

Christian Distinctives in Business

– A Response from David Parish

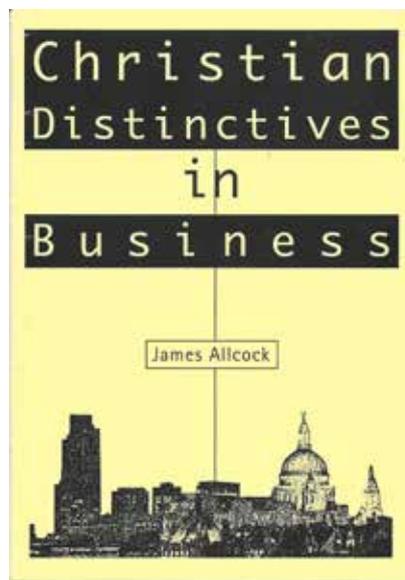
James Allcock was a singular individual. A businessman who tried, often imperfectly by his own admission, to embody his faith in how he thought and acted in the workplace. He was given to humorous turns of phrase. Yet he was often acerbic in his criticism of those he felt were too focussed on the mantras of the business world or strict interpretations of the duty of management only to the shareholders rather than customers, community or workforce. and equally neglectful of how Scripture might inform our outlook in business. I found him a loyal friend and excellent mentor who was always encouraging me to challenge some of the received thinking in business, and to look for more relational solutions than mere cost cutting.

This section from his booklet has always impressed me:

The Object of Christian Living

I want to say next that Christians in business must remember, particularly in the prevailing culture, that the objective of Christian living is not success, nor is it the acquisition of wealth or power. The object of Christian living is virtue. The gospel of success – the Dallas Baptist Church Gospel that the Lord will help you to your first million dollars – is not only a travesty of the New Testament, but an insult to the many Christian people whose calling and pursuit of the will and glory of God lead them into rejection, poverty and

hardship. We are here to be increasingly conformed to his will – as the collect puts it so well – until we naturally love what is commanded and desire what is promised, ‘that in all the changes and chances of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where lasting joys are to be found’ (Collect for the 4th Sunday in Easter, ASB 1980).



If we know we live and operate within the will of God, there is peace. Nothing so undermines this as ambition. We need to ask the question, ambitious for what? To quote George Cadbury:

‘Both in England and America, too much is made of men who are successful in business. Success in business is not a test of fine character. It is often the reverse. Men of refined mind are not often those who make great fortunes. It is not even a test of a man’s diligence. Some men, without any extraordinary

diligence, have the knack of making money, while many men of refined mind, though equally diligent, fail to succeed’.

Today there are university courses, books and seminars about applying virtue in business but 30 years ago, when James wrote that the object of Christian living as a business executive was to seek virtue in the workplace, this was radical thinking. I can remember it produced vigorous debate in the Q and A session that followed his talk.

I have recently studied some business outcomes over the past 20 years. In those where the executive team have focussed on doing the right thing over expediency, the outcome has always been better for the community and the company. Where companies have sought to be truthful about a crisis they have mainly survived and gone on to prosper, but fraud and deception usually bring loss of profitability and in some cases the demise of the company. It is also about being virtuous in our relationships with colleagues at work as Scripture commands us to seek the good of others.

I was at a business lunch with James at a well-known City church when after lunch as the attendees were chatting he whispered “I wonder how much insider trading is happening here”. A typical James joke but perhaps with an edge about how to ensure that the whole of what we do is related to our faith. 📺



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