



BUSINESS AS MISSION  
GLOBAL THINK TANK

ISSUE GROUP REPORT

# Scholars Needed

The Current State of  
Business as Mission  
Research

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# **Scholars Needed**

## **The Current State of Business as Mission Research**

**Report by the Business as Mission Think Tank Group**  
**Scholarship and Research**  
**May 2014**

[bamthinktank.org](http://bamthinktank.org)

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† Preliminary list as of October 1, 2013

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# Foreword

The Global Think Tank on Business as Mission has opened up a unique forum for collaboration among practitioners and leaders from around the world. When we began this second Think Tank initiative, we focused on a key word: *invigorate*. The purpose of the Think Tank has been to invigorate the global business as mission movement, to equip and encourage those who want to serve God and the common good in and through businesses—among all peoples.

To that end we launched over 30 national, regional and international working groups. Some of these groups focused on a particular issue in the BAM movement, and others were concentrating on BAM in and from a particular region or country.

The objectives for these groups were to listen, learn, share and connect. We developed tools and templates for the working groups to effectively collaborate through virtual meetings, as well as face-to-face consultations. Each group has produced materials, including papers, analyses, case studies, tools and resource directories, as a result of this dialogue.

To enable a meaningful and constructive conversation in and between groups, we have used the following working definition of business as mission:

Business as mission is:

- Profitable and sustainable businesses;
- Intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations;
- Focused on holistic transformation and the multiple bottom lines of economic, social, environmental and spiritual outcomes;
- Concerned about the world's poorest and least evangelized peoples.

This definition emerged from the first Think Tank on BAM, which among other things produced the Lausanne Occasional Paper on Business as Mission, as well as the BAM Manifesto: [http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP59\\_IG30.pdf](http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP59_IG30.pdf).

The Think Tank project has resulted in a massive global gathering of both intellectual and social capital for the BAM movement. As well as the written materials, we have built networks and have gathered together in person at the working group Leaders Forum and at the Global Congress on Business as Mission, both held in Thailand in April 2013. The intention is to now share and disseminate these gathered resources as widely as possible.

This report is one in a series of papers from the 30 plus working groups. Hundreds of leaders in the BAM community, from every continent, have contributed to these reports. Additional Think Tank reports may be found at <http://bamthinktank.org/reports>.

In 2014 we will publish a comprehensive BAM 2.0 paper, a follow up to the Lausanne BAM Paper of 2004.

These reports are not the end or the final destination of the BAM Think Tank, but should rather be seen as important reflections by BAM practitioners and other leaders who will continue to journey together. We need to continue to grapple with issues, and address needs and gaps. Some groups will continue and new initiatives will emerge. The BAM movement is on the move!

It has been a privilege to facilitate this unprecedented and global collaboration over the last two years. Looking back we can see that at times we have achieved less than we have hoped and planned for. But we have also witnessed that God is able to do more than we could have ever imagined.

Our sincere thanks goes to all those who have co-laboured with us to bring the Think Tank initiative to fruition. We want to especially thank the Steering Group, the Issue and Regional Group Leaders, the Support Team and our spouses Mark and Jennifer for their steadfast support.

We pray that these papers, case studies, tools, recommendations and resources would go out widely, and encourage and equip you as well as invigorate the global BAM movement.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21, NIV).

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September 2013  
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# Executive Summary

## Scholars Needed The Current State of Business as Mission Research

Great strides have been made in recent years to challenge the “sacred-secular” divide that is so deeply entrenched in the church, and to raise awareness of business’ potential to serve the common good. Yet the resources produced thus far offer little in the way of practical help for Christian business professionals. Few resources—whether books, websites, blogs, etc.—go beyond what might be called “cheerleading,” that is, encouraging Christians to “take their faith to work” or to embrace business as a vehicle for positive community impact.

As valuable as such “cheerleading” may be, there is a growing chorus of complaints by practitioners and educators about the lack of helpful resources, especially the lack of rigorous research that takes an unvarnished and critical look at what’s working, what’s not, and why. This is more than an academic problem; without quality research—and the resources that are generated by it—practitioners are forced to “figure things out” on their own, and the long-term impact of business as mission (BAM) will continue to be mixed.

One way to stimulate the production of such resources is by creating an association of BAM scholars. Such an association would include outlets (scholarly conferences and journals) for such research. Another way to address this need is by drawing from the closely related field of social entrepreneurship (SE). SE is similar to BAM in its emphasis on multiple “bottom lines”. The main difference is that SE accommodates all religious perspectives, including non-religious and humanistic perspectives. Still, there is much that can be learned through respectful dialogue between the two fields, and BAM scholars should actively engage this field by attending SE conferences and contributing to SE journals.

The following review is intended to help scholars get quickly up to speed on the research that has been done and what is still needed. This report is a slightly modified re-publication, with permission, of an essay previously published in the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* entitled “‘Business as Mission’ Hybrids: A Review and Research Agenda.”

# Scholars Needed

## The Current State of Business as Mission Research<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

“Business as mission”, as the name suggests, involves businesses that have a missionary impulse. As a field of scholarship, it shares much in common with social entrepreneurship, although the Christ-centric nature of business as mission (BAM) also makes it unique. As something that is different from “regular business” and “regular missions,” it presents new opportunities and raises new questions for scholars. It represents an opportunity in that BAM is the only ministry or mission strategy that has the potential to create wealth and support itself. All other ministries in various ways must *transfer* wealth from one group (individual donors, governments, etc.) to another to stay afloat. Yet this self-supporting aspect also raises some important theological, legal and economic questions.

Theologically, it requires Christians to develop an understanding of how business relates to *Missio Dei*. Legally, those conducting BAM within the context of a government-approved charity must exercise great care to avoid violating the law. Economically, since BAM is essentially a for-profit ministry, it raises many questions about how to structure and manage such a ministry for maximum impact. Such questions represent just the “tip of the iceberg”, which is why our title is an invitation, “Scholars Needed”.

The purpose of this document is to provide a brief overview of the emergence of BAM as a field of scholarly inquiry. It is not an all-encompassing literature review, but rather a limited one that is meant to provide a chronology of this young field. This is followed by some suggestions for further research. The paper concludes with a few thoughts about how to encourage more scholarship in this area. A bibliography is included to serve as a resource for scholars and practitioners who are unfamiliar with this subject.

### A Brief History of BAM Scholarship

While the practice of business as mission (BAM) in various forms can be traced throughout the church’s history,<sup>2</sup> as a field of scholarship, BAM is new and undeveloped. Baker (2006) notes that the words “business”, “commerce” or “industry” are rarely mentioned in the standard histories or theologies of Christian mission. One is similarly hard pressed to find any mention of “world mission” or “Great Commission” in the business literature, although discussions about faith in business have a long history. (See for example, Miller, 2007.)

### Tentmaking: the forerunner to BAM

Scholarly interest in the role of business in world mission first began to appear around the middle of the twentieth century under the heading of “Tentmaking”. Based on the missionary model of the Apostle Paul and his friends Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:3, Rom. 16:3, 2 Tim. 4:19), mission experts began experimenting with the idea that one’s professional skills can be used as instruments to advance God’s kingdom, particularly in less-Christianized countries.

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<sup>1</sup> This report is a slightly modified re-publication, with permission, of an essay previously published in the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* entitled ““Business as Mission” Hybrids: A Review and Research Agenda.” The original essay is available at <http://www.cbfa.org/JBIBVol15No1.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Danker (1971), Baker (2006), Pointer and Cooper (2006), and Owens (2006).

It is worth pausing here to reflect on Paul's motivations and strategies, because they reveal some interesting and surprising facts that have important implications for the tentmaking debate. First, a strong case can be made that Paul's mission work was, with a few exceptions, largely self-supported. At a minimum, he earned his own way in Corinth (1 Cor. 9), Ephesus (Acts 20:34-35), and Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9, 2 Thess. 3:8). Second, he worked even though he did not have to. In 1 Corinthians 9 he makes the strongest case in the Bible in favor of donor support for those in spiritual ministry. He did receive some financial support from the Philippians (Phil. 4:15-16), but his vigorous refusals to accept support in 1 Corinthians 9:12 and 15 suggests that it was not his *modus operandi*. Given that Paul's passion in life was to preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16) and see churches spring up in the spiritually driest places (Rom. 15:20), this raises the important question of "Why did Paul work when he had every right to live off the financial support of others instead?"

A careful study of his letters reveals the answer. For Paul, self-support was an integral part of his missionary strategy. Preaching the gospel for free added credibility to his message (2 Cor. 2:17, Titus 1:10-11) and served as a model for his converts to follow (2 Thess. 3:7-9, 1 Thess. 2:10-11, Eph. 4:28-32, 1 Cor. 4:12, 16, 1 Cor. 9:12-18). Remember that many of his followers were reformed idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, and extortionists (1 Cor. 6:9-11) who likely had no idea what a Godly lifestyle looked like. By modeling a disciplined and Christ-centered lifestyle, Paul helped transform not only their spiritual worldviews, but their economic and social conditions as well.

Inspired by Paul's model, modern tentmaking pioneers like Ruth Seimens, J. Christy Wilson and Ken Crowell set out in the mid-twentieth century to demonstrate that the model works today; that one's professional training and experience can in fact be assets for world mission rather than liabilities.<sup>3</sup> However, the "sacred-secular dichotomy" was deeply entrenched in the church, and tentmaking was viewed with great suspicion. The concerns tended to revolve around several key issues:

1. Time management, and specifically whether tentmakers were disadvantaged because the time they spent at work meant less time for "doing ministry".
2. Sources of income, and specifically whether it was better for tentmakers to be self-supported or donor-supported.
3. Accountability, that is, whether self-supported tentmakers represented a new breed of "lone wolf missionaries" who did not want to submit to the authority of a sending church or missionary sending agency.

On the issues of time management and income, Siemens, Wilson and Crowell were in basic agreement that tentmaking was by definition a self-supporting missions model, and that there is no necessary tradeoff between work and ministry. It is important to note, however, that unlike the more recent "Faith and Work" literature, the word "ministry" was understood to mean evangelism. In other words, work was consistent with ministry only in the sense that it created opportunities for evangelism. With the exception of Ginter (1998), there were few tentmaking advocates who were emphasizing the God-pleasing nature of the work itself, or otherwise promoting a broader definition of ministry or mission. On the third issue of tentmaker accountability, there was more disagreement. While some believed formal ties with a missionary sending agency was a good thing, Seimens was an outspoken critic of such links, believing that agencies were not sending true "Pauline-style"

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<sup>3</sup> Admittedly all three were reluctant pioneers because their initial plans were to serve as traditional missionaries, but for various reasons they found those avenues to be closed. See Seimens (1997), Wilson (1979) and Goheen (2004).

tentmakers, but “missionaries in disguise” instead. She did favor accountability, but felt that it should be with the tentmaker’s home church, not a missionary sending agency.

The first noteworthy scholarly contribution to this field was the now classic book by William Danker (1971) called *Profit for the Lord: Economic Activities in Moravian Missions and the Basel Mission Trading Company*.<sup>4</sup> This remarkable study documented the role businesses played in the missionary strategies of the Moravian Church and the Basel Mission Society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At times the businesses served as funding engines for their missionary endeavors abroad, and at other times the businesses were more integrally part of the missionary strategy. Put in today’s language, the businesses were at times examples of “business *for* mission” and at other times, examples of “business *as* mission”. In either case, the businesses were always intended to be financially self-sustaining, and there was no distinction made between secular work and sacred work. All work was seen as sacred (Danker, p. 29). The book is essential reading for BAM scholars and practitioners alike, as it offers a candid appraisal of the successes and failures of these pioneering businesses, and the lessons have surprising relevance today.

Possibly more significant for the tentmaking and BAM movements was the publication in 1979 of J. Christy Wilson’s book *Today’s Tentmakers*. Written for a popular audience, its primary focus was on the contemporary importance of tentmaking. In addition to a short autobiography, the book provides a biblical basis for tentmaking along with practical advice for individuals and churches that are considering tentmaking as a possible mission strategy. Wilson defends the validity of self-funded missions, and maintains that there is no necessary tradeoff between work and ministry. A careful reading of his book, however, suggests that work’s primary kingdom significance is as a platform for evangelism, rather than an act of worship and a ministry of its own kind. Wilson is also a strong advocate of tentmakers forming teams and seeking an accountability relationship with either a sending church and/or missionary sending agency.

Reinforcing this view of tentmaking was an empirical study by Hamilton (1987) that sought to identify the factors that contribute to a tentmaker’s effectiveness, or lack thereof. He defined tentmakers as cross-cultural, self-funded Christian workers who are recognized in the host culture as something other than a religious worker, but trained, called and motivated like any other missionary. His definition of “effectiveness” is less clear, although he states that his evaluation was based at least in part by a modified Engel Scale (p. 98). This measure of one’s spiritual progress, together with an emphasis in the book on evangelism, suggests that spiritual outcomes were his main concern. By this definition, the tentmakers that ranked as most effective had the following characteristics:

1. Prior experience leading an evangelistic Bible study.
2. Their primary motivation for going abroad was to evangelize.
3. They believed God called them to be tentmakers rather than traditional missionaries.
4. They had prior experience sharing their faith to others at home.
5. They had a strong relationship with their home church.
6. They were enthusiastic about tentmaking to the point of recruiting others to be tentmakers.

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<sup>4</sup> Subsequently republished in 2002 by Wipf & Stock Publishers.

By the late 1980s, tentmaking was becoming quite trendy in evangelical missions circles, a trend that was endorsed by mission statesman Tetsunao (Ted) Yamamori's influential book *God's New Envoys* in 1987, and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization's first-ever statement on tentmaking in 1989.<sup>5</sup> The Lausanne statement affirmed the role Christian lay people could play in world missions, and gave local churches the responsibility for recruiting and equipping people to be cross-cultural witnesses among unreached people groups. Church congregations were also given the responsibility of providing pastoral care for their tentmakers while on the field, and helping them with re-entry culture shock when they returned home.

It is impossible to pinpoint the exact date or cause, but by this time many missionaries with little or no work experience outside of a church were being encouraged to consider tentmaking as a way to gain entry into countries that were otherwise closed to missionaries. New mission agencies began springing up that were specifically focused on getting missionaries into these "creative access countries". This new generation of tentmaker was encouraged to raise donor support (to create a system of accountability and prayer support) and find tentmaking "platforms" that would not require too much time and thus distract them from their ministry goals. For the average Christian, there was no longer much of a difference between a tentmaker and a donor-supported missionary, except that missionaries operated openly in their host country, and tentmakers had to be more discreet about their true purpose for being in the country.

In response, some mission leaders started distancing themselves from the tentmaker label. For example, the U.S. affiliate of Tentmakers International Exchange—an organization called Intent—introduced the term "kingdom professional" to describe people who, rather than being ambivalent about work, were unapologetically committed to their professions, and saw their work as the necessary context for holistic ministry. In another example, tentmaking pioneer Gary Taylor (1998) wrote a blunt criticism entitled "Don't Call Me a Tentmaker", in which he complained that he "found few in the missions industry who could work in the normal secular sense of the term. It seemed very few cues remained from pre-missionary work-life to guide them into producing for their living and witnessing for their calling" (p. 24).

Another tentmaking pioneer, Patrick Lai, tried to clarify rather than abandon the tentmaking label by introducing a nomenclature that differentiated tentmakers into five categories. At one end (T-1) were working professionals who were transferred by their employers to an overseas assignment but who were not well trained in cross-cultural ministry, and therefore not very effective as tentmakers. At the other end of the spectrum (T-5) were donor-supported missionaries who perceived their tentmaking "platform" mainly as a cover for missionary work. In between these two extremes, says Lai, was the Apostle Paul (T-3), who had a single-minded focus on church planting but who nevertheless took his work seriously and was not averse to receiving donor support on occasion.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these efforts to clarify, and other attempts to defend a more biblical perspective on tentmaking by people like Seimens (1998), Ginter (1998), Rundle (2000) and English (2001), confusion over the definition and purpose of tentmaking continued to grow.

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<sup>5</sup> The Lausanne Tentmaking Statement can be found at <http://www.globalopps.org/lausanne.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Lai's nomenclature can also be found in Lai (2005), pages 21-28.

## The emergence of BAM

The term “business as mission” (BAM) first began to appear in the late 1990s at a pair of conferences focusing on the redemptive potential of Christian-managed businesses in Central Asia. BAM was similar to early definitions of tentmaking in that it was self-supporting and laity-driven, but it was also different because of its exclusive focus on business, and its embrace of a more holistic understanding of mission. Indeed, in a presentation given at those conferences, Markiewicz (1999) emphasized the role businesses can play in promoting the social and economic transformation of a nation, and affirmed the missional legitimacy of business *on those grounds alone*.

Several theologians and missiologists provided important refinements of this point. Among missiologists, Myers (1999) and Kirk (2000) made strong biblical cases in support of a broader understanding of mission—one that sees the purpose of the church as going beyond mere evangelism, and including all manner of personal and social reconciliation. Among theologians, Sherman and Hendricks (1990), Novak (1996) and Stevens (1999, 2001), among others, defended the intrinsic value of work and confronted the so-called “sacred-secular dichotomy” as it pertains to work, ministry and business. According to these theologians, to the extent that our “secular” work and our businesses contribute to the common good, our work is “missional” and “sacred,” and pleasing to God. By encouraging lay people to leave the marketplace to go into a more narrowly defined “ministry,” the church actually undermines its global impact.

Encouraged by the affirmation of this message, the idea of business as mission struck a chord with Christian business professionals and the term took on a life of its own. Within a short time there were conferences being held and books being produced on this topic.<sup>7</sup> By 2004 the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization identified BAM as an important new development in world mission and invited about 70 people from around the world to discuss this matter at its conference in Pattaya, Thailand. The official document that was subsequently produced (see Tunehag, McGee and Plummer, 2004) states plainly that “Business is a mission, a calling, a ministry in its own right.” It goes on to say that “Ultimately churches, mission agencies and kingdom businesses have the same purpose: to bring glory to God’s name among all nations.”

The week-long Lausanne meeting was made up of a geographically and ethnically diverse group of business and mission scholars, business professionals, missionaries, and pastors. As might be expected for such a diverse group, there were several areas of disagreement, even at the end, which are discussed in more detail in Johnson and Rundle (2006). For example, do businesses that are started by (nonprofit) mission agencies and sustained with the help of donor subsidized labor or capital qualify as “real businesses”?<sup>8</sup> If there are no concrete evangelism and church planting goals, can it still be considered “missional”? And what are the essential ingredients of a mutually beneficial partnership between a business and a mission agency or church? Mission leaders naturally prefer that agencies and/or churches have final authority over the endeavor, but many business people see that as a recipe for ruin. The preference of business leaders is to control key aspects of the partnership themselves so as to not jeopardize the viability of the business. In so doing, the outcomes that are favored by the mission leaders may be at risk.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Befus (2001), Silvos (2002), Rundle and Steffen (2003) and Yamamori and Eldred (2003).

<sup>8</sup> The alternative being “fake businesses” run by “undercover missionaries.”

The final document that was produced was not intended to resolve every question, and is ambiguous enough in these areas as to allow for a variety of interpretations. That said, a survey of other definitions seems to reinforce many key ideas that are found in the Lausanne statement. For example, Eldred (2005) describes BAM as “for-profit business ventures designed to facilitate God’s transformation of people and nations” (p. 60). Johnson and Rundle (2006) define BAM simply as “the utilization of for-profit businesses as instruments for global mission” (p. 25), where “mission” is understood to include transformation at the personal and social level. Johnson (2010) later elaborates on this by describing a BAM business as “a for-profit commercial business venture that is Christian led, intentionally devoted to being used as an instrument of God’s mission (*missio Dei*) to the world, and is operated in a crosscultural environment, either domestic or international” (p. 28).

In fact, emphases on BAM as cross-cultural, intentional, and holistic witness within an authentic, for-profit business context can be found in most definitions of BAM or BAM practitioners, including those presented in Rundle and Steffen (2003), Rundle (2003), Eldred (2005), Baer (2006), Tunehag (2008) and Russell (2010). The exceptions, while few in number, come in two extremes. At one end are those who maintain that, to the extent that they are fulfilling their calling, all Christians in business are doing BAM, regardless of their location, intentions or impact. At the other extreme are those that, like one mission agency’s recent advertisement for a BAM seminar, define BAM as “missions projects with business providing cover for the missionary”. These exceptions notwithstanding, it appears that a consensus is emerging on the definition of BAM, one that emphasizes several basic points. Specifically, BAM is:

1. Self-funded (hence the need for profitability).
2. Laity-driven (hence the frequent reminders about “calling” and the doctrine of the “Priesthood of all Believers”).
3. Intentional (which excludes those who are not thinking strategically about their missional impact).
4. Holistic (that is, focused on the multiple “bottom lines” of economic, social and spiritual outcomes).
5. Focused on the poor (including spiritual poverty).

It is important to note, however, that nothing in this list necessarily excludes businesses that are owned by nonprofit organizations. The social entrepreneurship literature has settled this matter long ago by accepting that different circumstances can call for different organizational structures. Gregory Dees (1998), who is one of the most influential SE scholars, makes this point with the following diagram, see Figure 1 below. It illustrates social entrepreneurship as a continuum between “pure charity” and “pure business”.

In the Christian missions world, one can think of the traditional missionary as being a “pure charity” in that he or she does not charge money for his/her services, and therefore is funded by donors. Conversely, the “regular” business described earlier is a “pure business” in that it charges a market rate for its products or services and pays market rates for its capital, labor and supplies. God can work through either a charity or a business, or a hybrid organization that is a combination of both. The task of Christian business scholars is to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and to begin equipping the next generation of Christian business professional. With this foundation in place, we are now ready to turn our attention to mapping out a research agenda.



<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Pure Charity</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>	<b>Pure Business</b>
<b>Customers/ Beneficiaries</b>	Pay nothing	Subsidized rates or mix of payers & nonpayers	Market rates
<b>Capital</b>	Donations & grants	Below-market capital or of donations & market-rate capital	Market rates
<b>Workforce</b>	Volunteers or donor-supported	Below-market wages or mix of volunteers and fully paid staff	Market rates
<b>Suppliers</b>	In-kind donations	Special discounts or mix of donations & purchased supplies	Market rates

Adopted from Dees (1998)

Figure 1: The “Social Enterprise Spectrum”

## Avenues for Further Research

Perhaps the most obvious need is for studies that assess the impact of business as mission, and identify the characteristics of the most effective BAM practitioners. Six recent studies have attempted to do this with varying degrees of rigor, and have reached conclusions that are somewhat contradictory. First is a study by Patrick Lai (2003) that was part of his doctoral work at the Asia Graduate School of Theology. Subsequently revised and republished in 2005 under the title *Tentmaking: Business as Mission*, Lai surveyed about 450 tentmakers (not all were in a business context) who were serving in the so-called 10/40 Window, questioning them about their backgrounds, motives, habits and outcomes. Like the Hamilton study some twenty years earlier, Lai’s definition of an “effective” tentmaker centered on evangelistic outcomes, and specifically: (1) the number of people they (the tentmaker) led to Christ; (2) the number of people they disciplined in the Word; and (3) the number of churches they planted. Most of his subjects were affiliated with missionary sending agencies that emphasized evangelistic outcomes over other measures of kingdom impact.

Predictably, those who stood out as most effective were spiritually mature and evangelistically zealous, as well as socially well-adjusted, focused, and well organized.<sup>9</sup> Yet, Lai also discovered something counterintuitive: those who believed the ultimate objective of mission was simply to win people to Christ were actually *less* effective in accomplishing these goals. The most consistently effective tentmakers were those who defined their objective as “transforming society” more generally. Evangelism and discipleship mattered a great deal to these tentmakers, but their ultimate objective was much broader than that. These findings are important and interesting, but the narrow definition of “effective” combined with the sample selection bias raises questions about the generalizability of the findings.

<sup>9</sup> More on the characteristics of an effective tentmaker can be found in chapter 4 of his book *Tentmaking: Business as Mission*.

Another study that examined the effectiveness of BAM reached a similar conclusion. Like the previous study, this one was part of a doctoral program undertaken at Asbury Theological Seminary (Russell, 2008) that was later published in 2011 under the title *The Use of Business in Missions in Chiang Mai, Thailand*. In an effort to hold as many cultural and geopolitical variables constant as possible, Russell focused on a single city—Chiang Mai, Thailand—and conducted an in-depth study of twelve self-identified missionary-run businesses there. The results were similar to Lai’s, although much more pronounced—those who had a single-minded focus on evangelism and church planting were surprisingly *less* effective at producing converts than those who had a broader definition of effectiveness. Stated differently, those with a more holistic understanding of their purpose for being in the country actually generate more spiritual fruit than those who have a single-minded focus on spiritual fruit! As interesting and significant as these findings are, however, they also have limited generalizability because of the small sample and the location-specific nature of the study.

At the BAM Global Congress in April 2013, Steve Rundle (Biola University) shared<sup>10</sup> the then-unpublished results of a study he and Min-Dong Paul Lee (Wheaton College) have been working on.<sup>11</sup> They surveyed 119 self-described BAM practitioners from around the world, looking specifically at the relationship between the accountability structures and “missional orientation” of the practitioners, and the outcomes of the businesses. Among their most significant findings are:

- A strong, positive correlation between impact and accountability to an independent board of directors (but no such correlation was found for those whose only accountability was to an NGO or mission agency).
- Practitioners who have a financial incentive to grow a successful business, and specifically rely on the business for their salaries, are significantly more “effective” in achieving “holistic” impact than those who rely exclusively on donor support.
- Those with a more “holistic”, multiple bottom line view of mission and BAM (their “missional orientation”) report significantly better results not only in the material arena (economic and social benefits), but they were also *no less fruitful* in the spiritual arena than those who focused exclusively on spiritual outcomes.

This makes it three scientifically credible studies conducted over the last decade that have found a strong connection between the “missional orientation” of the practitioners (their answer to the question of “What does it mean to be a missional business?”) and the impact of the business. Specifically they find that those with a holistic definition of purpose and success generally outperform—or at least are no less impactful than—those who care only about evangelistic outcomes. This obviously challenges the traditional way of thinking about how to recruit and equip potential BAM practitioners.

Three additional studies that looked only at the motivations of BAM practitioners reached contradictory conclusions. One was conducted by Christopher Brown as part of a Master’s thesis at Eastern University. Subsequently published by Bronkema and Brown (2009), the study finds evidence that, while much is said about the “multiple bottom lines” of BAM, in

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<sup>10</sup> The presentation given by Rundle at the BAM Global Congress in April 2013 is available here: <http://youtu.be/L3oho6jhBxc>.

<sup>11</sup> One paper entitled “Does Donor Support Help or Hinder BAM Practitioners?” (Rundle, 2014) has now been published in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, January 2014, available at: <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/system/files/2014-01-021-rundle.pdf>. Additional findings and papers are likely as Rundle and Lee have not completed their analysis of the data.

practice, BAM enthusiasts seem to only care about the economic and evangelistic bottom lines. Indeed, of the 39 “practitioners and theorists” surveyed, *none* identified societal or developmental transformation as one of the expected outcomes or best practices. The authors attribute this to the lingering ambivalence many evangelicals have toward incorporating social concerns into their mission goals. Their point may have some validity, but given the small sample size it would be premature to say this is a widespread problem.

In another Master’s thesis, Linda Christiansen (2008) surveyed participants of a course for aspiring BAM practitioners and found that, contrary to Brown’s study, the seminar participants were in fact not concerned about the economic impact or the viability of the business more broadly, but seemed mainly interested in societal and spiritual outcomes. This arguably is a predictable finding given that half of the participants were missionaries or church leaders who were either just thinking about BAM or in the start-up phase of their businesses. Like the previous study, one should be careful about concluding that these results are representative of the entire BAM movement.

Finally, Brian Albright (2014) studied the structures, goals and outcomes of BAM businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa, and specifically partnerships between African and American entrepreneurs. Given the challenging economic environment, he found that practitioners expressed their economic goals in terms of “sustainability,” and that they often employ a hybrid nonprofit/for-profit organizational structure. As for the desired spiritual impact, sub-Saharan Africa is heavily Christianized, and the goals tend to be expressed in terms of promoting biblical business principles.

As these six studies suggest, much more theoretical and empirical work is needed before we can say with any confidence whether, how and under what circumstances BAM is effective. Among the areas where further study is needed is the idea of “effectiveness” itself: What are the non-negotiable outcomes of an effective BAM business, and what metrics are most useful for assessing its effectiveness? What are the motivations, backgrounds and support structures of an effective BAM practitioner or management team? How can the resources and skills of the management team be expanded? Longitudinal studies would be especially helpful as they would add to our understanding of the evolution of these ventures and the factors that contribute to their eventual success or failure.<sup>12</sup>

Closely related are questions about the structure and governance of a BAM business. Like the “Social Enterprise Spectrum” in Figure 1, the population of self-described BAM businesses currently can be thought of as a continuum, like that in Figure 2 below, of organizational structures and missional mindsets. On one end are small businesses owned by missionaries or their (nonprofit) sending agencies that are principally motivated by the spiritual rather than the economic opportunity. For them, business is primarily a means to an end, and time spent doing business is by definition time *not* spent doing ministry. Small businesses are often preferred and donor support is seen as essential for insulating practitioners from the pressures that accompany running a business and for keeping practitioners focused on their ministry goals. Not surprisingly, these people often show more interest in their evangelistic goals, although the studies by Lai (2003), Russell (2008) and Rundle (2014) raise doubts about whether they are any more successful than the other group at achieving those goals.

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<sup>12</sup> Toward that end, Rundle and Steffen (2003) was revised and updated in 2011, with the second edition providing updates on the original case studies. Two companies, however, are no longer in business and are only mentioned in the preface. A separate study of failed BAM businesses could be very enlightening.

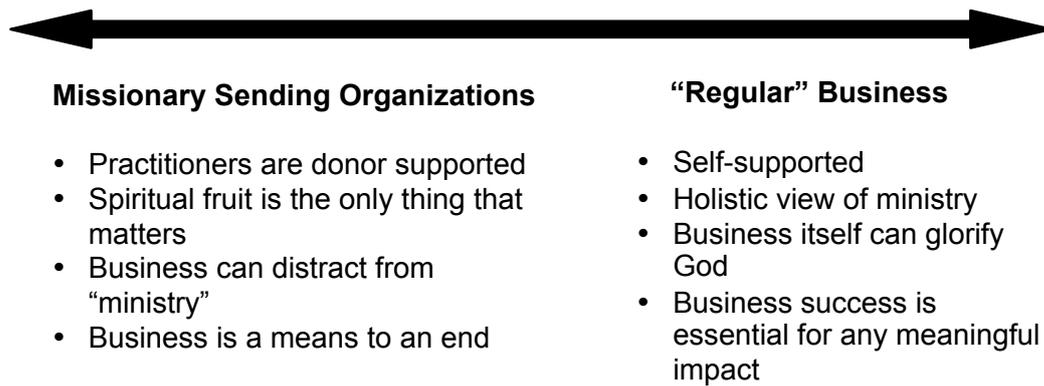


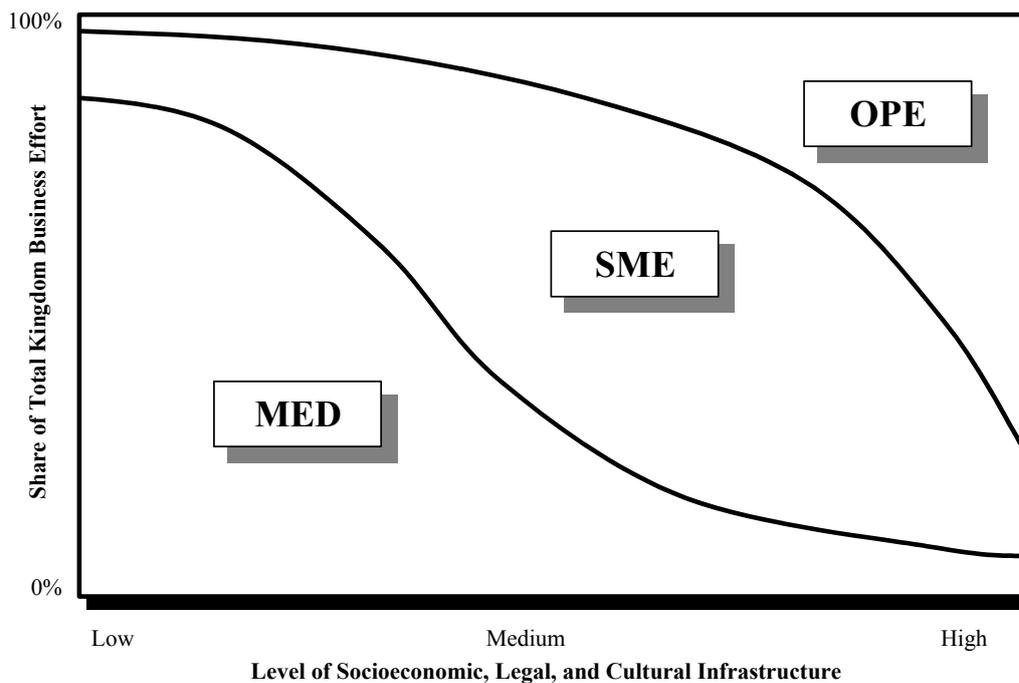
Figure 2: The Business as Mission Continuum

At the other end of the continuum are those who see BAM as a long overdue acknowledgement that business is itself a divine calling and a ministry, one that is every bit as important as the work of pastors and missionaries. Practitioners who hold this view are often in a “regular business” context in the sense that they are not affiliated (usually) with a missionary sending agency. They are sincere Christians who find themselves for various economic reasons located in a part of the world that has great social and spiritual need. Their definition of ministry is often broader than the average missionary, but the impact they have, when led by the Holy Spirit, is no less impressive.

In between these two extremes are a plethora of hybrid organizational and governance structures, including arrangements similar to licensing agreements, partnerships, joint ventures and quasi-franchises. This suggests another fruitful avenue for further research, one that would study these arrangements to determine which ones are most useful, and under what circumstances they are mutually beneficial.

A third avenue with almost unlimited potential for further research is the environmental factors that can inhibit or contribute to the goals and strategies of BAM. For example, in countries with severe market imperfections, is one model or one form of governance more effective than another? In what ways can governments or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) help or hinder the efforts of a BAM business? In what ways can BAM businesses help improve a society’s political, legal or cultural climate? Or turning the question around, what are the political, legal or cultural preconditions for success? Figure 3 below is an illustration from Ken Eldred’s 2005 book *God is at Work* that suggests that countries with weak socioeconomic, legal and cultural foundations are less suitable for “Overseas Private Equity” businesses, which would be included in our understanding BAM here. This is a thought-provoking and potentially important assertion that to our knowledge has never been tested.

This list of gaps in our knowledge base is far from complete. There is undoubtedly a similarly long list of questions that can be raised by missiologists, anthropologists, psychologists, theologians and other scholars, which is why an interdisciplinary association of scholars may need to be formed so that the various “dots” of research can be connected.



MED (Microenterprise Development): Very small businesses founded with less than \$5,000.  
 SME (Small- and Medium-Enterprise): Businesses capitalized in the \$5,000 to \$100,000 range.  
 OPE (Overseas Private Equity): Businesses requiring initial capitalization of \$100,000 or more.

Source: Ken Eldred (2005)

Figure 3: Ideal Business-Mission Strategy

### A word about microenterprise development

When some people hear the term “business as mission”, they instinctively think about microfinance and microenterprise development (MED), that is, efforts by NGOs to help poor people start their own small businesses.<sup>13</sup> Because of the vastly different purpose and approach of the organizations involved, some BAM advocates insist that this represents a separate topic. We will let others debate that question. Certainly these efforts have a missional component and involve businesses, and a similar debate is taking place there in the sense of whether microfinance is best carried out by a for-profit or a nonprofit organization. The reason this paper did not review any of that literature, or discuss any of the challenges associated with MED and microfinance, is because that area of scholarship has a longer history and is farther along in its development. Those interested in exploring the Christian contributions to this literature are encouraged to read Befus (2013), Myers (1999), Bussau and Mask (2003), Smith and Thurman (2007), Greer and Smith (2009), Corbett and Fikkert (2009) and Hoksbergen (2007, 2009), to name a few.

<sup>13</sup> For simplicity we are not making a distinction between helping people start Microenterprises or Small- and Medium-Size Enterprises (SMEs).

## Concluding Thoughts

Thus far most of the scholarly discussion about BAM has focused on theological questions related to the compatibility of business and mission, or the compatibility of work and ministry more generally.<sup>14</sup> Much less work has been done in the areas of strategy, governance, and operations. For example:

- Are there predictable advantages or disadvantages to different organizational forms for BAM businesses?
- What are some of the incentives and constraints that might shape the business strategies or the behavior of a BAM practitioner? Can they be condensed into a list of best practices?
- Are those best practices a function of one's cultural or geographical context, and if so, how?
- Do the best practices vary depending on the organizational form of the enterprise?
- How can spiritual outcomes be better defined and measured? How can practitioners be better trained and supported?

These questions represent only the “tip of the iceberg”. Business as mission has the potential of being a major force for good in the neediest parts of the world, but scholarship in this area has been lagging. This is more than an academic problem; without quality research—and the resources that are generated by it—practitioners are forced to “figure things out” on their own, and the long-term impact of BAM will continue to be mixed.

## Recommendations

To facilitate more research in this area, there is a need for an interdisciplinary association of Christian scholars that are united in their interest in this subject. Such an association would include anthropologists, theologians, missiologists, political science scholars, sociologists and many others. They do not need to organize their own conferences, necessarily, at least at first. Instead they could organize paper sessions at conferences related to their own disciplines, communicating their results and sharing their papers via a shared electronic network. The establishment of a venue for publication would also be an important step toward generating more research in this field. It is our hope that this paper will stimulate more interest in this important and rapidly developing subject.

Those wishing to communicate with the authors or the contributing group regarding this Report or these Recommendations and Action Plans may do so at [steve.rundle@biola.edu](mailto:steve.rundle@biola.edu) or [info@bamthinktank.org](mailto:info@bamthinktank.org).

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<sup>14</sup> See Part 1 of Johnson (2009) for a fairly comprehensive review of this very large field of theological literature. In addition are two excellent, recent contributions by Van Duzer (2010) and Wong and Rae (2011).  
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# Business as Mission Bibliography

Christians have been reflecting on their faith as it relates to business and economics since the time of Christ. This bibliography is limited to publications related to a small and relatively new subfield often referred to as “business as mission” (BAM). While the definition of BAM is still somewhat fluid, it shares many things in common with social entrepreneurship (SE) in that it involves the intentional use of business to address social, environmental, and/or spiritual concerns. The key difference is that BAM is motivated by an explicitly Christian worldview.

The purpose of this bibliography is to serve as a resource for scholars and practitioners who are unfamiliar with this subject. It includes relevant and noteworthy publications in the area of SE, BAM and “tentmaking.” To keep things manageable and focused, it **does not** survey the vast field of literature related to faith and economics, faith and work, or faith and business ethics. Those interested in such topics are encouraged to look at the Faith and Work Bibliography of Gordon-Conwell Seminary at <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/documents/faithandworkbibliography.pdf>.

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# **Appendix – SWOT Analysis of BAM Research**

## **BAM Think Tank Scholarship and Research Issue Group SWOT Analysis**

### **Strengths of Current BAM Research**

1. Its relative strength is in the area of evangelical Christian and Catholic perspectives on business, work and mission. (This is not to say that more theological work isn't necessary, but of all the possible topics surrounding BAM, theology has received the most attention).
2. Good foundation of well-articulated introductory articles.
3. Sample size of quality case studies is growing.
4. As a fairly new field of research, BAM represents a major opportunity for scholars to make significant contributions.
5. Research is by and large application or practice-oriented (in contrast to basic research that has little immediate benefit).
6. Christian universities and colleges are beginning to add BAM courses to the business curriculum (providing a demand for quality resources, including case studies).
7. In addition to the wide variety of practitioner-oriented conferences, the increasing respect for BAM as a field of scholarship has resulted in it being included as a theme in academic conferences.

### **Weaknesses of Current BAM Research**

1. As long as there continues to be many competing definitions of BAM, its acceptance as a legitimate field of scholarship work will be limited.
2. The relationship between BAM and the fields of international development and social entrepreneurship has not been clearly established, which limits the possibility of synergistic collaboration.
3. A dominance of scholarship from English speaking countries, particular North America. Scholarship from other parts of the world is either not finding its way to N. America or is not being produced.
4. Little communication between Christian traditions (evangelicals, Anglican, Catholic, etc.).
5. Little scholarship exists that goes beyond affirming (e.g. the biblical basis of) or inspiring (e.g. look what this BAMer did). Thus far there are few studies that take a rigorous and critical look at the actual practices, structures, or impacts of a BAM business.
6. Little historical research that can shed light on the life-cycle of kingdom businesses throughout history (Quakers, Puritans, etc.), their rise and fall, and the lessons that can be learned today.

## **Opportunities of Current BAM Research**

1. Interdisciplinary collaboration is an opportunity. Many other disciplines (international development, intercultural studies, theology, sociology, psychology, etc.) recognize the importance of business in promoting the common good. BAM scholars have an opportunity to teach, study, and collaborate with scholars in other disciplines, to do research and prepare practitioners with the wide variety of skills necessary to be effective on the field.
2. BAM represents an opportunity to better equip and motivate the next generation of Christian business professional (and help them avoid the mistakes of previous generations).
3. Lessons learned can have direct applicability to the broader social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility fields.
4. The research may also prove beneficial to the development or NGO community.

## **Threats Facing BAM Research**

1. Scholarly progress in this field risks being stunted by:
  - a) The wide variety of definitions, some of which are unflattering and can discourage practitioners and scholars alike.
  - b) The relative lack of analytical rigor, which, if left unchecked, will cause aspiring practitioners and scholars to dismiss the whole concept.
2. Research that does not “go deep” will leave practitioners unprepared and vulnerable to otherwise avoidable mistakes.