

Men of Purpose: Seven Christian Giants of Business

Peter Lupson questions whether personal feelings and moral considerations have to be suspended in the pursuit of profit, and illustrates his thesis with examples of seven Christian businessmen who deserve to be better known. Their deep Christian faith led them into 'making the best possible article' as well as providing outstanding care for employees and generous financial giving.

The world of business – a common perception

When I told people I was writing a book about the Christian founders of seven world-famous companies there was a surprised reaction: “Isn't that a contradiction in terms? Don't Christians and businesspeople inhabit different moral universes? The very expression 'Business is Business' implies that personal feelings and moral considerations can be suspended in the pursuit of profit.”

Is there any foundation to this widely held view? In his 2007 autobiography, Jordan Belfort, the notorious 'Wolf of Wall Street', gives a disturbing clue. He admitted that he lied for a living and

described Wall Street as 'as a place for killers' where he was not alone in the ruthless pursuit of profit: “I wasn't the one who thought up this clever game of financial extortion. This was occurring at some of the USA's most prestigious firms. Yet they were still in business – still thriving, in fact.”

Christian entrepreneurs – a different way

Unlike 'some of the USA's most prestigious firms' the seven Christian entrepreneurs I researched had a very different purpose. I chose these seven because their stories are not generally well known, unlike George Cadbury and Joseph Rowntree for instance. But like Cadbury and Rowntree, their Christian

faith inspired their business ethics and practice and earned them a reputation for integrity, quality, and outstanding care for their customers and employees. They built huge business empires and became world leaders in their fields without crossing moral boundaries. The following words about Henry Heinz, the renowned manufacturer of food products, could have been written of all: “He showed that the belief that business demanded ruthlessness and the cutting of moral corners was a superstition as foolish as it was evil. He built a business that proved it.”

Personal purpose

The starting point for these remarkable men – in business as in life – was their



Jordan Belfort,
the 'Wolf of Wall Street'

Photo: wegotthiscovered

personal relationship with Jesus Christ and their service for Him. William Hartley, the jam tycoon, stated that the purpose of his life was 'to serve the Lord every day to the best of my ability'. James Kraft, the creator of processed cheese, declared: 'My first job is to serve Jesus', while Henry Crowell, who spearheaded the meteoric rise of the Quaker Oats brand and who also created the largest stove-making company in the world, remarked: 'If my life can always be lived so as to please Him, I'll be supremely happy.'

Corporate purpose

Statements such as these among Christians are not really surprising. Most would assert something similar. However, the translation of a personal purpose into a publicly stated corporate purpose is much more challenging: it sets a standard that must be lived up to.

Henry Crowell's corporate purpose was 'to render the very best of service to the customers.' This was echoed by Heinz: 'The ruling principle of our business must be to secure the permanent satisfaction of the consumer and the full confidence of the trade.' Hartley's purpose was to achieve customer

satisfaction 'by making the best possible article and selling it at a fair price.' Anthony Rossi, founder of Tropicana, the world's largest fruit juice-producing company, guaranteed that his products would always be '100% pure'. Thomas Cook, the father of tourism, declared that 'God's earth with all its fullness and beauty is for the people', and made it his purpose to open up the world to all, irrespective of social class.

Statements like these could not be made lightly. Failure to live up to them would result in loss of credibility and a subsequent loss of business. So how were these ideals expressed in practice? There were a number of ways.

Quality

In 'making the best possible article' Hartley personally inspected every boiling and up to 1,000 jars at a time to maintain the purity and distinctive taste of his jam. Heinz welcomed visitors to his factory in Pittsburgh to inspect the cleanliness of the manufacturing process and the purity of his products. When Thomas Cook started his excursions, opening up the world was not easy. Travel was generally uncomfortable and sometimes

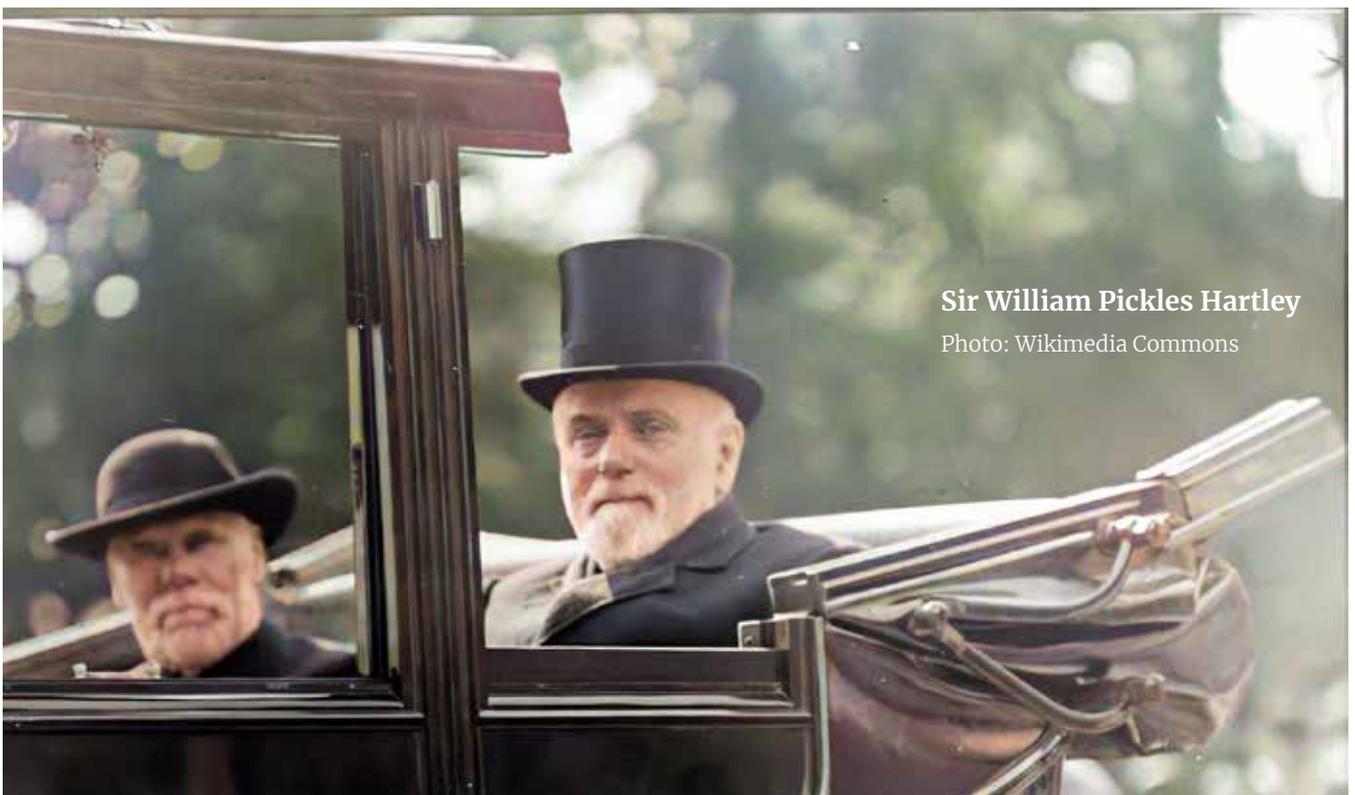
hazardous. His passengers were often nervous and needed reassurance. To provide them with the best possible travel experience Cook always accompanied them on his pioneering journeys, taking meticulous care of them all the way and smoothing out any difficulties they encountered.

Honesty

In addition to their concern for quality, all seven entrepreneurs were respected for their honesty. William Colgate, creator of the brand renowned first for soap then for toothpaste, resolved to 'make an honest soap; give a full pound'. His soap was not adulterated with low-grade oils as was the case with other unscrupulous manufacturers, and his weights and measures were always accurate.

When the Colgate company celebrated its centenary in 1906 the president stated: "Things have changed greatly in one hundred years but there is one change which I am thankful to say has not been made, and that is the old-fashioned, honest method of doing business that William Colgate founded."

In coining the slogan 'What we say we do, we do do' as his company motto,



Sir William Pickles Hartley

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

James Kraft was telling his customers that they could trust him and that his promises would always be honoured.

Outstanding care for employees

As a practical expression of his personal purpose 'to serve the Lord every day to the best of my ability' Hartley said that he always tried 'to carry out the teaching of Jesus Christ in the treatment of his employees. His stated principle in serving them was 'doing as I would be done by'. Amongst much else he ensured their working conditions were healthy and safe, he built a workers' village, provided free medical care and generously shared his profits with them.

When other manufacturers heard about his profit-sharing scheme they assumed there must be some commercial benefit in it and asked Hartley to tell them more. When he explained that he did this because 'it seems to me right and doing as I would be done by' they immediately lost interest and walked away. Shades, perhaps, of the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-25 who walked away sorrowfully from Jesus when told to give up his wealth to provide for the poor.

Heinz, too, took exceptional care of his workers. He provided them with rest rooms, dining facilities, reading rooms, libraries, a swimming pool, a gymnasium and a five-storey building for recreational purposes. They could also enjoy lunchtime concerts and daily park rides in a horse and carriage. A hospital and free medical and dental care were also provided for them.

James Kraft's care for his employees lived long in their memories. As one of them said: 'He gave a lot of meaning to people's lives because of the way in which the company was run.'

Financial giving

These seven entrepreneurs did not feel the money they made was theirs. Like Hartley, they all considered it to be 'the Lord's money' and felt they must exercise wisdom and sensitivity in its use.

Heinz publicly declared to his contemporaries 'Make all you can honestly; give all you can wisely'. He followed his own precepts. He expended huge amounts of time and vast amounts of money in the promotion of Sunday Schools, establishing them as far away as Japan.

Henry Crowell was so inspired when he heard the renowned evangelist D.L. Moody preach that his purpose immediately became clear to him: "I would never preach like Moody but I could make money and help support the labours of men like Moody. Then I resolved, 'Oh God, if you will allow me to make money to be used in Your service I will keep my name out of it so You will have the glory'."

James Kraft donated a large percentage of his profits to Christian organisations. It gave him great joy to know that his monetary gifts were a significant help in the development and growth of the Christian causes he supported.

Anthony Rossi established a foundation to provide funding for Christian educational institutions, Christian missions and numerous charities worldwide. He also founded the Bible Alliance to provide the blind and prison inmates with cassette recordings of the Bible and of Christian messages. He declared 'I will be ashamed at the judgement seat of Christ if I have one nickel that belongs to Anthony Rossi.'

What motivated these men to be so generous? Perhaps Hartley gives us the

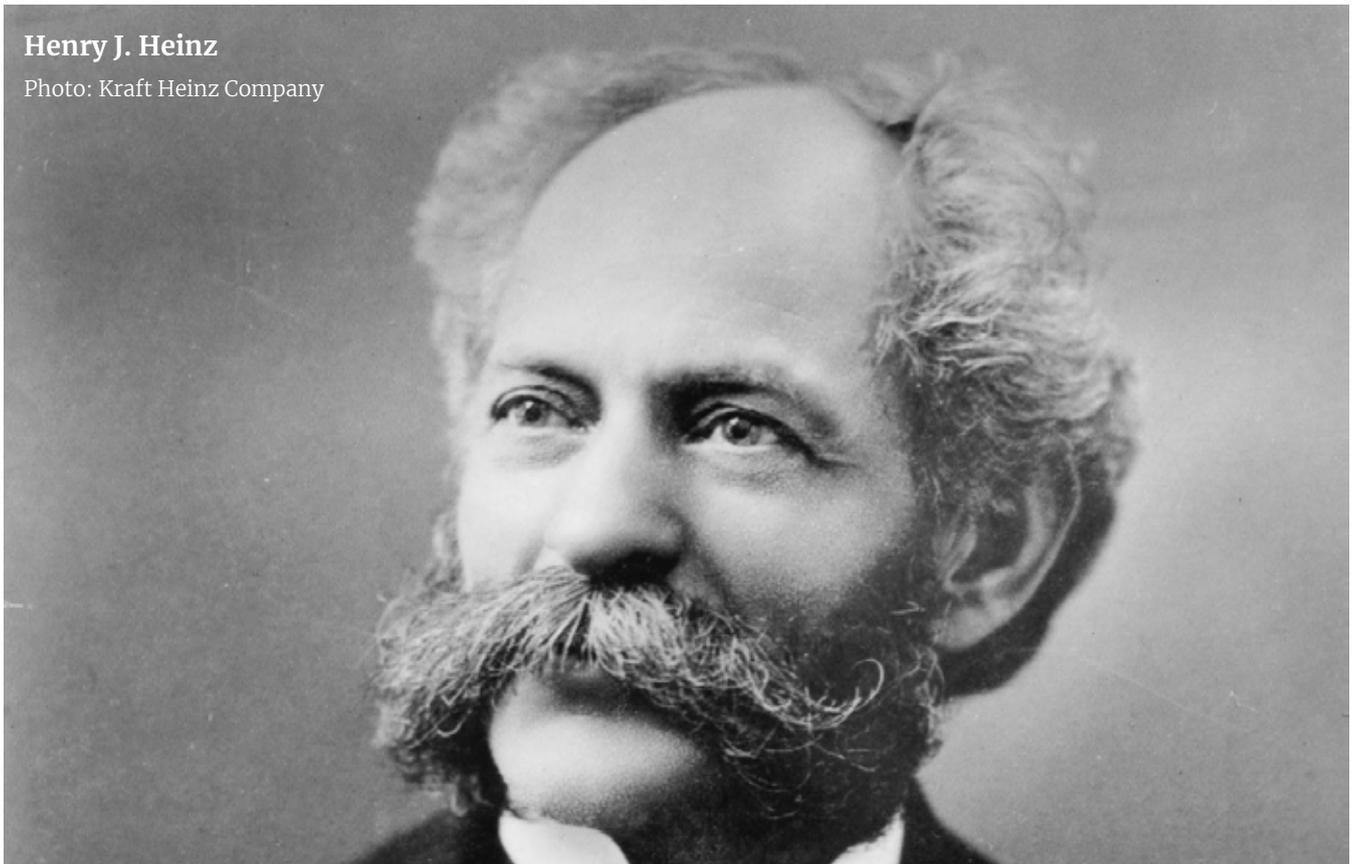


Anthony T. Rossi

Photo: Ricardo Ferro, Tampa Bay Times/Zuma Wire

Henry J. Heinz

Photo: Kraft Heinz Company



best answer: “When we think of the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, then nothing we can do is too much.”

Finding hidden treasure

How hard was it for these entrepreneurs to achieve their phenomenal success? At the 2021 Faith in Business Retreat we were asked to reflect on Matthew 13:44-46 and to imagine ourselves digging for treasure hidden in a field or finding a priceless pearl. What came to my mind was not a neatly cultivated field with a marker pinpointing the location of the treasure but a rough, uneven stretch of land covered with weeds, brambles and nettles. The time, effort and determination needed to locate and uncover the treasure would have been immense and often accompanied by exhaustion and disappointment. So it was for these entrepreneurs. They, too, encountered weeds, brambles and nettles in establishing their businesses but in the form of opposition, ridicule and failure. It was their faith in Christ that gave them the will and the courage to turn difficulties into opportunities and disasters into triumph.

When the Scottish railway companies pulled the plug on Thomas Cook,

his main source of income was lost at a stroke. 'All is in obscurity', he said but despite his despondency he continued 'to follow the leadings of Providence'. Feeling strongly that God was prompting him towards Switzerland he set off with a party to Geneva. Switzerland was quickly followed by excursions to France and Italy. God had allowed the Scottish door to close in order to open an even wider one into Continental Europe.

Henry Crowell started out in business as a wheat farmer but was convinced that God used the vagaries of the weather to lead him in a wholly new direction as an oatmeal producer: “God evidently did not want me to be a farmer. He took me out of one farm by a tornado and out of the second by a hot wind. And now He was opening the way for me to secure the Quaker mill. I thanked Him for all His blessings.” Crowell went on to establish Quaker Oats as a leading global brand.

When Henry Heinz went bankrupt just before Christmas in 1875 he was penniless and had to borrow money to buy food. The strain made him ill. On Christmas Day his mother gave him a card with a prayer

she had composed with the assurance that 'The Lord will provide'. Those words spoke to him with great power and lifted him out of his depression. He was able to make a fresh start and by the time of his death Heinz was the best known brand name in the world.

James Kraft's first year in business was a disaster. Plagued with self-doubt, he unexpectedly became aware of a deep inner voice telling him that in his attempt to create a successful business he had left God out of the equation. The revelation had a life-changing effect on him and from that day he dedicated his life fully to Christ and followed His guidance. It led him to becoming the world's largest cheese producer.

Like failure, ridicule can also hinder the search for the hidden treasure. Anthony Rossi needed to transport thousands of gallons of orange juice from Florida to New York City without spoiling, a seemingly impossible task. In answer to prayer he believed God was telling him to use a ship. He was laughed at. 'No cargo of orange juice could survive a two-and-a-half day sea voyage', he was told. He needed \$10 million to finance the project but one by one banks turned



Photo: Staffordshire Live

him down. Rossi was not deterred. In faith he persevered and eventually found a backer. He bought an 8,000-ton cargo ship and fitted it out with tanks insulated with lightweight high-strength foam glass 6.5 inches thick to maintain a constant temperature of 28°F during the voyage. This technological breakthrough made his company, Tropicana, the world's largest producer of orange juice.

Sometimes the brambles in the field are not external but internal. When Colgate first found faith in Christ he knew he had to break with the church he was attending, but it was a struggle. He explained: "There were a number of wealthy and respectable merchants [in that church] who seemed cordially to salute me. I had just commenced business and by their influence and kindness I could expect my prosperity to be furthered." After much soul-searching he realised his motives were wrong and left. From that point on his company flourished.

William Hartley, too, wrestled with selfish impulses in his early business life. Having pledged to devote a considerable proportion of his income to 'the needs of mankind' he was horrified to find that his natural instinct as an entrepreneur was to make money, not give it away. His faith enabled him to win the battle and he was eventually able to say that 'the higher self, if it was in full sympathy with the teaching of Jesus Christ, would rise above the temptation and be ready to share with others.' And this he did so generously that in 1908 he was knighted as one of the UK's leading philanthropists.

Their Christian witness

These men were beacons of light to their contemporaries. The quality of their products and the way in which they conducted business was both an inspiration and a challenge. Noticing the caring way that Henry Crowell treated his employees, one observer remarked: 'I'm not much of a churchman but I can go for Mr Crowell's type of Christianity.' Thomas Cook was praised for the

'Christian manner' in which he looked after his tourists. Anthony Rossi's scrupulous honesty and excellent treatment of his employees earned Tropicana the nickname 'the Christian orange juice company'. And a tribute to William Colgate epitomises what all these entrepreneurs were about: 'His business was prosecuted as God's business. Few men have so perfectly learned the secret of worship in work.'

'The Spirit of the Master'

For these entrepreneurs their work was a ministry. They were constantly mindful that they were ambassadors for Christ and accountable to Him for the way they lived and the way they conducted their business. Hartley could have been speaking for them all when he said: "I am much exercised as to whether I am such a disciple of Jesus Christ that my work people, my business friends, my neighbours and my family can constantly see the Spirit of the Master in my actions."

It's the acid test for us too. 



Peter Lupson is a former schoolteacher who has also worked in publishing. For many years a Chief Examiner for GCE Advanced Level German, he is the author of a number of successful German textbooks as well as the widely acclaimed Thank God for Football! about the church origins of famous football clubs and In God's Company (DayOne, 2019) about Christian giants of business. He has written and presented several Christian TV documentaries.