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Faith in the Workplace

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Recommended Citation

Pollard, C. William, "Faith in the Workplace" (2008). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 73.
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**Samaritan Interfaith
Focus on Faith Breakfast
Cress Creek Country Club
Naperville, Illinois
July 10, 2008**

“Faith in the Workplace”

C. William Pollard

It is a privilege for me to be with you at this Samaritan Interfaith Breakfast. As I have gotten to know a little more about the ministry of Samaritan Interfaith, I want to thank you for the work you are doing in our communities as you seek to integrate faith in the caring for the heart, mind, and soul and, in so doing, provide a place for healing and hope.

This morning, I have been asked to talk about faith in the workplace. This topic, not only involves the effectiveness of people at work – that is, getting the job done – but also how the work environment is or is not contributing to the people they are becoming.

Now, I come to this subject as a business person - one who has spent most of his life in the marketplace serving customers and making money.

Profit is often used as a measure of the effectiveness of the business firm. Profit is the engine that generates capital; the source for the creation of wealth. But its function is not limited to business. Without contributions and other sources of revenue exceeding expenses, the non-profit soon realizes that it is in the process of going financially bankrupt. The same is true for every family unit in our society. If a family's expenses continue to exceed its sources of income, a day of reckoning is only just around the corner. I would suggest that this principal also applies to government. There is an ultimate limit to what you can borrow to cover deficits.

We know, however, that the making of money can become consuming, an addiction where enough is never enough. We are told in the Bible that the love of money is the root of all evil.

Jesus asked His followers: "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul?" He instructed His disciples not to lay up their treasures here

on earth but in Heaven. "For where your treasure is there will your heart be also".

He went on to say that "no one can serve two masters. For you cannot serve God and money".

These words of Jesus remind us that profit as an end goal of life and measured only in dollars and cents is an empty vessel and can result in the poverty of the soul.

So, what is there in common between God and profit – faith and work?

ServiceMaster, the business I led over a twenty-five year period, was an attempt to answer these questions. As I have now retired from my leadership responsibilities at the Company and look back, I can add up the numbers that show growth in profits, customers served, and a return for our shareholders that averaged 20% per year. While these figures are part of a normal business assessment of performance, the conclusion for me cannot be limited to these money or value creation measurements

of profit. The real and lasting measurement is whether the investment and result of my leadership can be seen in the changed and improved lives of the people I led.

As a business, we wanted to excel at generating profits and creating value for shareholders. If we didn't want to play by these rules, we didn't belong in the ball game. But we also tried to encourage an environment where the workplace could be an open community where the question of a person's moral and spiritual development and the existence of God and how one related to claims of his or her faith with the demands of their work were issues of discussion, debate and, yes, even learning and understanding. We considered the people of our firm as, in fact, the soul of the firm.

Our corporate objectives at ServiceMaster were simply stated: To honor God in all we do, To help people develop, To pursue excellence, and To grow profitably.

Those first two objectives were end goals. The second two were means goals. We did not use our first objective as a basis of exclusion. It was, in fact, the reason of our

promotion of diversity as we recognized that different people, with different beliefs, were all part of God's mix.

It did not mean that everything was done right. We experienced our share of mistakes. We sometimes failed and did things wrong. But because of a stated standard and a reason for that standard, we could not hide our mistakes. Mistakes were regularly flushed out into the open for correction and, in some cases, for forgiveness. And leaders could not hide behind or protect themselves at the expense of those they were leading.

The process of seeking understanding and application of these objectives at all levels of the organization was a never-ending task. It involved matters of the heart as well as the head. And it was not susceptible to standard management techniques of implementation or measurement.

While at times it was discouraging, it also was energizing, as one realized the continuing potential for creativity and innovation, as there was a focus on the development of the whole person.

In a diverse and pluralistic society, some may question whether the first objective To honor God belongs as part of a purpose statement of a business; or for that matter, in our case, of a public company. But regardless of your starting point, the principal that may be embraced by all is simply where it led us and that was to honor and recognize the dignity and worth of every person and our responsibility as leaders to be involved in not only what that person was doing in their work but also who they were becoming.

The challenges and opportunities of running a business with these objectives have been the subject of several case studies at the Harvard Business School and are discussed in my first book, *The Soul of the Firm* and my more recent book *Serving Two Masters? Reflections of God and Profit*. Copies of these books will be available to you today.

During my leadership of the firm, I had the opportunity to develop a friendship with Peter Drucker. Peter is no longer living, but during his life, he wrote over 30 books on management and is often referred to as the Father of Modern Day Management Principles.

Drucker's classic definition of management is getting the right things done through others. But he doesn't stop there. He also suggests, in his concept of management as a liberal art, that a leader/manager must be concerned about what is happening to the person in the process. Those people who are producing profits, who are accomplishing the mission of the firm are also human. They have cares and concerns, emotions and feelings, beliefs and convictions. They have the potential to do good or evil, love or hate, contribute or detract, motivate or discourage.

Drucker goes on to say that the management and leadership of people requires an understanding of the human condition, including the recognition that there is a spiritual dimension to our humanity.

Robert Fogel, an economist from the University of Chicago and a 1993 Nobel Prize Winner, suggests in his book *The Fourth Great Awakening*, that this is a process of developing human capital or the growing of spiritual resources.

After tracing the history of religious faith in America, from pre-revolutionary war times to the present, and its effect on our society and economy, Fogel concludes that the major issue in our culture today is simply a lack of the distribution of what he refers to as "spiritual assets". There is, he says, a void in our society in the development of

the character of people and a provision for their spiritual needs. He also goes on to say that in order for the business firm of the future to resolve the growing complexities of ethical issues, it will have to acquire more "spiritual capital".

Fortune Magazine, in an article on soulless companies, suggested that they face an enemy from within and quoted that famous line from Henry Ford when he said: "Why is it I always get the whole person when all I really wanted was a pair of hands?"

Frankly, when you view people as only production units or something that can be defined solely in economic terms, you lose sight of their real value and worth. It is the whole person who comes to work every day; someone who deserves to be treated as the subject of work not just the object of work; someone who, as part of being human, also has a spiritual or faith dimension.

It was C. S. Lewis, the famous author and Oxford Dom who said, "There are no ordinary people, you've never talked to a mere mortal, nations, cultures, arts, civilizations, they are mortal and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals who we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit".

Now, for me as a Christian, and one who seeks to be a follower of Jesus Christ, one of the best ways I have found to share my faith and lead in the marketplace was to seek to serve as I led and to reflect the principle that Jesus taught His disciples as He

washed their feet - namely, that no leader was greater or had a self-interest more important than those being led. In seeking to so serve, the truth of what I said and believed could be measured by what I did. My ethic and faith became a reality as my words were backed up by my actions as a person of faith.

Servant leadership has been a learning experience for me. It has not come naturally. I had to understand what it meant to walk in the shoes of those I would lead. I was often reminded of my own imperfections and the need to admit my mistakes and ask for forgiveness and seek guidance from above. I also learned that it was wrong to use my leadership to impose my faith on others or treat people differently because they didn't believe the way I did. There would be times when I could share my faith but it needed to be done within the context of how people saw me live my faith.

There was no room for me to live a bifurcated life – church on Sunday and work on Monday. My business was a calling – a channel of distribution for fulfilling and living my faith. And so it has become a channel that has reached from the janitor's closet in Saudi Arabia to the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China – from sweeping streets in Osaka, Japan to ringing the bell of the New York Stock Exchange. The marketplace has provided a wonderful opportunity for me to embrace and engage those who do not believe the way I do, but who God loves and who, by my words and actions, should see the reality of His love.

There are many examples of people benefitting from their ServiceMaster experience. Let me share one with you.

As part of expanding our business to China, I had the opportunity to travel there and not only speak in the Great Hall of the People, but also get to know and work with many of our representatives in that country.

After returning home from one of my trips, I received a note from one of our Chinese employees who had been traveling with me as interpreter.

Here is what Shu Zhang said: "When I grew up in China, religions were forbidden and Mao's book became our Bible. When I was five or six years old I could recite Mao quotations and even use them to judge and lecture the kids in the neighborhood.

"Mao said, 'Serve the people. Leaders should be public servants.' This coincides with some of ServiceMaster's moral standards. When I think deeply, I see the difference that makes one work so successfully and the other collapse fatally. It must be the starting point of ServiceMaster to honor God, and that every individual has been created in His image with dignity and worth.

"ServiceMaster is designed to be a big, tall tree with strong roots which penetrate extensively to almost every corner of a person's daily life. It is still growing in mine. And I am still searching".

Shu is a thinking person. She has been confronted with life choices that go beyond doing a job and earning a living; choices about who she is becoming and how she can relate to God.

She felt accepted and loved in her work environment.

Joshua is one of those Biblical examples of a great leader. As he came to the closing days of his leadership, he called all of the tribes of Israel together and reminded them that, with God's help, they had been victorious in battles and were now occupying the Promised Land, living in cities they did not have to build and eating from vineyards they did not have to plant and then he challenged them to fear God and serve Him with faithfulness.

It was a challenge, not a command, for God does not compel anyone to follow or worship Him. In Joshua's conclusion, he emphasized this point when he said, "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.....but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Now, the Hebrew word that is translated "serve" is Avodah, and can also mean worship or work. Yes, that's right – our work also can be worship to the God we love. The business firm, the place where we work, serve customers, and make money, also can be a place of worship as we excel in what we do and bring alive the reality that Jesus lived and died for a purpose: that those He created and loved may know Him as God and Savior.

7/8/08