

How to integrate Business and Mission?

- basic considerations for choosing a suitable strategy -

This brochure is composed on the basis of a research project of Wageningen University The Netherlands. The research is conducted by Brigitta Methorst-Zijlstra in order to receive a Masters degree in Rural Development Sociology. This brochure is written specifically for Protestant-Evangelical development workers, entrepreneurs and missionaries as a help to reflect on personal choices regarding the topic. It deals with basic considerations for projects in the field of business and mission.

Why integrate business and mission?

There are many ways to live out a Christian life. In the working life there are many possibilities for Protestant-Evangelicals to be active, for instance as full time missionaries, as development workers or as entrepreneurs. There are all kinds of overlaps between these three seemingly separate jobs. For instance missionaries set up economic activities, entrepreneurs do part of their job in the form of development aid and development workers are testifying by doing 'good deeds'. It seems that these overlaps between business and mission goals are occurring more and more.

Business and mission seem to me more intertwined than might be noticed at first sight.

At the same time it can be a visionary choice to combine business and mission goals in concrete projects. It might be a form worth considering specifically in areas where there is lack of jobs and lack of investment. The **added value** can be enormous. It may give people in those regions new hope for their future if they can earn their own income. The risks of these projects are also high since usually those projects will take place in situations of economic and spiritual depression. To choose for such a combination is **challenging** and at the same time it can be a form of '**calling**' to undertake such projects in seemingly hopeless regions

For those who are working or want to work in this field it is important to choose a good working strategy regarding the integration of business and mission, one that fits best to personal characteristics and circumstances.

There are many options for concrete integration of business and mission

- by implementing biblical values: your business style may attract others and raise questions about your motives. A chance to tell about your inspiration
- by achieving 'added value' in places where there are economic problems (lack of jobs)
- by actively seeking for business opportunities in non-Christian environments
- by giving trainings on entrepreneurship
- by helping start-up companies with your contacts and experience

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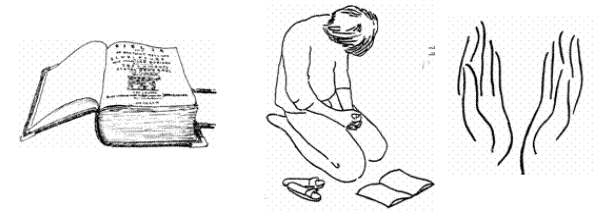
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Characteristics of Protestant-Evangelical thinking

▪ **Diversity**: The Protestant - Evangelical movement does not know a central authority on world scale like the Roman Catholic or Orthodox church. It is less institutionalised and hierarchical organised. As a result there is more freedom to individually shape Christian living and it is encouraged to reflect about personal experiences and practices.

▪ There is an emphasis on a **personal relationship** with Jesus Christ, the central person in the Christian faith. The central theme of the bible is God's love and mercy for all people. In their opinion, God wants to establish and restore personal relationships with individuals and this is only possible through Jesus Christ. The biblical history of the death of Jesus (the son) on the cross is seen as a deed of salvation in order to create the possibility for all people to be restored into a right relationship with God (the father). This offer from God can either be accepted or rejected by people and it asks for an individual and voluntary choice.



▪ **The drive to involve others**: some Protestant-Evangelicals seize opportunities to attract people's attention towards becoming involved in a relationship with Jesus. The Christian faith is not shared as a theory or a set of biblical principles, but as a testimony by the ones who have experienced what it is to have a personal relationship with God. The results of this relationship become visible in the lives of people and this can be actively shown. It can strengthen the testimony or weaken it. There seems to be a tendency to distinguish between a testimony by good deeds (to love God, yourself and your neighbour) or by words (make disciples and teaching them).

Central issues of the integration of business and mission

The research showed four issues which always play a role in deciding upon a suitable strategy

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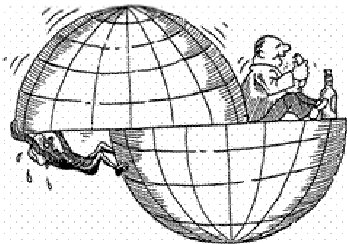
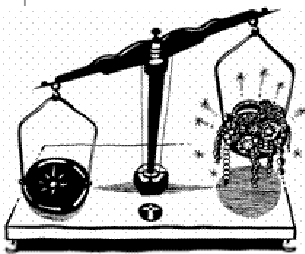
The type of relationship with 'the other' or 'know yourself'

An important issue is to make clear in every project is whose problem is it and who is responsible?

*The poor suffer from the same poverty as the non poor. When the non poor play god in the lives of the poor, they also have a marred view of themselves. They have stopped being who they truly are and are assuming the role of God. **The nature of poverty is fundamentally relational.** The perspective is that poverty is the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable.*

*Poverty is a product of a system. The system cannot be changed without sacrifices. Either those living in the first world must give up their lifestyle, or there will never be universal justice or well-being. **There is no such thing as painless social change.***

*There is not one developed and one underdeveloped world. There is only one world that is badly developed. The underdeveloped (the helped) and the developed (the helpers) are related to each other. It is a **mutual responsibility** to work on development and 'us' and 'them' are two equal partners to achieve this. It is a matter for all of us and everyone has his or her own responsibility.*



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The role of spirituality

Spirituality as the experience of a **personal relationship with God** can be given a prominent or less obvious role. There are different strategies in 'promoting' this relationship, or to testify of it. It can be silently **through good deeds** which are meant to show the love of God, or it can be done **through words**: explaining the love of God and the possibility to live in a 'restored' relationship with God. The more there is a wish for spiritual development in the sense of developing a relationship with God, the more there is a desire to speak about this and to make known how this relationship can become 'a reality' in the lives of people. **The testimony can take different forms** and this reflects the means the Protestant - Evangelicals are willing to use and how active they want to be in spiritual growth for the people around them. Spirituality is a natural part of the lives of most people. It is widely recognized as one of **people's strongest motivations** and it seems logical to address it and exchange about what really matters in life. Maybe the word 'mission' could do with a fresh up in order to get rid of the misleading and often negative connotation.

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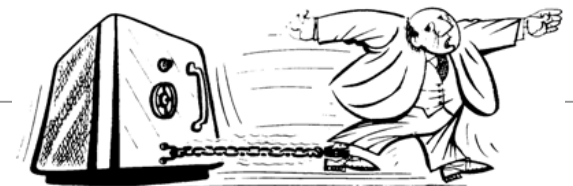
The role of money: for profit or non-profit

Some Protestant - Evangelicals perceive that insecurity about income strengthens their relationship with God. They 'seek' for this insecurity by living on donations. Others question an exclusive relation between donor support and 'God':

According to me, an entrepreneur who makes profit is just as dependent on the Lord. That has nothing to do with the involvement of money. They put too much attention on that. According to me, you should just be sensible with the available means. For me it is, how to put it, just too pious.

This statement expresses also the normality of paying professional attention to financial matters. **Money is just always involved**, that is a neutral fact. There is nothing supernatural or spiritual labelled to it. Maybe, since entrepreneurs -in general- are trained to work with (large amounts of) money, for them it is just one of the means they work with. They might have more experience in dealing with 'the powers of money'.

For-profit and non-profit are two different ideologies. **Non-profit or profit implies totally different modes of thinking.** A non-profit way of working is not easily changed in a for-profit working style and vice versa. The characteristics of entrepreneurs which attract them to business and the characteristics of missionaries which attract them to mission can be quite different from each other. In concrete projects it is wise to distinguish between for-profit and non-profit activities. For the entrepreneur this is important in order to keep overview on how business activities are doing. Both donor support (non-profit) and self financing (for-profit enterprises) can be ways to work. **One form does not have to be more spiritual than another.**



Attitude towards moral dilemmas: principled or pragmatic?

There is a linkage between moral principles and the relationship with God in Protestant- Evangelical thinking. God is seen as the one who 'knows' what is good and wrong: **the moral absolute**. If a person is in relationship with God through contact with God in prayer and through the bible, he can develop his own sense of what is right and wrong and implement this in his relationship with other people.

The focus can be more on personal change of the people involved in the business or more on the success of the business itself. In practice it means a more moralistic or a more pragmatic stance.

Some people focus on the implementation of certain moral principles which are regarded by them as sort of 'moral absolutes'. They have a strong drive *to be different than the other*. They perceive they have to show what *Christian principles* are by implementing them in their daily lives. The implementation of these moral principles causes frictions and debate about fundamental issues like 'what is lying' among themselves and non-Christians. These debates are seen as valuable because it stimulates people to formulate their own opinions.

Others are less focussed on teaching of principles: *If I have to bring over a container of chicken and at customs they ask 1000 dollar for working quickly and if not, they turn off the cooler, I will pay. I am very pragmatic about this. I am focussing on my goal: the poultry has to go to the people for food. I do not make a principle matter out of it. If you look at what Jesus found important and you read in the bible about it, he looked at the person to give help, not at the system. Think of the adulterous woman. He told the others who wanted to stone her, those of you who are without sin, throw a stone first. Jesus was busy with sin, but what mattered to him were people.*

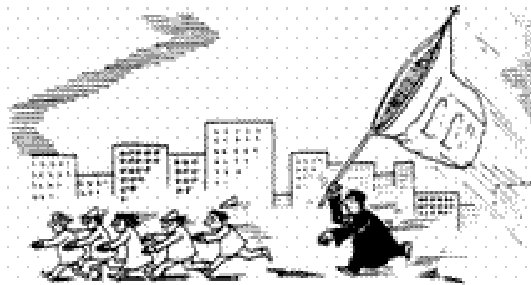
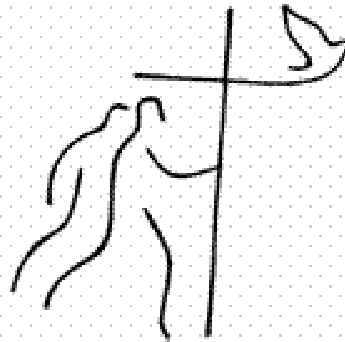
This opinion indicates a choice between putting energy in changing 'the system', or putting energy in reaching concrete goals. **What is your own position regarding concrete moral dilemmas?**

Central issues of the integration of business and mission

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Integration of business and mission is not new

The integration of business and mission might seem something new today, compared to the last 50 years, but looking back further, this integration is not new at all.

- About 2000 years ago, one of the early followers of Jesus, **Paul**, was a full-timer leather worker during much of his missionary career. From his letters can be derived that it was a purposeful combination.
- In the Middle Ages, **Christian monks** integrated work and ministry by tilling fields, clearing forests and building roads, while also tending to the sick, the orphaned and the imprisoned, protecting the poor and teaching the children.
- Even as recently as in the nineteenth century, many early protestants such as the Moravians, the Basel Mission Society and William Carey integrated business and other secular occupations into their mission strategies. For instance, in 1844 the **missionaries of Basel Mission Society** started a weaving industry to create employment. The aim of the commercial enterprise of the Mission was not to make profit, but to teaching how to conduct business on Christian principles

It looks like the separation of business and mission has only been temporarily. It seems to be a heritage of a modern worldview that makes a clear distinction between the so-called physical and spiritual world.

An example in Bosnia- Herzegovina

- the added value of BRON - services: a project in progress -

BRON's vision and strategy

BRON is a start-up company with a Christian world view. *It is our vision that people in Bosnia discover their own self worth and important values and that they are able to live accordingly. We want to testify mostly by our deeds our core values to the people we work with or have contact with. We see this 'testifying' as a normal process of getting to know people and sharing ideas and views.*

It is our vision that Bosnian people have the chance to provide for their own family's livelihood. We see earning your own livelihood as healthy for the mind and supporting the self-respect.

BRON wants to work alongside people in economically sustainable projects. BRON's income should come out of these projects. The aim is to set up a for profit agricultural production business in Bosnia. When this is established, all kinds of activities can be developed as a spin-off. For instance linkages between Dutch and Bosnian teenagers, students and churches.

Conclusion: There are all kinds of combinations possible between mission and business, depending on the needs and possibilities of a particular situation and of the people involved. There is more than just the obvious and creativity is asked for in order to work out chosen strategies into workable projects. Much can be learned from the one's 'in the field', be it missionaries, entrepreneurs or development workers. They have more in common than might be noticed at first sight. There are numerous possibilities for fruitful linkages and active cooperation. This brochure aims to encourage different Protestant-Evangelical workers to get into contact with each other, to join forces and establish cooperation in concrete activities.

Basic challenges of the Bosnian situation

The Bosnian context is highly complex, both socially and economically and it provides many mission and business challenges. The socialist heritage (**bureaucracy!**), the transition process and the destructions of civil war have resulted into a difficult social and economic situation.

'The highest level of unemployment is found mainly among the 16-22 age group and represents one of the largest problems of Bosnia'

'Many individuals continue to be unaware of the change process, or have failed to adapt mentally to the new situation'

Lack of trust is a basic problem which is hindering improvement of people's (economic) situation. The Protestant - Evangelical perception of this problem gives it a moral and spiritual meaning. Lack of trust is a result of violations of biblical moral principles like righteousness and honesty. This results in a distortion of the relationship with God, who is seen as (totally) righteous and honest.

*The **spiritual emptiness**, which goes beyond norms and values, is very clearly the biggest problem. To fill this emptiness, nationalism is being fed. That is the worst poverty you can get because it accumulates in war. We want people to see for themselves that God has a different purpose with our lives and this purpose can truly inspire.*

After all, you must make careful plans before you fight a battle, and the more good advice you get, the more likely you are to win ...

Proverbs 24:6, Good News Bible, American Bible Society

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