

Why Business Matters to God (And What Still Needs to Be Fixed),
by Jeff Van Duzer. Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2010.
205pp. pb. \$20.00. 978-0-8308-3888-2.

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This reviewer was delighted to review Jeff Van Duzer's *Why Business Matters to God*.¹ Van Duzer was recently promoted as the Provost of Seattle Pacific University (SPU), after a successful tenure professorship and a Deanship at SPU's School of Business and Economics. Before this, he also practiced law in Seattle with an emphasis on finance and natural resources.

From the outset Van Duzer gives a short but profoundly simple what "This book is about . . ." formula:

First: "It is a book about why business can be . . . a powerful tool for good in the hands of God. . . ." Secondly: "It is a book that celebrates the amazing way . . . the market works and sees global capitalism as one of the best hopes for addressing the problems of the world. . . ." Thirdly: "It is a book that seeks to honor Christians who have been called into business and have often been made to feel like second-class citizens in God's kingdom" (p. 9). This is his macrostructure for the entire read.

At the micro level, Van Duzer wants the reader to consider "all the good that business is already doing [in] the world" (p. 9). He strongly asserts that business could accomplish more. In so doing he challenges the dominant way that business is done today. He wants to correct the disjunction that Christian business people are not "ministers." Their role is important to God in that they can glorify him and can be used as agents of the Gospel in the market-place. Secondly he makes his case that a good understanding of the Bible "*givens* be reexamined and, in many cases turned upside down" (p. 9, emphasis added). He sums up his purposes well: He seeks for the book to be comforting as well as prophetic. He presents sound reasoning *why* business still matters to God and *what* still needs more repair work.

Van Duzer sets forth a very good Biblical Theology at the nexus of Bible

1 In the interest of self disclosure: Although not trained as an ethicist per se, I have had the opportunity to teach "Intro to Christian Ethics" on the grad school level for Union University and edit *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics* by Walton Padelford. In this regard, there is a certain kinship felt with Van Duzer because he is a lawyer by trade and not necessarily trained in the theories of philosophical ethics proper but is an "applied ethicists."

and business. He gives credence to Adam and Eve's sin. The resulting dynamic is a "cause and effect" that plays itself out in the hearts of men as well as the institutions of business even today. An example might be from their original sin; covetousness came into existence and now covetousness is a major motivator individually as well as financially.

Instead of discussing the mechanics or the "how to;" this reviewer was captivated by two background dynamics that could easily be overlooked by the casual reader. These perspectives framed Van Duzer's discussion and will reward the careful reader with a special view of Van Duzer's monograph: The *Shalom* perspective and the *Proleptic* perspective.

SHALOM

Van Duzer gives full credence to *The Fall* (see pp.54-56) as a historical event. Before their sin the primal couple's "relationship with each other and with the rest of the created order were in balance" (p. 55). Although the word "Shalom" is not used Biblically of the ante-Fall period, it is nonetheless a full description of their time and place of Eden. Here, he co-opts Nicolas Wolterstorff's extended definition:

Shalom is the human being dwelling at peace in all his or her relationships: with God, with self, with fellows, with nature. . . . Shalom at its highest is enjoyment in one's relationships. . . . To dwell in shalom is to enjoy living before God, to enjoy living in one's physical surroundings, to enjoy living with one's fellows, [and] to enjoy life with oneself.²

Van Duzer describes how the loss of Shalom has affected human beings. A major focus is on how we view our work. Because the first relationship with God was broken—our relationship to our work is marred also. Work was not part of the curse but was part of God's creation ordinance. And according to Van Duzer, ". . . the original meaning of work was seriously distorted" (p. 57).

Since the lapse, humanity has endeavored "to fill . . . [this] hollow purpose by locating meaning in career advancement" or "their ability to be productive" or "to find meaning in their enjoyment of particular job activities" (p. 57). But "the disruption of relations with God [i.e. Shalom,] has . . . produced an

2 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 69-70; quoted in Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God (And What Still Needs to Be Fixed)* p. 55, n. 9.

identity crisis” in each of us. We find ourselves thrown back on Augustine’s truism: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”³

Van Duzer works out the application of the broken Shalom in his section on the “CONSEQUENCES OF BROKEN HUMAN-HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS FOR BUSINESS” (see p. 56ff). Here he discusses such topics as “livable wages,” “unsafe working conditions,” and “employee privacy” (see p. 58ff).

PROLEPTIC

Van Duzer co-opts H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ of Culture* as paradigm for a major portion of his discussion. Niebuhrian thought influences Van Duzer’s understanding of how business functions in the present world since the Lapse. Humanity deviates away from but still desires the original Shalom. His proleptic—or the already and the not yet of the Kingdom—comes about when he asserts that “Christians are to engage their world. They don’t retreat” [from it] (141). The Christians are “God’s agents on the ground” as it were. Understanding what Shalom was and what the world has become is critical for the Christian business-person. It requires the leadership of God’s Holy Spirit to make ethical decisions in each and every case. “At times, Christians are to build on the common ground that they find between the mandates of culture and God’s Kingdom. At other times, they will be caught in the tensions between what is and what should be, and these tensions will drive them to confession and to God’s grace” (pp. 141-142).

There cannot be a hard and fast set of rules for the business-person—or a “one size fits all” ethic. Doing business is casuistic in Van Duzer’s schemata; each business decision must be taken on its own merits. Tough decisions must be made in the here and now. With the tensions of a desire for the lost Shalom and the Coming Kingdom; all business ethics is done with personal stewardship, a desire to alleviate poverty, and creation care in mind.

With knowledge of The Fall and how it will be in the ultimate Kingdom Age; the business person must conduct him or herself as a U. S. soldier after D-Day of World War II. This is a metaphor that Van Duzer employs

3 Taken from: <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/thou-hast-made-us-for-thyself-o-lord-and-our/347709.html> on 29 December 2012.

throughout. It demonstrates the tension between the “already” and the “not-yet.” The Christian business-person must do business ethically in the present evil world in the lack of perfect Shalom and with the coming victorious Kingdom of Christ in view. “The beginning of the end” of the Nazi regime had come. But there was still a long march to Berlin. In the same way, the Christian business-person knows that the days in which we live are evil. But we must conduct business in the market place until the time when Christ shall come at the end and make all things new.

For Van Duzer the Christian business person should be—seeking possible Shalom in all business relationships; abiding in faith, hope, and love; and looking for the coming Kingdom! He stands in the mainstream of Evangelical ethical thought and practice. If men like Carl F.H. Henry or Francis Schaeffer were here today they would read and endorse this book! Why, because Van Duzer believes in living out the Gospel in the market place with the hope of the ultimate Shalom being fulfilled in our Lord’s Coming Kingdom. Van Duzer believes that “thy Kingdom come” is not just words, but the motto represents the Christian mandate for those engaging in business. This is why I highly recommend this work and will probably adopt it for future ethics classes.