

# Why Bother with Business as Mission, BAM?

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## **The Collapse of the Soviet Union**

Remember the Soviet Union? It was a communist country with a planned centralized economy. Violations of human rights were prevalent, and it lacked freedoms to act in the marketplace. I was there and witnessed the dysfunctional state first hand. It was like a giant statue with feet of clay, and it did eventually topple and implode in December 1991.

One country became 15 countries. One currency became 15 currencies. One grand artificial and dysfunctional economic system crumbled and 15 new nations had to re-group and try to adjust to a market based global economy.

## **My Personal Journey into BAM**

After the fall of the Soviet Union I continued to travel and work in Central Asia, especially in the “stans”: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and so forth. Certainly, there were geopolitical changes and turmoil, but there were many other changes as well. A lot of Christian agencies came to the region from all over the world. Further, we witnessed quite a remarkable number of people from a Muslim background who became followers of Jesus.

At the same time there was an exponential growth of unemployment and under-employment. This happened on a scale that most of us find hard to fathom. With this, came all kinds of social problems. How could we as followers of Jesus respond to this need? Jobs were urgently needed. But churches and mission agencies did not call upon the people most qualified to address these challenges - business people.

So in the mid-90s we began to explore how we could engage, equip and connect Christians in business with the needs and opportunities of the Central Asia region. We started the Central Asia Business Consultation and ran it for 10 years. The lessons we learned, including developing methods and networks to listen, learn, share, and connect, were foundational for the development of the global think tanks on Business as Mission.

## **Genocide in Rwanda**

A second game changer was the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. If our sole success criterion is church planting and growth, Rwanda was probably the ultimate success story in the history of church and missions.

In 100 years it went from 0 to approximately 90 percent of the population becoming members of various churches. But in the spring of 1994 about one million people were killed in just a few months. This was literally Christians killing Christians. Rwanda had people in church, but not church in people. The Gospel had not transformed ethnic relations, politics, or media.

### **What is our Mission?**

These tragic events forced me to review our mission. What is the mission of the church? How can we serve people and nations, and move towards a holistic transformation, believing that God can transform individuals and communities, churches and nations? What does it mean to be a Christian in the marketplace? How can we do business as mission, law as mission, education as mission, and city planning as mission? How can we serve God and the common good? What does it mean in practice and what are the lessons learned in seeking shalom and prosperity of cities and nations (as noted in Jer. 29)? How do we affirm, equip and deploy business people to exercise their gifts of wealth creation for the nations?

### **Genesis of BAM in Genesis**

BAM is not a modern phenomenon or a new idea. God is the original entrepreneur. Business is deeply divine and deeply human. Doing business reflects who God is and who we are. God is the Creator; he worked and created good things for himself and others. The triune God created in community for community, which included Adam and Eve.

We are created in God's image, thus we are to create good things - products and services. Just as God did quality control at the end of each creation / production day, and found the products good, we are to strive for excellence in business. God told Adam and Eve to work in the garden; by sowing one seed they could reap twenty. Thus they were involved in a value-add process. They received a good return on their investment (ROI) and made a profit.

Work, creativity, value added processes, profit, ROI, product development, quality control, and serving the common good - business fundamentals - are all found in the first chapters of the Bible. The genesis of BAM is in Genesis.

### **Rediscover Biblical Roots and Historical Connections**

We always need to stand at the crossroads of the historical and the global church. We need to learn from those who have gone before us and connect with other around the globe today. We are not the first ones in history doing business for God and the common good. Here are a few examples.

The astute **businesswoman in Proverbs 31** did market assessments, profitable investments, and used profit to grow her business, and she gave to charitable causes. She provided much needed employment. Verse 31 concludes that her work in and impact through business is commendable and should be recognized.

The transformative good news spread along the **Silk Road** as followers of Jesus did business. We can learn from the **Moravians** and the **Quakers**. The **Cadbury** (chocolate) family ran a business for many generations, with multiple bottom-lines for many stakeholders.<sup>1</sup> Hans Nielsen **Hauge** (1771 – 1824) was instrumental for a spiritual revival in **Norway** while also influencing the industrialization of the country.<sup>2</sup>

BAM is a rediscovery journey, similar to the reformation era when there was a push to go back to the sources – ad fontes. We must pursue a deeper understanding of Biblical truths and apply them today.

Martin Luther's statement is a reassuring reminder of BAM's historical roots: *"A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and the office of his trade, and they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another."*<sup>3</sup>

## **Wealth Creation, Sharing, and Hoarding**

We are not Christians just doing social enterprise. We are mandated to have a positive impact on multiple bottom-lines for multiple stakeholders, and God should always be one of them. Business as Mission is not a technique. It is a worldview and a lifestyle. It is about following Jesus in the marketplace, to the ends of the earth; it is about loving God and serving people through business.

As we do business, we create wealth - not only financial wealth, but also social, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual wealth. The Bible talks about wealth in three ways: wealth creation, sharing and hoarding. The last is condemned. Wealth sharing is encouraged and is often facilitated through NGOs and churches, but there is no wealth to be shared unless it has been created. Wealth creation is a godly gift; God says that He gives the ability to create wealth. (Deut. 8:18)

Let's look at the context of this statement in Deuteronomy chapter eight. The people of Israel have been brought out of Egypt and are about to enter the Promised Land. God tells them what to expect and what to do. He explicitly states that there are good business prospects in mining and agriculture. People are admonished to seize these opportunities. As a result, wealth will be created. But then a danger arises, or rather, two potential pitfalls.

Firstly, God says there is a risk that people will think and say that they themselves have created wealth, failing to acknowledge the Lord in it. This is what precedes verse 18. So God reminds them that He is the one who gives the gift and ability to create wealth.

Secondly, wealth creation is put into the context of the Covenant. God entered into a Covenant with Abraham and his descendants that He blessed them so they could bless others - locally and globally. But, one could say blessings are

beyond words. To bless others is to create all kinds of wealth and in turn, share it. This is indeed a part of the Covenant. And one mustn't forget God - the initiator of the Covenant.

Wealth creation processes, done through business, should be mindful of both God and others. We should always have this dual goal: to do business for God **and** the common good. It makes a difference. Noah and his sons undertook a massive engineering project with this perspective and it led to the salvation of mankind and creation. An equally impressive construction project was the Tower of Babel. However God was left out of this project, and, built on selfish motives, it led to the breakdown of society.

The gift and calling to create wealth is beyond a micro finance loan or a single small or medium size business. It is about building nations, and seeking the welfare of cities.

*“This is what the Lord Almighty says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city.”* (Jer. 29)

Here the people of Israel are in exile. They are in a country they didn't choose. But they mustn't sit and sulk, simply go into survival mode, or withdraw into religious ceremonies and meetings. No, they are commanded to start businesses, develop the local economy, and in doing so strive for shalom. Shalom is whole relationships filled with integrity. Business is about relationships with customers, clients, suppliers, staff, community, city, and environment. Seek shalom with all these partners and entities, as you seek to create wealth and prosperity for cities and nations.

Pope Francis writes: *“Business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving the world. It can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the area in which it operates, especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good.”*<sup>4</sup>

## **Sunday ↔ Monday**

BAM is a worldview, shaped by the Bible, and sees creativity in business as potentially helpful for people and society. It involves affirming, equipping, and deploying business people into service.

But the sacred-secular divide is deeply entrenched in our churches and in our thinking as Christians all around the world.

Pope John Paul II said that *“There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called “spiritual” life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called “secular” life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. ... This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age”*.<sup>5</sup>

BAM is not just a minor tweak in our business techniques. It is about aligning our thinking with the Bible's view on work and business. BAM is about connecting Sunday with Monday. Whatever we believe and profess in church on Sunday should inform our business goals and activities on Monday. God wants it and the world needs it.

### **BAM – a modern movement with roots and global scope**

It is natural and easy to focus on our lifetime and our immediate geographical context. But as Christians we need to stand at crossroads of history and the whole world. History is His story; there is a meta-narrative of creation, fall and redemption. And it has a global perspective – for God so loved the world.

Thus we mustn't forget or cut off our roots. Remember that Jesus was a Jew and Martin Luther was a Catholic. Although there is a strong engagement by Evangelicals in the BAM movement, BAM is not limited to it. Nor is it theologically, conceptually, historically or practically a Protestant or Evangelical thing.

BAM is ultimately rooted in who God is and who we are created in his image. Through the Holy Scriptures we learn about the sanctity of work and the gift and command of wealth creation. We can read of God-fearing people doing business with a positive impact on people and communities.

Through history – and around the globe – there are examples of people shaping businesses for God and the common good. The BAM movement is a part of this, a continuation. But we have a responsibility in our day and age, to be rooted in Scripture and history, and to connect with others nationally, regionally and globally, as we do business as unto the Lord and serve people.

*For “the lay faithful have the responsibility of being in the forefront in working out a solution to the very serious problems of growing unemployment; ... to raise up new forms of entrepreneurship and to look again at systems of commerce, finance and exchange of technology.”<sup>6</sup>*

### **BAM is bigger than BAM**

Business as Mission is a term in English. But the movement is bigger than the term and it is not limited to English. If you Google Business as Mission, you get a lot of hits. But it does not give you a fair picture of the global and diverse nature of the BAM movement. It only gives you a picture of BAM initiatives using English. There are 6000 other languages in the world. And it only portrays those BAM initiatives, which have chosen to go public, and market themselves.

For example, two of the bigger BAM initiatives in the world operate in Korean<sup>7</sup> and Bahasa. And BAM speaks Chinese – there is a Hong Kong based BAM organization that has published a lot of BAM material in Chinese, both old and simplified script.<sup>8</sup>

Another indicator of the international scope of BAM, is that BAM material is available in at least 17 different languages: Arabic, Bahasa, Chinese, Dutch, English, Farsi, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, and Vietnamese.<sup>9</sup>

## **BAM – The Movement**

20 years ago we could not credibly talk about a global BAM movement. Today, by the grace of God, we can. The first global think tank on BAM (2003 – 2004) and the Lausanne paper on BAM (2004)<sup>10</sup> helped catalyze a common global understanding of the concept.

It sought to address how businesses can:

- serve people;
- align with God's purposes;
- be good stewards of the planet; and
- make a profit.

This is often referred to as the quadruple bottom-line. We are aiming at a positive impact economically, socially, environmentally and spiritually, leading to holistic transformation of people and societies – to the greater glory of God. We are especially concerned about the world's poorest and the least evangelized peoples.

The 2nd global think tank process (2011 – 2013) increased the connections, creating global connectivity of key players in the BAM eco-system, with people from every continent.

The BAM think tank had approximately 30 national, regional and international working groups collaborating. Leaders from these groups and other BAM leaders at large, about 80 in total, met at the Leaders' Forum in April 2013 in Thailand.

Then the largest global gathering ever of social and intellectual capital in the BAM space followed this. More than 550 people from over 40 nations came to the BAM Congress later in the month. The Congress collaborated with a BAM Trade Fair, which followed immediately after and had over 200 participants.

These BAM think tanks (2003 – 2004 and 2011 – 2013), processes, meetings and reports, as well as the BAM Congress, have been instrumental in building a global BAM movement, establishing a shared vision, developing common values, and facilitating a global network of BAM practitioners and other key leaders in the overall BAM eco-system.<sup>11</sup>

BAM Global<sup>12</sup> continues to serve. We exist to invigorate the global BAM movement, by facilitating communication and collaboration among four major constituencies, leaders from business, church, missions, and academia. All these four groups have been engaged in the think tanks, at the BAM Global Congress, in various national and regional consultations as well as in the Think Tank reports<sup>13</sup>.

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The **BAM Manifesto**,<sup>14</sup> published October 2004, was adopted by the first BAM think tank, which “*worked for a year, addressing issues relating to God’s purposes for work and business, the role of business people in church and missions, the needs of the world and the potential response of business*”.

Excerpts:

### **Affirmations**

*We believe that **God** has created all men & women in His image with the ability to be creative, creating good things for themselves and for others - this includes business.*

*We believe in following in the footsteps of **Jesus**, who constantly and consistently met the needs of the people he encountered, thus demonstrating the love of God and the rule of His kingdom.*

*We believe that the **Holy Spirit** empowers all members of the **Body of Christ** to serve, to meet the real spiritual and physical needs of others, demonstrating the kingdom of God.*

*We believe that God has called and equipped business people to make a **Kingdom** difference in and through their businesses.*

*We believe that the **Gospel** has the power to transform individuals, communities and societies. Christians in business should therefore be a part of this holistic transformation through business.*

*We recognise the fact that poverty and unemployment are often rampant in areas where the name of Jesus is rarely heard and understood.*

*We recognise both the dire need for and the importance of business development. However it is more than just business per se. **Business as Mission** is about business with a Kingdom of God perspective, purpose and impact.*

*We recognise that there is a need for job creation and for multiplication of businesses all over the world, aiming at the quadruple bottom line: spiritual, economical, social and environmental transformation.*

### **Recommendation**

***We call upon the Church worldwide** to identify, affirm, pray for, commission and release business people and entrepreneurs to exercise their gifts and calling as business people in the world--among all peoples and to the ends of the earth.*

***We call upon business people globally** to receive this affirmation and to consider how their gifts and experience might be used to help meet the world’s most pressing spiritual and physical needs through Business as Mission.*

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<sup>1</sup> Suggested reading: *Chocolate Wars*, by Deborah Cadbury

<sup>2</sup> <http://matstunehag.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Hauge-.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 129

<sup>5</sup> Christifideles Laici: The Vocation And Mission Of The Lay Faithful In The Church And The World: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II to bishops, priests, deacons, women and men religious and all the lay faithful (December 30, 1988)

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II. Christifideles laici 1988

<sup>7</sup> <http://matstunehag.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/BAM-IBA-Movements-with-a-rich-history-and-a-bright-future-v-15-May.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [www.chinesebam.com](http://www.chinesebam.com)

<sup>9</sup> <http://matstunehag.com/bam-material-in-17-languages/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.matstunehag.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/BAM-LOP-June-05.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> See also <http://businessasmission.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://bamglobal.org/>

<sup>13</sup> 19 reports published as of Feb 2017. See <http://bamglobal.org/reports/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://matstunehag.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/BAM-MANIFESTO-2.pdf>