize the transaction costs of customers exchanging with them in the marketplace, and by contributing to the greater good of society through how it uses the community's resources, it is maximizing its overall contribution to society. But to attempt to separate the economic outcomes of a firm from the social impact of the firm or too narrowly define the social impact of a firm merely in terms of its economic impact, is to gloss over or even to tear apart the larger social reason a firm exists.

### Examples in Practice

The following are offered as a few examples of the practical dimension of biblical themes.

#### Great Controversy

The Great Controversy theme calls us to imitate God's governance of the universe when Satan sought to discredit Christ for his own selfish political gain. Accordingly, managers imitate Christ when they are longsuffering with egoist colleagues. They also attempt to broaden the perspective of others away from narrow selfishness. However, they set limits on the behaviors of employees that are destructive in the organization. They prevent bullying and open expressions of anger that escalate toward violence. An example of this is the J. M. Smucker company founded by a Christian. One of the explicit company "rules" is that open expressions of anger are not tolerated.

Managers following God's way of managing will use managerial control and feedback reporting systems as positive influences on ethical behavior. This promotes openness and transparency.

While all may not be called by the Holy Spirit to be a prophetic voice in the marketplace, certainly some faithful believers will be called (Cafferky, 2013b). The Scripture calls on us to resist the Devil (James 4:7; see also Ephesians 4:27; 6:12-17). Christians have tended to personalize this by focusing on the personal temptations the Great Deceiver brings to us. What many in business are not talking about is the call to resist Satan in the marketplace, in the organizations for which we work. Courageous, faithful followers will not merely speak negative criticisms about ethical lapses in their industry or company. They will propose positive alternatives. They will present the business reasons that accrue from reforms. Whenever possible, they will speak in private; however, sometimes public prophetic voices are needed.

#### Holiness

The book of Leviticus in the Bible has been called the "Holiness Code" of the Bible. Leviticus shows how some of the principles of flourishing life can be nourished in the community. More than merely a list of "dos and don'ts," these reveal deeper principles at stake. Some of these examples are addressed in the book of Deuteronomy. Table 4 shows the specific expression of holiness from Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the left

column. The right column gives an example from the current business environment showing how holiness might be expressed in buying and selling activities.

**Table 4. Application of Holiness Theme.**

<b>LEVITICUS &amp; DEUTERONOMY</b>	<b>CURRENT BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT</b>
<p><b>Fairness:</b> Do not defraud others; do not manipulate cash flow to your own advantage that results in hurt of your neighbor (Lev 19:13; Deut 24:14).</p>	<p>Do not get more influence in the organization by being deceitful or using dirty tricks.</p> <p>Do not use loopholes in company policy to take advantage of employees on compensation issues (e.g., categorizing employees as “exempt” and then expecting them to work long hours without consideration; signing contract with independent “consultant” or other workers that define work quantity in large blocks and then expect these persons to take on work that comes in smaller blocks without compensation).</p> <p>Do not use loopholes in company policy to take advantage of the company on financial issues (e.g., incurring an expense for personal benefit but under the guise of providing service to the organization and then asking for reimbursement).</p> <p>Be faithful in paying what you promise to vendors. Don’t try to manipulate vendors with your words in order to avoid paying on time.</p>
<p><b>Generosity:</b> Leave some life-sustaining resources for the orphans, widows, poor and strangers who are vulnerable or who have difficulty accessing these (Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19).</p>	<p>Hire workers who are autistic or developmentally disabled so that they can experience the joy of service to others.</p> <p>Share a portion of company profits or personal income to help segments of society that are vulnerable.</p> <p>Contribute to the welfare of orphans, widows and the poor.</p>
<p><b>Compassion:</b> Do not take an injurious or insulting action toward other people who cannot act to prevent the injury or the insult. Do not secretly, for your own advantage, harm others who cannot defend themselves or make choices because they lack key information (Lev 19:14, 32; Deut 27:18).</p>	<p>When someone on the committee misses a committee meeting, do not give this person an assignment when they do not have informed consent.</p> <p>When someone is not available to participate in key negotiations for access to resources, such as scheduling work, include them in the process so they are not surprised.</p>

### **Implications for Higher Education**

Scripture themes, if used as the foundation stones for the curriculum of an educational system from kindergarten through graduate school, could transform the brand of Adventist education, making it truly distinctive from secular institutions.

#### **Biblical Foundations of Academic Disciplines – A Self-Study Approach**

Accrediting agencies typically ask educational institutions to conduct a self-study to measure compliance with accreditation standards. We may not enjoy doing the work for these agencies, but knowing that a self-study is required for accreditation, such an exercise can be accomplished in terms of the broad biblical themes that are addressed in the curriculum. For example, a relatively simple self-study can be conducted regarding the number of minutes devoted to biblical foundations in core courses that students are required to complete for graduation. Two tables can be created from this study. The first table would report the number of *contact minutes* devoted to biblical foundations in each of the required *core courses* in a particular school or department. When all schools and departments have reported the results, the second table would become a summary of the entire institution as seen from the point of view of the broad academic disciplines. A similar study could be completed for general education courses.

#### **Combating a Crowded Faculty Meeting Agenda**

Look at the items in faculty meeting agendas month to month. How much time is spent on “the desires for other things which enter and choke out the word?” (Mark 4:19). We are concerned about what outside organizations require of us. We desire to have our students become successful *individuals*. This drives the meeting agendas to leave, in some cases, almost no room for discussions of how the Bible might be the basis of our curriculum.

#### **Implications for B-Schools**

Just as these themes suggest a radical departure from contemporary “best practices” in business, so too, they suggest something radical for Christian business education, a radical manifesto which has not yet caught on among Christian business scholars. Christians new to business practice, i.e., graduates from business schools, need to understand the deep connections between business and the Bible message. This will help them recognize

opportunities to advocate on behalf of the Character of God in the midst of business functions. Christians new to business practice will develop an identity at some point. Without a clear compelling sense of Christian identity with respect to marketplace activities and roles, the identity that they do form over time may or may not be based on a biblical foundation.

This has implications for the curriculum in a business school. What we need is not more courses to require of students, as if cramming more training in before they graduate will help them be more successful. Rather, what we need is less time spent on the technical dimensions and more time spent on developing a faithful Christian identity. Christians new to business may not know how to represent the Character of God in typical business situations where explicitly referring to anything from the Bible will immediately shut people's ears. For example, Christians new to business will need to know how to identify when a nonbeliever is beginning to question his worldview or when a fellow worker is in spiritual crisis, and then they will need to have skills to respond appropriately.

### **Evaluating Contemporary Theories of the Firm**

The dominant, secular theory of the firm has a direct and profound impact on most of the core business curriculum, including business ethics, business law, management, business finance, strategy, entrepreneurship, economics, and marketing. As business faculty, we have spent a lot of time debating what should be required in the core of the curriculum. Yet, we celebrate when students score high on the Major Field Test in the area of finance. Scores on the finance section are literally applauded by alumni when they hear the news. For years the business finance course was held up as the paragon of business learning in our business school, while the dominant theory of the firm at the root of the course is as much in conflict with the biblical record of our Creator as the theory of evolution is in biology. Not once in 12 years has a conversation taken place regarding critically evaluating the core curriculum in terms of the dominant secular theories in the light of Scripture themes. Until Christians begin the difficult work of critically evaluating the contemporary theories of the firm with our students, we will continue to implicitly teach these theories and let students fend for themselves in terms of a biblical foundation. In the field of biology, evolution is the dominant theory that has brought Christians vigorously into scholarly dialogue about the implications of the theory for research and teaching. Currently, there is no stream of



vigorous Christian scholarship evaluating the dominant theories of the firm that we teach students every day. The Seventh-day Adventist church spends millions of dollars in research to combat the influence of the theory of evolution. It spends zero dollars to combat the influence of the dominant theories of the firm which may be much more insidious in their impact on university students. Not one dollar has been asked of donors to fund a research center devoted to better understanding the biblical idea of prosperity, the best pedagogy for helping students grasp the deep implications of the Scriptural perspective. Not a penny has been spent on developing even one scholar who can effectively enter the scholarly dialogue by counteracting the prevailing views using Scriptural principles.

Seventh-day Adventists hold high the Law of God as the immutable transcript of His Character. At the center of this Law, a miniature representation of it is the Sabbath. While Adventists hold in high regard the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath as the day of worship, there are few Adventist voices calling for keeping Sabbath principles Sunday through Friday. One of these principles is that Sabbath is a structural limitation on wealth maximization. How can Adventists continue to promote Sabbath-keeping and not trumpet the Scripture principles regarding constraints on wealth building?

### **Tradeoffs**

The elephant in the room that I hear no one talking about is tradeoffs. Every 10 minutes spent in class period covering a biblical theme and its implications for students means ten minutes not spent covering important information from the academic discipline. Every hour an instructor spends in Bible study in preparation for a class period is an hour that could have been spent looking for new examples, new activities, interesting illustrations. For every hour students spend on an assignment related to the biblical foundations in their discipline, they have one hour less to spend on other homework which advances their understanding of management, accounting, finance, and any other course they are taking.

### **Conclusion**

The thesis of this paper can be summarized with the following propositional statements: (A) The image of God established at Creation has been marred; (B) God's plan of redemption includes the restoration of His image; (C) the restoration process involves imitating the character of God; (D) the character of God is expressed

conceptually in the Ten Commandments, visibly in the life and work of Jesus Christ, and through the “grand themes” of the Bible; (E) business is a setting where God restores His image and where the grand themes can be expressed; (F) the grand themes become the fundamental principles of business; and (G) the purpose of business is directly related to this restoration process. Contemporary secular discussions about the purpose of business are dominated by concerns over maximizing wealth. These dominant ideas are contrasted with the biblical perspective as expressed in grand biblical themes. Twelve biblical themes emerge from the study of Bible passages that describe the character of God, passages that describe the identity and work of Jesus Christ, and passages that instruct believers.

If we broaden the definition of evangelism and mission to encompass the whole plan of salvation where the restoration of the image of God is in full view, something that is supported by the biblical themes considered here, we can see opportunities for engaging in mission and evangelism *during* work, rather than conceiving of these functions as things we do *after* work. Furthermore, such a broadened perspective challenges the prevailing view of what it means for the Christian to work in a publically-traded, for-profit organization. If Christian business professionals absent themselves from this more challenging context, on what basis can it be said that such persons are faithful co-workers with God in the process of restoring His image?

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