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Business Through the Eyes of Faith (Book Review)

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Olthuis points out that this is not due to a tension between the "normative" and the "contextual," but is rather a difference between "authentic" and "in-authentic" contextualizations of the norm.

David Lyon critically examines the notion of an "information society" and the reductionism and determinism which this notion implies. As an alternative he offers the concept of "responsible technology," which Arthur Zijlstra in his critique of Lyon's essay rebaptizes as "reflexive technology."

The many other essays of the book hold forth in a similar vein, enough to show that Christians can fruitfully work with the conceptual pair of "normativity" and "contextuality" in the social sciences. I personally

Business Through the Eyes of Faith, by Richard Chewning, John Eby, and Shirley Roels (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1990. 266 pages, paperback, \$9.95. Reviewed by John Visser, Professor of Business Administration.

Business Through the Eyes of Faith (BTEF) is not a critique by theologians of current business practices. Neither is it an attempt by "successful" business people to justify, through an appeal to the Scriptures, what they would like to do or have already done. Rather, it is a book by college business professors which attempts to communicate the often superhuman challenge of doing business "Christianly" in twentieth century North America. The overall conclusion is that those who seek to use the Scriptures as a lamp for their business lives are likely to find the process very difficult and challenging, but not impossible. At the same time, the authors make it clear that the potential blessings (not necessarily financial) to Christians in business and those directly affected by the decisions they make can also be substantial.

A theme that emerges early in the book is that most of the difficulties confronted by Christians in business go well beyond the temptation or pressure to do things that are quite obviously beyond either the law or generally accepted tenets of Christian morality (although, of course, issues along these lines can and do come up). Rather, the major challenge to Christians in business involves making very specific and very difficult business decisions which do justice to the broad Scriptural themes which we claim govern our lives. Early on the authors appeal to God's injunction in Micah 6:8 to "do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." They define justice as "a call to do the right thing in the right manner with the right motive" (27). They note that this becomes extremely difficult when one abandons the simplistic idea that a business exists only (or primarily) to make

like Quentin Schultze's narrative approach to an analysis of popular culture.

A fascinating feature of this book is that it illustrates how its authors work with their Christian worldview in their field of study. Each of them wants to practice their discipline Christianly, yet in close contact with the world. They want to challenge others to demonstrate the explanatory power of their concepts, theories, and approaches. They do this with humility, yet under the conviction that their own Christian approach is able to stand the test as well as any other. In discussion with others they want to justify their worldview as a compass essential for proper scientific work. In my opinion every Christian scholar ought to read this book.

money (although they are careful to enunciate the critical role that profits play in business).

BTEF defines business success in terms of service. The authors admit, however, that this definition opens a Pandora's box of sticky business decisions. Since businesses exist to serve their customers, employees, owners, neighborhoods, etc., it is never easy to decide how to divide the resources flowing into the business. When times get tough, it is even more difficult to decide how the losses should be handled. In addition, since Christians also have clear responsibilities to such diverse elements as creditors, competitors, governments, God's creation, the poor (both near and far away), future generations, etc., the number and complexity of the decisions to be made becomes almost mind-boggling.

The authors' attempt to develop Christian perspective at the broadest possible level seems to be both a necessary and appropriate first step. They note that one's faith affects the way in which he approaches issues as diverse as product quality, leadership style, compensation, hiring, firing, employee development, planning and organization, working conditions, pollution control, pricing, advertising, community involvement, etc. Spliced into these discussions are descriptions of the essentiality of moral and ethical behavior to business practice as well as some suggestions as to how Christians should approach broad economic questions, such as how to evaluate the economic system in which they are immersed, or how to maintain a proper perspective on business-government relationships.

The book's strength is also its weakness. Many subjects are touched so lightly, that they remain virtually

untouched. For example, at one point we are told that a business is not the same as a charity, but no clear attempt is made to delineate just how or why a business is different from a charity or an educational institution or, for that matter, any other non-profit organization. At another point, we are told that "natural resources should be treated as capital, not as consumable income," a wonderfully thought-provoking phrase, but the ultimate implications of carrying such a philosophy out are never really explored. Other issues, such as the legal implications of being an avowedly Christian company, the development of a framework for allocating the business's resources, an articulation of a Christian perspective on risk, corporate limited liability, or bankruptcy, or the importance of integrating prayer or the principle of Sabbath rest into business practice are left essentially untouched. In addition, by taking a completely non-quantitative approach to the issues, the authors sometimes miss opportunities to use the results of some research to enhance validity or credibility.

Each chapter of BTEF begins with a brief "Point for Discussion," and ends with some "Questions for

Reflection." These are important elements of the book, since questions raised in the narrative sections of the chapters have the potential to bear much fruit when discussed in the context of a class, Bible study, or other small group. In addition, the brief accounts of the experiences of businesses that are sincerely trying to be distinctive are both insightful and encouraging.

Some may find BTEF somewhat frustrating because it probably raises more questions than it answers. Others may feel that it does not speak clearly to the particular situation in which they find themselves because they neither work in Christian businesses nor are in positions of substantial authority in so-called secular businesses. Nevertheless, BTEF has something important to say to all Christians in business, and will be particularly useful to those Christians who are already sensitive to the comprehensive nature of their Christian worldview. It is a much needed book which will be a valuable resource for broadening student understanding of the complexities of "doing the right thing" in business, and helping experienced business persons re-think the relationship between their faith and business practice.

A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life, by J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway) 1990. 336 pages. No price. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

The last few years have seen the production of some truly substantive analyses of Puritan thought. Leland Ryken's helpful *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (1986) and Theodore Dwight Bozeman's superb *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (1988) come quickly to mind. And J. I. Packer has written a worthy work on sanctification in his *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (1984). Being an avid reader of both Puritan literature and works on holiness, I was more than happy to find this book on my desk. Unfortunately, it did not live up to expectations.

The book is flawed in several respects. First, it is not put together very well. Some of the chapters seem as though they were written for other uses but are included within the work because they are about the Puritans. For example, chapter 8, which is entitled "'Saved by His Precious Blood': An Introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death*," is not about John Owen *per se*, but is an apodictic affirmation of the Canons of Dort. Since Owen's work is a treatment of limited atonement, and that is Packer's theme in the chapter, it might serve as an introduction to a publication of Owen's treatise, but that treatise is not included. At other times the work is painfully repetitious.

One gets the feeling that the book was not composed as a whole but is in fact made up of occasional essays that have been merely collected, with no more to hold them together than the fact that they all concern Puritan themes.

Second, Packer's goal is to bring modern evangelicalism under the critique of Puritanism, and so expose it to a Neo-Puritanism vision. Thus he writes: "Churches and Christians today are sadly Laodicean: complacent, somnolent, shallow, stuffy. We need reviving. What to do? Opening the windows of our souls to let in a breath of fresh air from the seventeenth century would, I suggest, be the wisest possible course" (77).

The tone of the book is decidedly polemical and remedial, yet Packer is far too broad in his polemic. It is difficult to get a bead on just who he is directing his argument against. At times he does give hints. He says that "we today" are shaped by "irrational, emotional, romanticism disguised as super-spirituality" (25). Who is the "we" to whom he refers? His own Anglican tradition? The North American Evangelicalism in which he presently lives and works? Just a few pages earlier he speaks of a "man-centered, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent and sen-