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# The Church of Jesus Christ: *A Business?*

Due to the powerful influence of commercialism, many churches and ministries across the world are increasingly looking like businesses. The language of business is replacing biblical and theological vocabulary at a very fast pace. Market share, marketing, public relations, needs analysis, customer satisfaction, environmental scanning, strategic plan, change management, efficiency, and so forth, are replacing evangelism, discipleship, compassion, Christian education, faith promise, caring, and the like, in many churches. These concepts did not arrive from major theological institutions, but from the best business schools of the world, particularly in the United States of America. A similar change in church vocabulary took place a generation ago when psychology made its way into the churches and provided an additional model of pastoral ministry and image of pastor as therapist. [I was in the divinity school when it happened and must confess that it was not all bad once some corrections took place.]

Many of today's business concepts are important and can certainly contribute to the efficient running of the organizational aspects of the community of faith. They can assist in running the organization in a businesslike fashion. The problem is that the border between business and businesslike is disappearing in many places. I am not claiming that some unscrupulous people are causing this problem. Actually, it is the result of good people with very good intentions applying business concepts to the body of Christ without serious biblical and theological reflection. They are simply adapting good business principles and practices without "baptizing them."

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Here's the problem: The church is not simply an organization; it is primarily a living organism. The Bible does not dwell on the organizational aspects of the church; instead, it uses familial language to describe the church. The church is the family of God, the community of faith, the body of Christ, and the household of faith. A family is not about bottom line. It is about relationships and stewardship. It is a place of sacrifices and nurturing, not profit, profit-sharing, customer satisfaction, and normal concepts of return on investment.

Please don't misunderstand me. The church has always been involved with the marketplace. Marketplace can be a context of ministry and a contributor to ministry. The role of the marketplace in advancing the Kingdom of God cannot be minimized. From the Book of Acts all the way to the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship, history tells us about the potential and positive impact of the marketplace in advancing the Kingdom of God.

However, the church is not simply a business. The difference between business and businesslike must be preserved in the context of the church of Jesus Christ and its ministries.

Three business concepts have contributed to the confusion in this regard—leadership, change, and efficiency. These can be called three obsessions. The assumption is that everyone must be a leader, all changes are good and needed, and efficiency is the highest value in all situations. Let's briefly review these concepts.

Leadership: It seems everyone is talking about leadership. There are so many books available on this subject. Seminars and



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Yes, the Bible talks about shepherds, elders, presbyters, et al., much more than about leaders. The word "leader" appears only very few times in the Bible. We are advised to remember our leaders and to imitate their faith, but the word of God is not obsessed with the idea of leadership.

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conferences on the topic of leadership are available in every imaginable field. The truth is that the Bible says very little about leadership as this concept is understood in today's society. The scripture talks much more about followership!

Yes, the Bible talks about shepherds, elders, presbyters, et al., much more than about leaders. The word "leader" appears only very few times in the Bible. We are advised to remember our leaders and to imitate their faith, but the word of God is not obsessed with the idea of leadership. Biblical advice is more about following. We are called to follow Jesus. We are to take up the cross and follow Christ. The emphasis in the modern concept of leadership is on the leader. The focus of biblical leadership is on the people who follow. Biblical leaders are those who feed and care. Nurturing is the main work of biblical leaders—not bossing around others. In fact, Jesus said it should not be so among His followers.

God anoints certain people to lead others, but the spirit in which they lead is not arrogance; it is service. In the Kingdom of God, leaders are servants and followers at the same time. Biblical leaders can require others to follow them only as they follow Christ. Not everyone should be a leader in the body of Christ. It is OK to be a follower in the family of God.

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Change is the second concept. Nothing is ever good enough. Things must change for the sake of change alone.

Certainly there are things in life and ministry that need to change. I am not denying that some things in church and society must change.

But the idea that constant change is what is needed in all situations is not right. Some changes are unnecessary and unprofitable. Some things should be left alone. Change is not a prerequisite for happiness or profit. Change the things that need to be changed. Don't repair unbroken things. This is especially true about relationships and values.

Efficiency is the third concept. Of course, efficiency is a good thing, but there are higher values than efficiency in some situations. A grandmother may not be the most efficient member of the family, but do you want to replace her? Tithing may not be the most efficient financial management by some measures, but do you want to stop giving to God? Raising children is not the most efficient way to spend money, but do you want to disown your children? No, certainly not. Efficiency is important, but sometimes there are other values that are

more important. Relationships matter. Sometimes ministry is inefficient. You may keep a particular ministry open a little longer for biblical reasons. This is consistent with Kingdom principles.

So what is the bottom line? The church is not a business, but its organizational aspects must be run like a business. Many churches and ministries are guilty of sloppy and sometimes illegal operations and business practices. Applying excellent business practices to the organizational parts of the church is good Christian stewardship, but great caution must be taken not to blur the lines

between the life and mission of the body of Christ and its operational responsibilities. The church of Jesus Christ in the world today is both an organism and an

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