

The Christian and Modern Business Enterprise

by Drs. Bob Goudzwaard

MANY PROBLEMS — ONE SOLUTION?

What is the right relationship between labour, management and capital in the modern business enterprise? Where are the limits of the owner's authority? Are employees entitled to have a voice in enterprise and, if so, in which form? Is competition among industries a good thing or a necessary evil? What freedom must private enterprises be allowed?

For questions such as these there continues to be a vivid interest. From a scientific as well as a political and social point of view, the "business enterprise" is being subjected to a renewed evaluation and appraisal.

It is in no way sure what will emerge concretely from this process of renewed evaluation. What is certain, however, is that no modern labour organization will, in the long run, be able to escape adopting a new attitude towards the place and structure of modern enterprise. The above mentioned problems take too important a place for that in the minds and hearts of its members. But how will the modern labour organization have to go about this? And what will the nature of the concrete solutions which it seeks for all these problems be?

A CURRENT VIEW

For these last questions, various authors have their answers ready. Proceeding from the assumption that the practical solutions to all these problems must above all be found in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, they take the position that only those solutions which have not been beclouded by certain world-and-life views and political opinions deserve consideration.

These authors feel that such "neutral", "objective" solutions can be found. Only two things, they claim, are needed for this. First, that in an "objective", "scientific" way, a common picture of what enterprise really is and does is formed and that secondly, together we test this picture by human norms of "values" acceptable to every right-minded person: "values" such as human responsibility and the right of development of the free personality. It is claimed that in this way, practical suggestions to reform industrial enterprise will of themselves emerge, suggestions which can be shared by all men of good will, irrespective of their political or religious convictions. After all, the "objective" character of the scientific investigation as well as the "neutral

content" of applied human values guarantee it.

What must we think of this view? To strive for solutions in an atmosphere of mutual understanding is undoubtedly a good thing, but is it really possible to give one neutral, objective, scientifically justified answer to all these problems that will rise above all differences of world-and-life views?

In all frankness I wish to state at the outset that in my opinion this is an untenable position. Already when dealing with the most practical questions in industrial enterprise, our deepest convictions are involved, let alone when we speak of the fundamental questions noted at the beginning of this article.

This is not merely a personal opinion, however. Two strong arguments can be adduced for this position.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF "OBJECTIVE" APPROACHES

In the first place, in this connection it is well to note what constitutes the factual content of the so-called universally accepted human values such as solidarity, responsibility and free development of the human personality. The results of such an investigation are, in fact, rather dismaying. The more universally these values are accepted, the more their content approaches emptiness.

VALUELESS VALUES

A comparison of two rather arbitrarily chosen quotations from political works can probably demonstrate this more clearly than a lengthy argument. From the two quotations which I now present, the names of the intended political movements have purposely been omitted.

The highest goal of our movement consists in guaranteeing full freedom for the development of human personality and in creating conditions for an unlimited development of the personality. It is in this that our movement recognizes true freedom in the most exalted sense of the word.

Our movement is striving, directed towards creating, as much as possible, conditions in our society under which man can develop himself as freely as possible. We are interested primarily, therefore, in the human personality.

When comparing these two quotations, you will agree with me that they are practically identical. Yet the first is a literal quotation from an official communist textbook, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus*

(Principles of Marxism-Leninism), and the second refers not to communism, but to conservatism. It is, in fact, taken from an article on conservatism by Prof. Oud, a prominent European conservative.

From this it is evident that concepts and values such as freedom, development of the human personality, etc., are interpreted by each one in his own way. Only the words, the terms are generally accepted, but not their content. And it is exactly that content which in principle is completely determined by one's world-and-life view.

A person, therefore, who in a discussion of the problems surrounding modern enterprise, appeals to generally accepted values such as responsibility, solidarity, and development of the personality, etc., finds himself in the midst of the battle between world-and-life views whether he wants to or not. There is no possibility for a "neutral", "objective" approach to these problems in this way.

SOCIALISM AND CONSERVATISM

With this I now have come to my second argument. It is a wellknown fact that precisely in the area of enterprise socialism and conservatism have of old crossed swords. Their battle was not fought, however, on "neutral" grounds! For in this duel, orthodox socialism chose as its religious starting point the glorification of *man-in-community*, whereas conservatism chose *man-as-an-individual*. And until this very day, their conceptions of business enterprise are still largely inspired by these characteristically humanistic presuppositions.

Socialism still considers the business enterprise as a mere extension and a fully dependent unit of the national community; a unit, however, which can never assume the characteristics of a real community as long as it is torn by the antithesis between capital and labour (the class struggle). In contrast, conservatism even today considers enterprise as a totally independent project of individual providers of capital who simply have to let themselves be guided by their enlightened economic interests in order to automatically create the optimum well-being for all, also for the labourers in enterprise.

The fact that these two, radically opposed philosophic views of business enterprise, which are universally accepted and independent of any world-and-life views, exert their influence to this very day dooms to failure every attempt to construct solutions for modern enterprise.

CHRISTIAN WITNESSING AND PROBLEMS OF BUSINESS ENTERPRISE: A QUESTION OF TWO WORLDS?

The conclusion of the preceding paragraph was: when considering the

problems of modern enterprise, the "neutrality" of world-and-life view is out of the question. The differences between various religious convictions make themselves irresistibly felt also here, whether one likes it or not.

But having said this, we, as Christians, are immediately faced with the question of how we, in a concrete way, are to see the meaning of the Christian faith for the modern industrial enterprise. And that is a question which many, also among sincere Christians, dare not really face. Is it right, they ask, to link the name of Jesus Christ to such typically businesslike, practical problems? Will that not lead to a desecration of the Gospel? Are not the problems of modern industry of an entirely different nature than the truths of the Gospel as we confess them, for instance, in the Apostolic Creed?

THE CHARGED CHARACTER OF THE GOSPEL

Even though this reaction is basically an unevangelical reaction — as we shall see later — we cannot simply brush these objections aside. Especially Christians of Reformed persuasion forget too easily at times that one can in no way juggle and manipulate Christ and His Gospel, and that from the outset, every use of His name is subject to the charged word of Scripture: "Let everyone that names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness" (II Tim. 2:19). Also when discussing the Christian view of enterprise must we clearly keep in mind that we do not have Christ's Name and Word at our free disposal, but that instead, we are at His disposal.

A BRIDGED DISTANCE

Exactly because we are at Christ's disposal, we also have to maintain that we are fully justified in relating Christ and His Work to the problematics of modern industry! For the Christ Who controls us is not someone who will have no dealings with this modern world. On the contrary, He came down to this world and became like unto us. He took an active part in the economic process of production and consumption of His own day. He was not even ashamed of the simple carpenter work in the small business of His father. Already for this reason alone, anyone who wants to construct a distance between the Christian Gospel and modern industrial problems is radically and principally wrong. He then constructs a distance which has already been bridged by the Lord Jesus. For Christ Himself, Son of the eternal God, was an active member of one of the firms of this world. A person, therefore, who is serious about Christ controlling him, will also view modern, industrial problems in the light of Christ's coming into this world and His Kingship over

it. For man knows that he does not have the right to leave Christ out when considering modern business enterprise. He will in no wise want to ignore the fact that if anyone can claim a say in it, it is the Lord Christ. In other words, because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself led the way by joining His father's business enterprise in Nazareth, there rests on us no other task than to follow Him obediently in our labour in industry today.

THE FINAL LINK IN THE CHAIN

It is of great importance also to note that this way of speaking and thinking about the relationship between the Christian faith and modern industry instantly and radically frees us from every pressing question as to how we must bring our faith to bear on modern industrial problems.

A person who says "following Christ" and realizes that Christ controls us, knows at the same time that we are concerned with the total claim of Christ's Word on our whole life, also our personal life. He also realizes that "to follow Him" means nothing less than through the power, the energy of God's Word, our whole way of thinking and living is turned about and reformed. Through the power of this Word, therefore, we receive insight into what real freedom, responsibility and community imply for human life. This is the final link of the chain!

At the beginning of this article it was explained that by confronting modern enterprise with norms such as responsibility, love for fellowman and the free development of personality, many authors are able to construct their own view of industry and its problems. Consequently, when we open our hearts to what God's Word has to say about human responsibility, freedom and community, a Christian view of modern enterprise lies within our reach. Or rather, not within our reach but within the reach of the unique and dynamic power of the Word of Jesus Christ.

NO REASON FOR COMPLACENCY

The conclusion of the previous paragraph was: the Christian's life in modern enterprise, as well as his thinking about it, stands in the light of the radical following of Jesus Christ. And, in our thinking, this following after Him will also have to be evident in this: that in our study of the problems of modern enterprise, we have to allow ourselves to be guided by a renewed insight, given by God's Spirit, into man's true responsibility, justice and sense of community. Does this mean, however, that we have a ready-made Christian view of enterprise in our pocket? Certainly not. In order to remove all reason for complacency and misplaced self-satisfaction, I would call your attention to two things in particular.

OUR IMPERFECT LISTENING

In the first place, we as Christians may never lose sight of the fact that our receptiveness to the Gospel is quite impaired. The norms and ideas which we hold, therefore, often have more to do with humanistic common sense than with the Gospel. The contents which we ascribe to concepts such as freedom, justice, responsibility and community are seldom based on a deeply evangelical insight. They are based, rather, on a hodge-podge of libertarian, rationalistic or other prejudices. Only continual contact with the Bible and never-ceasing prayer can free us from these prejudices. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." (Rom. 12:2).

OUR IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE

But there is something else. Responsibility and freedom in an enterprise is quite different from responsibility and freedom in a *state* or *family* or *church*. For such norms as responsibility and freedom¹ do not float somewhere above this earthly life, but time and again direct themselves concretely to various societal relationships. The duty to act responsibly towards the neighbour, for example, holds for all of life—but in a business enterprise it assumes a different form than in the family or in the relation between government and subjects. There is nothing wrong or deplorable in that, for it reveals in a fascinating way that the creation of God is a multi-coloured creation. The mutual relationships among God's creatures are not all of the same pattern, but of an enormously rich variety. And in each of these relationships God's Word and Law are of direct relevance, a relevance which is directly attuned to the nature of these relationships. This implies, however, that we must be well informed to the structure of modern enterprise before we can, in a meaningful way, arrive at our own view of responsibility, authority and freedom *in enterprise*. Quoting and applying certain Scripture passages is in itself not sufficient to arrive at an intrinsically Christian view of enterprise. That can be attained only by letting ourselves be governed by the *Spirit* of God's Law, the Spirit which *also* drives us out to carefully examine and evaluate the *structure* and *operation* of modern enterprise.

CONTINUATION OF OUR INVESTIGATION

When in the two following installments I will say something about the place of modern enterprise in present-day society and about the Christian view of the relationships within enter-

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¹ Freedom is indeed a *norm*. The Gospel calls us to freedom (Gal. 5:1).

Centennial Rededication

by Patricia Young

In this twentieth century of conflicts and cross-currents of international opportunism, Christian morality is all too often sent forth in a clown suit to be mocked as a superstitious clod fresh up from Squareville; who doesn't dig the scene and is holding up the march to Hell. In an atmosphere of permissiveness, new morality and perverted values, the golden thread of truth which marks the way to our spiritual destiny becomes tangled up with the allurements of materialism. For this reason and on the occasion of our Centennial, we can do no better than to search the pages of our Bible for clear-cut answers.

Today, modernists often argue that the Biblical teachings applied only to the conditions of the day in which they were written. Nothing could be further from the truth. For principles do not change. The writings of the Bible, while composed amidst a culture and condition far different from our own, (as well as two thousand years removed from us in time) are as applicable today as when they were first propounded.

And just as the Encyclical on *Atheistic Communism* should be heeded today, so Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (The Condition of the Working Classes) sheds light on the right contemporary principles and attitudes towards labour and management.

Pope Leo wastes no time in going to the heart of the matter, speaking of "the spirit of revolutionary change" which was disturbing the nations of the world. That he was speaking of political ideologies becomes clear when he speaks of the disappearance of the old Workers' Guilds and how the evils of socialism had stepped into the vacuum and "worked on the poor man's envy of the rich, endeavouring to destroy private property in favour of the common property of all." Directing his judgement to man's basic God-given rights, he went on: "When a man engages in remunerative labour, the very reason and motive of his work is to obtain property, and to hold it as his own private possession." From this fundamental truth, he points also to the right of the individual to dispose of his remuneration in the manner of his own choosing — even to saving it to become an owner of tools and an employer in his own right!

Thus, in setting forth the reasons why a man works as well as his right to the fruits of his labour, Pope Leo XIII rejected socialism as degrading to the human being, just as he rejected any interference from the State which

could (and often did) arbitrarily decide that these fruits of labour were the common property of all!

Similarly, in upholding the rights of the individual, he points to the rights of the family unit, condemning such legislation which encroached upon the authority of the parent over his children.

Needless to say, Marxist and socialist philosophies still reject both of these premises. Those whose doctrine is based upon the "class struggle" and the rule of the proletariat, find individual liberty at odds with their philosophy of the superiority of the working class and the subservience of all to the dictatorship of the State. Writing some twenty years before the Russian Revolution, but at a time when British Fabian Socialism was the rage among young intellectuals and ambitious politicians, Pope Leo saw evil in the new philosophy of "class struggle" and likened labour and management to the disposition of the members of the human body. He points out that while society is ordained by nature to exist as worker and employer, both must work in harmony and agreement, maintaining the equilibrium of the *whole* body. Obviously, for the right arm to be constantly waging war upon the left leg can only result in lack of balance. For the right arm to be dedicated to the elimination of the left leg is to court the disaster of crippling the whole body politic!

Because of the lessons in harmony taught throughout the Bible, Pope Leo, in speaking of the need for harmony between employee and employer, illustrates for us by way of the parable dealing with the hiring of labourers and the avenging anger of Heaven when those employees attempted fraud. He reminds us of how the Son of God came to earth — not as the Son of a King, Emperor or even minor government official, but as the Son of a carpenter.

In examining the condition of the working classes, Pope Leo also examines the State as related to poverty, justice towards all and working men's rights. Foremost among these rights are the rights of association. In lauding Workmen's Associations, he again quotes from the Bible: "It is better that two should be together than one; for they have the advantage of their society. If one shall fall he shall be supported by the other. Woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth he hath none to lift him up."

At the same time, he issued this warning: "But there is a good deal of evidence which goes to prove that many

of these societies are in the hands of invisible leaders, and are managed on principles far from compatible with Christianity and the public well being, and that they do their best to get into their hands the whole field of labour and to force workmen either to join them or starve." In pinpointing this evil, Pope Leo recommended that Christian workmen unite their forces and courageously shake off the yoke of an unjust and intolerable oppression.

On this Labour Day of Canada's Centennial year, we can do no better than to examine and reiterate Biblical belief and principles and to re-dedicate ourselves to their observation. ●

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prise itself, it will be clear that the foregoing remarks about our imperfect listening and knowledge are also directly applicable there. What will be suggested in the following installments may fall short, on the one hand, due to an insufficient insight into the real content of, for instance, the Christian idea of freedom and responsibility; or, on the other hand, due to an insufficient knowledge of and insight into the structure of the enterprise.

For that reason also, a communal reflection on questions such as these remains urgently necessary. Without a *communal* reflection, our own individual insights remain too limited and too shallow. ●

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The C.J.L. Foundation hopes that the federal and provincial governments will put some teeth into this new charter. If they don't, it won't be worth the paper it is written on.

Before the constitutional conference gets under way, the conferees should give some real thought to the origin, nature, and scope of civil rights and liberties. They ought to ask themselves: "Who grants freedom? What are civil liberties? Who owns this world? Who originated the right and duty to work?" If these leaders do come to grips with these fundamental questions in the light of a Biblically directed view of life, of man, and of society, they will discover that God is the author of freedom and that civil liberties follow therefrom; that this is our Father's world and that God created the right to work — not the trade unions.

Prime Minister Pearson, and Premier Robarts, Manning, Smallwood and the seven others had better bear in mind the late John F. Kennedy's memorable words: "... the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God."

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