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A Cause of Worth (or A Cause of Greater Worth)

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This essay was first given as a presentation by our president, C. William Pollard, at a series of ServiceMaster management conferences during the past year. We include it in this annual report to give shareholders an understanding of the commitment we feel, both as individuals and as a company, to be stewards of God's creation. The thoughts expressed here by Bill Pollard have been the guiding philosophy of ServiceMaster from its founding days with Marion Wade and Ken Hansen. This philosophy will continue to guide our plans and efforts as we look to the future of our company.

16.9

Kenneth T. Wessner, Chairman

A CAUSE OF WORTH OR A CAUSE OF GREATER WORTH

by C. William Pollard

What is worth? A value that is relative, or one that is absolute? Publilius Syrus, a famous Roman writer in the first century before Christ, concluded, "A thing is worth what someone will pay for it." At first glance the statement seems obvious. But in fact, using the price of things as a measure of worth often confounds us.

In the winter of 1971 I purchased a Christmas gift for my wife, Judy. It was a Hummel Christmas plate, priced at \$21.95. It was the first Christmas plate produced by the famous German firm, and the store clerk assured me that it would increase in value. Last year Judy and I were attending an antique auction and found, much to our surprise, that a 1971 Hummel Christmas plate sold for one thousand dollars.

What was it about that plate that brought about this remarkable growth in value, this apparent greater worth? Its substance had not changed. It had not grown. But it was in great demand. The original molds had been broken. Now there were a limited number, with no opportunity for replacement. And of course, there was the factor of inflation. Had all these factors contributed to an increased worth? The dollar value was there, but is this the worth that contributes to a greater worth?

It is hard to consider the concept of worth without a monetary measurement. But we learn from history that worth in terms of money is clearly relative. After World War I, inflation struck a vanquished Germany. Money was all but worthless, and was trundled to the store in a wheelbarrow to buy a simple loaf of bread. Following the 1929 stock market crash in the United States, instead of inflation there was deflation, a contraction of

the money supply. Gross national product dropped significantly, and twelve million people, a quarter of the labor force, were out of work.

In our current economy we have experienced another disturbing phenomenon: inflation combined with recession, with unemployment increasing at the same time that prices and wages are increasing.

Some governments attempt to stabilize economic fluctuations through external controls on the price of goods and services. Such controls appear to give absolute value to everything, but the appearance is illusory. Some things come to be regarded as worth more than their fixed prices, and some come to be worth less, depending on the law of supply and demand. Since the official value of things cannot adjust accordingly, people shift to an underground economy, to primitive barter systems, to bribery and blackmarketeering. In a modern society this is the economic equivalent of anarchy, and it leads some economists to conclude that the genesis of real worth is possible only if prices and values are free to fluctuate at will. These economists advocate total freedom not only over market prices, but over the whole span of production and distribution of goods and services.

But is freedom the source or essential ingredient of worth? Freedom that permits abortion on demand — just because there is a demand? Freedom that has as its only primary check and balance the common denominator of profit and competition? In many situations profit does act as an effective tool to allocate resources. It gives a standard and a discipline within which to manage and direct groups of people. But it does not solve the problem of the profitable X-rated film, or address the basic issue of what is the purpose of life. Is freedom, then, or the free enterprise system, the answer to worth, or to a greater worth? There must be something more.

Marion Wade, the founder of ServiceMaster, believed that there is

something more. He had a vision, a vision of a company committed to people, honoring God in their work and producing a standard of excellence in their service to others. That vision is encompassed today in the four objectives of ServiceMaster: to honor God in all we do; to help people develop; to pursue excellence; and to grow profitably. Inevitably the question is asked, are these four objectives compatible? There is a growing belief among some people that a conflict exists between spiritual values on the one hand, and economic objectives on the other. Can there be anything in common between God and profit?

People point to the unequal distribution of wealth inherent in a capitalist system and conclude that if God exists and He is just, there cannot be a common ground between Him and a system with such inherent inequities. To understand worth, however, we must talk not about the value of things, but the value, the worth, of people. Worth is not measured by the monetary value of a person's tangible assets, but by the fact that all people are created in God's image. The individual, created in the image of God, is the common link between God and profit.

Those social economists who explain worth exclusively in economic terms equate value with a redistribution of wealth in which everybody shares equally. This assumes, however, that the wealth to be shared already exists, like a natural resource, and that the only requirement is to see that it is distributed equally. Unfortunately, in order to distribute wealth you have to produce wealth, and in actual practice the redistribution policies of socialism invariably seem to defeat proficiency and productivity, and produce a sharing of poverty instead of a sharing of wealth. The free enterprise system continues to be the most efficient system of production and distribution.

But the question remains, how can such a system harbor a cause of ~~greater~~ *GREATER*.

worth? How does a person honor God AND make a profit? The issue is not merely efficient production, but production FOR WHAT? Do we use people for production or production for people? To produce more goods and more services with less time and less effort is merely treading water unless there is a positive cultivation and growth of the person. And is even that enough? We must ask also whether the purposes and will of God are being accomplished in the process.

Here may be the discovery of worth; yes, even a greater worth. A thing is worth what its purchaser will pay for it. For old Publilius Syrus this was not just a truism. It was reality. He had been a slave, brought from Antioch to Rome. There he was purchased by a wealthy philanthropist—who promptly set him free. Perhaps Publilius Syrus knew the large sum of money his benefactor paid for him. "Am I worth so much?" he might have asked.

What is any human being worth? A few dollars, which is the combined value of our chemical substance? The price of a slave? A handsome salary with attractive benefits? Or even the life of another person? Yet still, is it possible, the life of God's Son, Jesus Christ? Worth in such terms is not just a finite measurement with the standard expressed in dollars and cents. It is an absolute, an absolute that has its origin in God. It is that inherent, God-like characteristic that generates demand for more, that is measured by reproduction in the lives of others and produces satisfaction and real value.

What is worth? The simple truth is that God is worth. And when God, the essence and origin of worth, works in the lives of people who have committed themselves to Him; and when these people are multiplied in the lives of others: the result is a greater worth. This is expressed in the formula:
 $(G+M) \times M_n = W^n$

We may have little problem with the proposition that God is the essence and origin of worth. It is that second that staggers our thinking, how-

Chairman Kenneth T. Wessner (left) and President C. William Pollard. Under their leadership ServiceMaster looks forward to the future, with a continued commitment to grow in serving people.

ever. Man plus God multiplied in the lives of other men is a greater worth. As C. S. Lewis expressed it in the book, *The World's Last Night*: "God seems to do nothing of Himself which He cannot possibly delegate to His creatures. He could, if He chose, repair our bodies miraculously, without food, or give us food without the aid of farmers, bakers, and butchers; or knowledge without the aid of learned men; or convert the heathen without missionaries. Instead, He allows soils and weather and animals and the muscles, and minds, and wills of men to cooperate in the execution of His will." Is this how God makes something out of nothing? Indeed, makes a likeness of God in man?

The reality is that God has chosen people to accomplish His will, so that a greater worth is accomplished as we exercise stewardship over the resources made available to us. All that we have and are demands use, stewardship. This is what God requires of us. The only reason we possess a mental capacity, a job or responsibility, or anything that someone else does not have is for greater use, greater expenditure to ful-

fill God's purpose. There is no personal accumulation plan with God. We are called to be spent for His purpose. To whom much has been given, much will be required. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9 (New International Version.)

A greater worth comes, then, only as we spend ourselves in the lives of others. A greater worth will not be measured solely in economic terms—that is, whether we in ServiceMaster are successful in building a profitable business. Profit is only a measure of the resources to be used and spent for God. It is not an end in itself. It is a measure of our effectiveness in using those resources to benefit the people we serve, the fellow employees we work with, and those who invest in our enterprise. This cause, to use ourselves, to use our resources, to be spent, is a cause of greater worth. In a free society, and as members of God's creation, it is both our right, and our profound responsibility.