

Business as Mission is bigger than you think

Business as Mission, BAM, may sometimes be a tricky term, but it is an important concept and an essential praxis.

But BAM it is not a silver bullet; it is not the ultimate strategy. It is, however, a growing global movement of Christians in the market place asking: How can we shape business to serve *people*, align with God's *purposes*, be good stewards of the *planet* and make a *profit*?

Business as Mission is not trying to replace traditional means of serving God and people among all nations. Business as Mission is not a fundraising method. Nor is it about attaching some church-like activities to a business.

Business as Mission, BAM, recognizes the importance of and embraces Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR. But it goes beyond as well: BAM is CSR+.

We are on a mission in and through business. It is for example a mission of justice. One could even say 'Business as Justice'. This and other terms may help us understand the holistic and transformational nature of Business as Mission.

Let me give 12 brief examples. The list could be made longer, but these 12 will hopefully show that Business as Mission is not just doing business with a touch of "churchianity"

1. Business as Justice

God loves justice and hates injustice. God sent prophets again and again who spoke out against injustice, and they demanded change and correction. Injustice often manifested itself in the market place: it was corruption, labor exploitation and abuse of vulnerable people like immigrants.

To pursue honest business and care for staff is *Business as Justice*. To treat customers and suppliers well is also a part of this God honoring pursuit. *Business as Justice* includes fighting corruption and bribery.

2. Business as True Religion

True worship is to take care of widows and orphans. (James 1:27) These are two vulnerable groups, who often are exploited in the market place today. Human traffickers often target lonely children. Circumstances and cunning people may force widows into prostitution.

These are realities in many parts of the world. Who will offer orphans and widows a future; give them jobs with dignity, so they can support themselves and others? That would be *Business as True Religion*.

3. Business as Shalom

Shalom is a Biblical concept of good and harmonious relationships. But relationships were damaged and broken through the fall in Genesis chapter 3. Through Christ there is a way to restored relationship with God, with one another, and with creation.

Business is so much about relationships, with staff, colleagues, peers, customers, clients, suppliers, family, community, tax authorities, and so forth. How can we as Christians in business strive towards Shalom; *Business as Shalom*?

4. Business as Stewardship

Every human being has been entrusted with gifts and talents. In business we also talk about assets. Stewardship is another important Biblical concept. How can we use what we have to serve? What does stewardship mean when we own and / or run a business?

God has given some people strong entrepreneurial gifts. They can be used for God and for the common good through business. It is the same with managerial gifts or gifts of bookkeeping or sales. We should encourage people with business skills to be good stewards - *Business as Stewardship*.

5. Business as Servant Leadership

Jesus came to serve. He was an example of good and godly leadership. Many books are written on this topic and it indicates the importance of the very concept of servant leadership.

Doing business as unto the Lord means that we also explore what servant leadership means in the business context. It is not a simple formula or a cookie cutter approach. It may look differently in different industries and cultures. But the key underlying principle is to serve people, communities, nations, and God. We are too often reminded about the lack of good leadership in the business world. *Business as Servant Leadership* is more than needed.

6. Business as Human Dignity

Every person on this planet is created in God's image. We all have value and dignity linked to the Creator. He created us to be creative, and to create good things for others and ourselves. It is deeply human and divine to create; it is an intrinsic part of human dignity. This creativity process and thus human dignity has been partly broken, but there is restoration power through Jesus Christ.

It is not a sin to be unemployed, but unemployment and the inability to work and support oneself and family, is a consequence of the fall. It is a loss of human dignity. Putting people to work, providing jobs with dignity, is a godly act – it is *Business as Human Dignity*.

7. Business as Reconciliation

The Apostle Paul writes that we are agents of reconciliation. Broken relationships and conflicts are common, even in the market place. We also witness tension and violence between ethnic and religious groups. Can businesses provide a forum for reconciliation? Can business people bridge ethnic and religious divides?

There is a long and sometimes violent history of severe distrust and tension between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. But I have seen first hand how Chinese Christian business people in Indonesia have changed interethnic dynamics and transformed interreligious relationships by intentionally doing business as justice, stewardship, shalom, servant leadership, and so forth. As God's ambassadors, we can be business people on a mission to do *Business as Reconciliation*.

8. Business as Creation Care

During the creation days God did a daily evaluation, he exercised quality control on the products he produced. His verdict was "*these are good*". He has entrusted us to be stewards also of creation. Like God we can rejoice in being creative in the physical arena and produce goods and services that are good for people and the creation. This is the 1st Biblical mandate we have – to be creative and to work, also in the business world.

The importance of environmentally friendly businesses is included in the triple bottom line, striving to have a positive impact economically, socially and environmentally. (Profit, people, planet)

On a visit to south Asia 2012 I met a couple who are working as management consultants to major manufacturing companies. This couple had a clear BAM mission, and was able to help these companies to become more profitable, improve working condition, save energy and clean up huge amounts of water. Access to and preservation of clean water is one of the biggest challenges we face globally. *Business as Creation care* is essential.

9. Business as Loving Your Neighbor

The 2nd scriptural mandate is the great commandment and includes to "*love your neighbor as yourself*". We know that business can and should serve people and meet various needs. For example: Unemployment is a major underlying cause to malnourishment and starvation, homelessness, human trafficking, disease and limited access to medical treatment, as well as to debt and crime. Providing people with jobs is alleviating and preventing these dire conditions.

Human resource management (a term which sounds too impersonal and technical to me) should be an expression of loving your neighbor. Taking our neighbors' physical environment into consideration as we run businesses is also a part of this responsibility. CSR is thus not a new thing; it is based on Biblical principles.

We can also study and learn from history. For example, the Quakers in England and Hans Nielsen Hauge in Norway were agents of holistic transformation through business already a few hundred years ago. They did *Business as Loving Your Neighbor*.

10. Business as Great Commission

The 3rd Biblical mandate is the global centrifugal thrust: to all peoples, to all nations. This is a major theme in the global BAM movement. How can we serve in and through business, empowered by the Holy Spirit, “*in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*”.

Business as Mission is about being a follower of Jesus, in business and to the whole world, especially in areas with dire economical, social and spiritual needs. This is CSR+ and this dimension is not an elective. We want to see the Kingdom of God demonstrated among all peoples. It is *Business as Great Commission*.

11. Business as Body of Christ

God calls and equips some people to business. We need to affirm and encourage business people to exercise their calling with professionalism, excellence and integrity. Martin Luther puts it this way:

“A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and the office of his trade, and they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.” (An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility)

12. Business as Glorifying God

BAM is the acronym for Business as Mission. Another relevant acronym is **AMDG**. The ultimate bottom line of Business as Mission is **AMDG** - ad maiorem Dei gloriam – for the greater glory of God

Mats Tunehag

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www.MatsTunehag.com