

WITNESS AT WORK

by Jim Thornton and Jorj Kowszun

Contents

About this book	2
Study 1: Witness in Objectives.....	4
Study 2: Witness in Ambition	12
Study 3: Witness in Truthfulness.....	21
Interlude: Making Moral Decisions	28
Study 4: Witness in Failure	29
Second Interlude: Zax for Tax.....	36
Study 5: Witness in Lifestyle	38
Study 6: Witness in Priorities	46
Study 7: Witness in Evangelism.....	57

About this book

This book has been designed to be used by groups of Christians who want to think about how their faith should impact in the workplace. It has its origins in some work done by the UCCF Business Studies Group.

It is intended, in particular, for busy people who want to think about the implications of being a Christian in their place of work in some depth, but do not have the time to read widely. John Stott, when asked if he would write a book for people in business, replied that if he thought people in business read books he would write one; that book is still to be written.

Busy managers who try to keep up with current management thinking know what a help *The Manager's Bookshelf* is: 45 of the current best-sellers summarised and analysed. Without having to read 45 books you can at least understand the issues and know where to look if you have to. We have tried to do a bit of this: the studies in this book include a summary of a key part of an important piece of Christian writing on the topic in question. If members of the group working on a study have not been able to read the book, at least they will know what the key issues are.

Each study contains:

- a brief introduction to the topic;
- a *Book of the Week* summary;
- a list of relevant Bible references;
- some questions for discussion;
- suggestions for a time of prayer.

We suggest that:

- you will find it helpful if all members of the study group buy a copy of the book: it costs less than either hiring two videos, or buying a ticket for a football match, or buying a round of drinks;
- you will also find it helpful to programme two sessions for Study 1. Our experience is that this raises so many issues that you are likely to run out of time. In addition there needs to be time for the group to understand where each person is coming from;
- you should be sensitive to those in your group who are between jobs and those who see their work as homemakers.

Our hope and prayer is that as a result of working through these studies you will be strengthened in your witness at work, so that the name of Jesus may be honoured more and more and the Kingdom of God may come in its fullness.

Jim Thornton and Jorj Kowszun

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Copyright © Home Group Resources Ltd 1997

First published in Great Britain 1997

All rights reserved

Study 1: Witness in Objectives

Introduction

What are our objectives at work?

Before we can think clearly about our witness at work we need to be clear about our *objectives*. What is the *purpose* of our work and *why* are we doing it?

Consider the following story, which turns up in a range of different guises:

The architect arrives on a building site and meets three different people. The first is laying bricks and when asked what he is doing replies:

“I am building this wall.”

The second person he meets is carrying bricks and his reply to the question is:

“I am earning a crust in order that I and my family may eat.”

The third person is sweeping up brick-dust and his reply is:

“I am privileged, sir, to be taking part in the building of this magnificent cathedral for the glory of God.”

What does our attitude to work – or our business philosophy – say about Jesus to other people?

This is a very wide subject and this study focuses on some of the underlying structural issues. We are concerned, in particular, that you should give some



thought to some very basic questions.

For example:

What is a *Christian* level of profit?

It may seem a silly question, but groups discussing Christians and the workplace tend to divide quickly on this issue.

It may help to place this and related basic questions into an appropriate context. Perhaps a good starting point might be to examine the goals and objectives of businesses operating in a capitalist economy.

Market Capitalism

Do Christians have anything distinctive to say about market capitalism?

Archbishop William Temple and his colleagues grappled with this question at a conference during the second world war. They included the following in the *Malvern Declaration* of 10 January 1941:

“To a large extent production is carried on not to supply the consumer with goods but to bring profits to the producer ... This method of ordering industry which tends to treat human work and human satisfaction alike as means to a false end – namely monetary gain – becomes a source of unemployment at home and dangerous competition for markets abroad ... The system under which we have lived has been a predisposing cause of war even though those who direct and profit by it have desired peace.”

The historian Arthur Bryant identified the introduction of the limited liability company as a significant turning point in attitudes to business ethics:

“The consequences of the Companies Act of 1862 were perhaps greater than that of any single measure in English parliamentary history. They completed the divorce between the Christian conscience and the economic practice of everyday life. They paganised the commercial community. Henceforward an astute man by adherence to legal rules which had nothing to do with morality could grow immeasurably rich by virtue of shuffling off his most elementary obligations to his fellows. He could not only grow rich by these means. He could grow immensely rich.”

These two quotations help us to see how both the structures and the practices of modern business tend to encourage corrupt motivations. Does this mean that capitalism is inherently evil?

Brian Griffiths argues that, far from being inherently evil, capitalism is morally neutral. He deduces seven biblical principles:

there is a positive mandate to create wealth;

- 1 **private property rather than state social or collective ownership is the Christian norm for society;**
- 2 **each family should have a permanent stake in economic life;**
- 3 **the relief and elimination of poverty rather than the pursuit of economic equality should be a Christian concern;**
- 4 **economic injustice is to be remedied;**
- 5 **there should be constant warnings of the dangers of materialism;**

accountability and judgement are an integral part of economic life.

Roy McCloughry points out that the great paradox of market capitalism is that the unintentional consequences of self-interest are said to be good for the community as a whole. He suggests that Griffiths' attempt to 'reinstate self-interest in a more acceptable guise' blurs the distinction between:

- self-preservation which is a human instinct and
- the desire for self-gratification that is a consequence of human fallenness.

He further points out that Griffiths' approach overlooks the fact that in our self-loving society 'conspicuous consumption' indicates status in life:

"The compulsion to consume in order to authenticate one's own existence is a modern phenomenon which is far removed from 'that self respect of which our Lord spoke' ...

"The form of self-interest which is traditionally meant to drive business life would be unacceptable if brought into the home! People are asked to conduct their business affairs according to one set of principles and their social life according to another focused on personal altruism. Consequently we are forced into a kind of 'doublethink' ... The very drives which are most admired in the market-place are those which are most destructive of social communities.

And he quotes from Schumacher:

"In the current vocabulary of condemnation there are few words as final and conclusive as 'uneconomic'. If an activity has been branded as 'uneconomic' its right of existence is not merely questioned but fundamentally denied. Anything that is found to be an impediment to economic growth is a shameful thing and if people cling to it they are thought of as either saboteurs or fools. Call a thing immoral or ugly, soul destroying or a degradation of man, a peril to the peace of the world or to the well-being of future generations so long as you have not shown it to be 'uneconomic' you have not really questioned its right to exist, grow or prosper."

A closely related issue is that of private property rights and the ownership of the means of production.

What about private property rights?

Brian Griffiths argues that the Bible upholds private property rights:

"God alone has total and unconditional ownership of property. Throughout the Bible private property is the normal accepted form of ownership and there is no conflict between trusteeship and private property rights.

"The justification of private property rights ... is rooted in creation. Man was created a responsible being. But freedom presupposes the ability to make choices concerning those things over which persons have control. In the material area of life this can be guaranteed only by the existence of private property rights."

He concludes that:

"Private property rather than state, social or collective ownership is the Christian norm for society."

And he draws the further conclusion:

"To the extent that private property rights .. are the appropriate Christian starting point, then a market economy .. is the logical outcome."

Donald Hay, however, takes issue with Griffiths' conclusion that the market economy can be treated as a biblical ideal. He points out that:

"Many people are highly responsible stewards of resources in which they have no private property rights; the examples of Christian

ministers, hospital doctors and University professors come to mind.”

Both of them agree, however, that the term *private property rights* has to be qualified if it is to be asserted as a biblical principle:

“The Christian view of private property rights is different from the Roman or Justinian view which derived ownership from the concept of natural right. In the Roman view ownership meant the unconditional and exclusive use of property by the individual. He was free to choose ... exactly how he wished to use that property. By contrast a Judaeo-Christian view places emphasis on duties as well as rights – think of the poor-tithe, the gleaning laws and the legislation of a zero rate of interest in the Pentateuch economy”

This brings us back to Griffiths’ seventh principle, that accountability should be an integral part of our economic life and that we should expect to be judged accordingly.

The ‘book of the week’ for this first study is Chris Wright’s *Living as the People of God*. He tackles the issue of ownership of land as it is dealt with in the Old Testament and tries to identify the corresponding concepts in the New Testament.

Book of the Week

***Living as the People of God:* Christopher J.H. Wright**

Revd. Dr. Christopher Wright is Principal of All Nations Christian College at Easneye, Ware. After Cambridge he served a curacy in Tonbridge and lectured at Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India. He has written extensively on ethics and the Old Testament.

In *Living as the People of God* Wright looks at the theology of land in the Old Testament and applies this theology to thinking about the relevance of biblical economics to working in a competitive modern environment.

Whatever became of the Land?

Land in the Old Testament has a major role in the overall faith and theology of Israel but what happens to the land in the New Testament? What does Israel’s basic means of production point to in the Church?

“The New Testament ... gives no theological significance to the territorial land of Palestine as such. However, in the Old Testament, the land is not merely a piece of territory, any more than the Temple is merely a building or Jerusalem merely a city. Like them, it was the focus of major theological and ethical traditions. These traditions can hardly have vanished from sight in the New Testament ...”

To answer this question, Wright sets out three complementary ways of interpreting and applying Old Testament ethical material.

Three modes of interpretation

Paradigmatic interpretation

This interpretation treats the relationship between God and Israel as a model (a *paradigm*) of the relationship that God seeks with the whole of humanity. It expresses the idea that:

“God’s relation to Israel in their land was a deliberate reflection of his relation to mankind on earth, or rather, a redemptive response to the fracturing of his creative purpose in the latter sphere. Mankind was fallen and lived on an earth that was cursed. Israel was redeemed and lived in a land that God would bless.”

Eschatological interpretation

This interpretation compares the relationship between God and Israel with the eventual condition that will exist between redeemed humanity and God at the end times (the *eschaton*). It rests on the conviction that:

“God’s redemptive purpose, initiated through Israel and their land ... will ultimately embrace all nations and the whole earth, in a transformed and perfect new creation ... God will not just abandon his creation, but will redeem it. And the land of Israel functioned as a prototype of that redeemed earth.”

Typological understanding

This third way of interpretation is a matter of:

“... simply treating the land as we do other great features and themes of the Old Testament, by relating it to the person and work of the Messiah and through him to the nature of the community of those ‘in Christ’, Messianic Israel.”

So, we know:

- the old covenants point to the new;
- that sacrifice points to the cross;
- that circumcision points to baptism;
- that Passover points to Eucharist.

What does the land point to? In the Old Testament to possess the land was to share in the inheritance of all God's people. 'The land' meant security, inclusion, blessing, corporate sharing and practical responsibility. To be foreigners or aliens (*gerim* and *tosabim*) was to be landless dependants in Israel's economy.

Fellowship (Koinonia)

In Ephesians 2:19 Paul expounds the new all-inclusive dimension of the Christian gospel in a passage that is rich with Old Testament imagery:

"Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household." (NIV)

To be 'in Christ' just as to be 'in the land' denotes a status and a relationship that have been given by God, a position of inclusion and security. This is also to be understood as a commitment to live in fellowship with those who share this relationship by fulfilling practical responsibilities.

Wright goes on to look at the way the socio-economic dimension of the land feeds through from the Old Testament into the New. He looks in particular at the understanding and practice of 'fellowship' (koinonia):

"a practical, often costly, sharing, which is a far cry from that watery 'togetherness' which commonly passes as 'fellowship' ... the experience of fellowship, in its full, rich, 'concrete' New Testament sense, fulfils analogous theological and ethical functions for Christians as the possession of land did for Old Testament Israelites ... Both are linked to the status of sonship and the related themes of inheritance and promise. Both thereby constitute a proof of authentic relationship with God as part of his redeemed community. For fellowship, like the land, has its limits: so that the person who departs permanently from it or refuses to accept it shows that he has no real part in God's people."

Wright claims that the threefold framework of interpretation:

"releases the potential and power of Old Testament ethics into the whole range of Christian concerns."

He illustrates this by applying the framework to the Old Testament jubilee and associated sabbatical institutions and notes:

"The jubilee was designed to prevent the accumulation of the bulk of the land in the hands of the few. It protected a system of land tenure that was intended to be broadly equitable, with the ownership of land widely spread throughout the population. It was an attempt to impede, and indeed periodically to reverse, the relentless economic forces that lead to a downward spiral of debt, poverty, dispossession and bondage. Its major focus of concern was for the economic viability of the smallest economic units, namely the household with its land: it was a family-oriented economic law."

It may be helpful to refer back to this material in Study 4 when considering Old Testament promises of prosperity.

For Further Reading:

ELLUL Jacques (1984) *Money and Power* Illinois: IVP (Ellul argues that money is not neutral and is a powerful agent that sets itself against God's Kingdom)

GRIFFITHS Brian (1982) *Morality and the Market Place* London: Hodder & Stoughton

HAY Donald (1989) *Economics Today* Leicester: Apollos/IVP

McCLOUGHRY Roy (1990) *The Eye of the Needle* Leicester: IVP

SCHUMACHER E F (1974) *Small is Beautiful* London: Abacus (Sphere)

STOTT John R W (1984) *Issues Facing Christians Today* Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan & Scott (Chapter 9 in particular on work and unemployment)

TAWNEY R H (1937) *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* London: Pelican (Tawney argues that Capitalism had Puritanism as one of its parents)

WRIGHT Christopher J H (1983) *Living as the People of God* Leicester: IVP

Bible References

The list of references included with each study is not intended to be exhaustive but is a selection provided for use as starting points.

book	reference	context
Genesis	1: 26ff	Be fruitful ... subdue the earth
	2: 15	Work the earth and take care of it
	3: 17-19	Cursed is the ground because of you
Leviticus	25	The Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee
Deuteronomy	15	The year of Cancelling Debts
	23: 19	Do not charge your brother interest
Nehemiah	5:1-13	Let the practice of usury stop
Psalms	8: 6-8	Man the ruler over creation
Matthew	5: 13-16	You are salt and light
	6: 24	No one can serve two masters
	7: 24	Building on a rock
	10: 39	Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it
	25: 14-30	The parable of the talents

book	reference	context
Mark	12: 13-17	Paying taxes to Caesar
Luke	16: 1-17	Parable of the shrewd manager
	19: 11-27	The parable of the ten minas
Romans	12: 1-2	Do not conform to the world's pattern
	13: 1-7	Authorities are established by God
1 Corinthians	6: 7-8	Why go to law?
2 Corinthians	8: 13-15	Our desire is equality
Galatians	5: 16-26	Live by the Spirit
Ephesians	4: 1-2	Live a life worthy of your calling
Philippians	3: 4-11	Whatever was to my profit I consider loss
Colossians	4: 1	Provide what is right and fair for your employees
I Timothy	4: 4-5	Everything God created is good
	6: 6-10	Godliness with contentment is great gain

Activities

1 Questionnaire

Use the right-hand scale to indicate your measure of agreement or disagreement with each statement. You will probably want to qualify your responses and will be able to do so in discussion; for now just give a rough indication of how you might tend to respond to each statement.

	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
1 The stakeholders in a business (shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers and the community) have an equal right to benefit from the success of the business.					
2 Risk should be rewarded but speculation should be penalised.					
3 The main objective of any business is to maximise the long-term rate of return on equity in the business.					
4 Capitalism has many faults as an economic system but is the least worst of the available options.					
5 Competition, being morally neutral, is the best way to regulate a market.					
6 Earning for God as much as one can should be a Christian's main motivation in business.					
7 The right price is the maximum price that the market will stand.					
8 Money is a morally neutral commodity					
9 Profit is the only objective measure of the health of any organisation.					
10 Wealth creation enterprises should be valued by Christians more than service organisations (metal bashers are more important than hairdressers).					
11 In a tough business environment, it is bad stewardship for a Christian to refuse to take actions that could put a competitor out of business.					
12 In the normal course of business activity there is no such thing as an excessive profit.					
13 Mercy in business is a sign of weakness.					

Compare your answers with the rest of the group and look briefly at those statements where there is disagreement. How would you justify your answer from the teaching of Jesus or from principles set out in the Bible?

2 Ealing Intercoolers Ltd

The following fictitious letter is based on a real set of events but names, contexts, etc. have been changed. Discuss the issues that this letter raises and decide whether Richard Cameron can be said to be acting in a way that is consistent with his Christian integrity.

20 June 1993

Richard Cameron Esq.
Managing Director
Ealing Intercoolers Ltd
Unit 4, Bridge Estate
Uxbridge Road
Ealing
London W

Dear Mr Cameron

Stanbridge Press Ltd

I believe you are aware of the current situation at Stanbridge Press, where we are undertaking the installation of a new air-conditioning system for the company's research department, against a very tight schedule. New equipment is to be installed in four weeks' time, and as far as we can ascertain you are the only company in the UK with the chiller unit of the designed size in stock; in order to complete our contract on time we have no alternative but to purchase the unit from you.

We have been advised by your sales director, Mr Bob Cratchett, that we can purchase the chiller for £75,000. You will know that the quoted price from the overseas manufacturer is £40,000 cif London.

I am aware that you had originally designed and priced this project for my brother-in-law, who is managing Director of Stanbridge Press; you will know that we were given your plans and Specification and told we could have the contract if we would agree to do the work for a certain sum, which we agreed.

We have located a UK manufacturer who can provide a larger chiller unit in two weeks for £60,000, but if we use the larger unit, with the associated design changes, we will make a loss on the job. The price you are quoting to us for the designed size of chiller seems to us to include not only your design costs but also the profit you would have expected to make if you had been awarded the job.

I know you are a member of the PCC at your local Parish Church, and you are known in the trade for your Christian beliefs and integrity. I ask you for the sake of our small company, which has only been trading for two years, that you sell us the chiller unit for a fair price that will enable both of us to make a reasonable return. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Sluggett
Kwik-Kool Heatbusters Ltd

3 Dr. Crippen

Divide into two or three groups. Each group comprises the Board of Grantchester NHS Trust, meeting to price a new method of carrying out a hip replacement operation.

Dr. Crippen has developed a new technique using lasers and carbon-graphite components that should cut the operating time in half and enable patients to be discharged in two-thirds of the normal hospitalisation time.

The direct costs of the operation, including overhead contribution, are estimated at £860, but Dr. Crippen insists on a royalty payment of 10% for each operation carried out. The Chief Executive is not keen on this, but fears that refusal might cause Dr. Crippen to leave and join another Health Trust. He also fears that it might discourage other staff from developing new techniques.

The adjoining Health Trust pays £1,750 for a hip replacement and there is generally a nine month waiting list. The nurses, wanting steady employment, prefer a regular flow of patients rather than a mad rush for a few months.

It is agreed that this is a good opportunity to generate some earnings that could be utilised to improve the hospital facilities. The problem is to decide a basis on which the price should be agreed.

The Chief Executive wants funds to improve facilities in the long term, the staff want incentives to develop new techniques and the politicians want to reduce queues in the short term providing this does not provoke retaliation from neighbouring Health Trusts.

Set out the principles you would recommend as Chair of the Board and suggest a price for the operation.

Would your answer be different if this was a Church-run hospital or a Mission hospital?

4 Questions

- What relevance do Old Testament regulations for an agrarian pre-industrial economy have for us today?
- How would you summarise the key Biblical principles for economic life?
- Is using the protection of the limited liability company an immoral way of operating? Ought

Christians to witness by trading with unlimited liability?

- Do you think Church leaders should make pronouncements on economics?
- Do you manage your household (your finances, relationships, aspirations) on the same lines as you manage your work place? Does Christian morality require that you should?
- What would be the distinctive features of a company operating on 'Biblical principles'? Is this an attractive proposition or should Christians avoid witnessing in this way?
- Was there a tension in the group between those working in large corporations or the public sector, and those working in small businesses?

How would you summarise the difference in perspective?

- What should be the objectives for a Christian working as a manager in:
 - The National Health Service;
 - Kwik-Kool Heatbusters Ltd?

Affirmation and Prayer

It would be natural to finish the Study with a time of prayer. As part of that time the group should ask themselves the following:

Is it possible to summarise in a single sentence the conclusions you have come to?

As a result of this Study is there at least on aspect of your working life that you would like to change or at least explore prayerfully?

Pray for each other and your witness at work.

In 1 Peter 2:12 it says:

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”(NIV)

Ask God to help us know how to live such good lives, particularly in those areas where it is far from clear what the 'good' decisions should be – in Jesus' name.