

# FAITH INTEGRATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL ARENA OF BUSINESS

*Jan Weisen*

*“There is no conflict between the best in Christianity and  
the best in Education.”* —Dean Bertha Munro,  
*Eastern Nazarene College, 1923-1957*

No one should be surprised that a paper on faith and business would be near the last section of this project. Given the continued scandals throughout the past several decades involving unlawful and questionable ethical behavior by business leaders, young and old alike, one could hardly be blamed if he or she questioned the compatibility of faith and business, much less faith in business. It should not be comforting for those of us involved with business education to realize that some opinion polls have placed those involved with business less favorably than politicians.<sup>56</sup> Names of organizations such as Adelphia, WorldCom, Enron, and Merck, and people like Kenneth Lay and Bernie Madoff hit the headlines, and when we believe we’ve heard it all, “bubbles” are named after more financial debacles that end up affecting us all in ways we still have yet to fully understand.

One result of past business scandals has been the call for business schools to teach ethics more thoroughly. At its foundation, ethical behavior is based on some system of values and beliefs. With the call to “teach more ethics,” people eventually get around to asking, sometimes arguing, about

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whose values are to be used upon which to base our ethical teachings. Whether we teach ethics via a course on business ethics or spread across the curriculum, the inclusion of ethics in and of itself cannot transform even one of our students into



a new person with a new set of values. That outcome can be accomplished only through Christ and His Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17). In an age when people increasingly segment and compartmentalize their lives, we would be foolish to believe that “business ethics” is a world unto itself with its unique set of values of right and wrong, and that the teaching of “ethics” is the philosophy or religion department’s responsibility. Indeed ethical behavior should be modeled, taught, and expected in all departments across campus. It is in just such an environment where our Nazarene colleges and universities should be the proverbial city on a hill.

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Jesus’ call for us to follow Him (John 21:22) can include a business career and as such can and should be a high and holy calling. With the proliferation of not-for-profit agencies; non-governmental organizations; and humanitarian and mission organizations, the need for godly men and women with the knowledge and skills to serve has never been greater.

One of the missional core values is the church’s mission to higher education that is committed to the open and honest pursuit of knowledge and truth; the development of Christian character; and the equipping of leaders to accomplish our God-given calling of serving in the church and the world. Many a well-intentioned graduate has climbed the ladder of success to find at the end of the day that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall during their entire career. So how do we as Christian business faculty integrate our theology into a curriculum of the four P’s of marketing (product, price, promotion, and place); the debits and credits of accounting; wise investments; and so on?

A starting point perhaps should be what Wesley called three plain rules: “Gain all you can; save all you can; give all you can.”<sup>57</sup> Wesley believed in working hard, but within limits. For Wesley, implicit in this is honorable gain that would please the Lord and does not harm one’s mind, body,

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soul, or that of one's neighbor. "Wesley's primary criterion for selection of an occupation was not the consideration of one's abilities and inclinations, but the possibilities of service that is pleasing to God. Money and professional activity in the Christian calling should not be ends in themselves, but rather means leading to a higher goal: fulfillment of the divine will, consisting specifically in the commandment to love."<sup>58</sup> A great place to begin should be in our advising regarding the courses students take inside and outside of their core classes. But at the end of the day in a very real, practical way, students need to know that their faith should be lived out in the products/services one provides at a fair price; the ethical treatment of employees, regardless of their country of residency; and the relationships with vendors, suppliers, customers, and stakeholders.

**T**he practical outcome of the second rule ("save all you can") is that we as individuals and organizations would not waste our resources in what Wesley called gratifying the desires of the flesh. The list is long and varied, and many an institution has fallen from a leadership position in what has been described as "the undisciplined pursuit of more."<sup>59</sup> Instant gratification is a temptation to us all, but the saying "cash is king" has been true throughout history, and Wesley would have agreed.

At this time, 44 of the 50 states in the U.S.A. are projecting budget shortfalls of \$125 billion for the 2012 fiscal year with no easy solutions in sight.<sup>60</sup> Notwithstanding the recent increase in personal savings over the past two years of approximately 5.5%, the average personal savings rate is still

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low compared with that of other countries.<sup>61</sup> Combined with a consumer debt of approximately 2.4 trillion dollars,<sup>62</sup> it is clear that we've not followed Wesley's second rule as closely as we could have. This debt equates to almost \$7,800 per man, woman, and child living in the United States, based on 2010 census data.

Wesley believed that the three rules are inextricably bound together in such a way that failure to do the third while accomplishing the first two would preclude possessions from pleasing God and from becoming a blessing for others, and ultimately possessions would become a temptation difficult to overcome. Students need to be challenged to pursue a career with a purpose and to understand that a good name individually and corporately is priceless. The issue of corporate social responsibility has become a necessary undertaking for businesses as they navigate the turbulent waters of public



perception. Students need to understand that being good global, corporate citizens is not just to allow them to look good in the eyes of their community or to increase the bottom line. Wealth as such is amoral. Unlike last year's fashion, "doing the right thing" should never go out of style.

Everything that wealth can achieve, be it good or evil, depends on how people choose to use it. The biblical admonition for stewardship of God's resources is that those who have been trusted with much will have much to answer for.

Carrying out the above activities with integrity is not a goal one strives to achieve and, once acquired, like a trophy, is put on the shelf to be admired but never attended to again. It is an on-going commitment to be genuine in a too often virtual world that becomes part of the organizational DNA that needs to be intentionally re-born into future institutional generations. Being successful here leads to an organization built on trust, with leadership that inspires confidence; fosters personal credibility and accountability at all levels; and

includes a determination to accomplish the mission in spite of the obstacles.<sup>63</sup>

Wesley saw the need to understand and use worldly wealth as a wise steward (Luke 16:9), knowing the potential threat it poses to oneself and others. Like Jesus sent His followers out, we send our students out like sheep among wolves. Like Jesus' disciples, they need to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16). ■

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#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>66</sup>Jennifer Merritt, "For MBA's, Soul-Searching 101," *Business Week*, Sept. 16, 2002, 64-65.
- <sup>67</sup>Wesley, John. "Sermon XLIV: The Use of Money," vol. 2 of Wesley's *Standard Sermons*, Edition Number 1, ed. Edward H. Sugden (London: The Epworth Press, 1921).
- <sup>68</sup>Manfred Marquardt, *Praxis und Prinzipien der Sozialethik John Wesley's [John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles]*, translated by John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abington Press, 1991), 39.
- <sup>69</sup>James C. Collins, *How the Mighty Fall and Why Some Companies Never Give In* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).
- <sup>70</sup>Elizabeth McNichol, Phil Oliff, and Nicholas Johnson, "States Continue to Feel Recession's Impact," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities* (Feb. 10, 2011). <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&tid=711>.
- <sup>71</sup>United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, Department of Commerce, *Personal Saving Rate*. <http://www.bea.gov/BRIEF/SAVING.HTM>.
- <sup>72</sup>Federal Reserve Statistical Release, *Consumer Credit*, Release Date: February 7, 2011. <http://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/G19/Current/>.
- <sup>73</sup>James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001); Stephen R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

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