

THE CHRISTIAN AND MODERN BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

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Many Problems — One Solution?

What is the right relationship between labour, management and capital in the modern business enterprise? Where are the limits of the owner's authority? Are employees entitled to have a voice in enterprise and, if so, in which form? Is competition among industries a good thing or a necessary evil? What freedom must private enterprises be allowed?

For questions such as these there continues to be a vivid interest. From a scientific as well as a political and social point of view, the "business enterprise" is being subjected to a renewed evaluation and appraisal.

It is in no way sure what will emerge concretely from this process of renewed evaluation. What is certain, however, is that no modern labour organization will, in the long run, be able to escape adopting a new attitude towards the place and structure of modern enterprise. The above mentioned problems take too important a place for that in the minds and hearts of its members.

But how will the modern labour organization have to go about this? And what will the nature of the concrete solutions which it seeks for all these problems be?

A CURRENT VIEW

For these last questions, various authors have their answers ready. Proceeding from the assumption that the practical solutions to all these problems must above all be found in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, they take the position that only those solutions which have not been beclouded by certain world-and-life views and political opinions deserve consideration.

These authors feel that such "neutral", "objective" solutions can be found. Only two things, they claim, are needed for this. First, that in an

"objective", "scientific" way, a common picture of what enterprise really is and does is formed and that secondly, together we test this picture by human norms of "values" acceptable to every right-minded person: "values" such as human responsibility and the right of development of the free personality. It is claimed that in this way, practical suggestions to reform industrial enterprise will of themselves emerge, suggestions which can be shared by all men of good will, irrespective of their political or religious convictions. After all, the "objective" character of the scientific investigation as well as the "neutral content" of applied human values guarantee it.

What must we think of this view? To strive for solutions in an atmosphere of mutual understanding is undoubtedly a good thing, but is it really possible to give one neutral, objective, scientifically justified answer to all these problems that will rise above all differences of world-and-life views?

In all frankness I wish to state at the outset that in my opinion this is an untenable position. Already when dealing with the most practical questions in industrial enterprise, our deepest convictions are involved, let alone when we speak of the fundamental questions noted at the beginning of this article.

This is not merely a personal opinion, however. Two strong arguments can be adduced for this position.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF "OBJECTIVE" APPROACHES

In the first place, in this connection it is well to note what constitutes the factual content of the so-called universally accepted human values such as solidarity, responsibility and free development of the human personality. The results of such an investigation are, in fact, rather dismaying. The more universally these values

are accepted, the more their content approaches emptiness.

VALUELESS VALUES

A comparison of two rather arbitrarily chosen quotations from political works can probably demonstrate this more clearly than a lengthy argument. From the two quotations which I now present, the names of the intended political movements have purposely been omitted.

The highest goal of our movement consists in guaranteeing full freedom for the development of human personality and in creating conditions for an unlimited development of the personality. It is in this that our movement recognizes true freedom in the most exalted sense of the word.

Our movement is striving, directed towards creating, as much as possible, conditions in our society under which man can develop himself as freely as possible. We are interested primarily, therefore, in the human personality.

When comparing these two quotations, you will agree with me that they are practically identical. Yet the first is a literal quotation from an official communist textbook, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus* (Principles of Marxism-Leninism), and the second refers not to communism, but to conservatism. It is, in fact, taken from an article on conservatism by Prof. Oud, a prominent European conservative.

From this it is evident that concepts and values such as freedom, development of the human personality, etc., are interpreted by each one in his own way. Only the words, the terms are generally accepted, but not their content. And it is exactly that content which in principle is completely determined by one's world-and-life view.

A person, therefore, who in a discussion of the problems surrounding

modern enterprise, appeals to generally accepted values such as responsibility, solidarity, and development of the personality, etc., finds himself in the midst of the battle between world-and-life views, whether he wants to or not. There is no possibility for a "neutral", "objective" approach to these problems in this way.

SOCIALISM AND CONSERVATISM

With this I now have come to my second argument. It is a wellknown fact that precisely in the area of enterprise socialism and conservatism have of old crossed swords. Their battle was not fought, however, on "neutral" grounds! For in this duel, orthodox socialism chose as its religious starting point the glorification of man-in-community, whereas conservatism chose man-as-an-individual. And until this very day, their conceptions of business enterprise are still largely inspired by these characteristically humanistic presuppositions.

Socialism still considers the business enterprise as a mere extension and a fully dependent unit of the national community; a unit, however, which can never assume the characteristics of a real community as long as it is torn by the antithesis between capital and labour (the class struggle). In contrast, conservatism even today considers enterprise as a totally independent project of individual providers of capital who simply have to let themselves be guided by their enlightened economic interests in order to automatically create the optimum well-being for all, also for the labourers in enterprise.

The fact that these two, radically opposed philosophic views of business enterprise exert their influence to this very day, dooms to failure every attempt to construct solutions for modern enterprise, which are universally accepted and independent of any world-and-life views.

Christian Witnessing and Problems of Business Enterprise: a Question of Two Worlds?

The conclusion of the preceding paragraph was: when considering the problems of modern enterprise, the "neutrality" of world-and-life view is out of the question. The differences between various religious convictions make themselves irresistibly felt also here, whether he likes it or not.

But having said this, we, as Christians, are immediately faced with the question of how we, in a concrete way, are to see the meaning of the Christian faith for the modern industrial enterprise. And that is a question which many, also among sincere Christians, dare not really face. Is it right, they ask, to link the name of Jesus Christ to such typically businesslike, practical problems? Will that not lead to a desecration of the Gospel? Are not the problems of modern industry of an entirely different nature than the truths of the Gospel as we confess them, for instance, in the Apostolic Creed?

THE CHARGED CHARACTER OF THE GOSPEL

Even though this reaction is basically an unevangelical reaction — as we shall see later — we cannot simply brush these objections aside. Especially Christians of Reformed persuasion forget too easily at times that one can in no way juggle and manipulate Christ and His Gospel; and that from the outset, every use of His name is subject to the charged word of Scripture: "Let everyone that names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness" (II Tim. 2:19). Also when discussing the Christian view of enterprise must we clearly keep in mind that we do not have Christ's Name and Word at our free disposal, but that instead, we are at His disposal.

A BRIDGED DISTANCE

Exactly because we are at Christ's disposal, we also have to maintain that we are fully justified in relating Christ and His Work to the problems of modern industry! For the Christ Who controls us is not someone who will have no dealings with this modern world. On the contrary, He came down to this world and became like unto us. He took an active part in the economic process of production and consumption of His own day. He was not even ashamed of the simple carpenter work in the small business of His father. Already for this reason alone, anyone who wants to construct a distance between the Christian Gospel and modern industrial problems is radically and principally wrong. He then constructs a distance which has already been bridged by the Lord Jesus. For Christ Himself, Son of the eternal God, was an active member of one of the firms of this world.

A person, therefore, who is serious about Christ controlling him, will also view modern, industrial problems in the light of Christ's coming into this world and His Kingship over it. For he knows that man does not have the right to leave Christ out when considering modern business enterprise. He will in no wise want to ignore the fact that if anyone can claim a say in it, it is the Lord Christ. In other words, because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself led the way by joining His father's business enterprise in Nazareth, there rests on us no other task than to follow Him obediently in our labour in industry today.

THE FINAL LINK IN THE CHAIN

It is of great importance also to note that this way of speaking and thinking about the relationship between the Christian faith and modern industry instantly and radically frees us from every pressing question as to how we must bring our faith to bear on modern industrial problems.

For everyone who wants to follow Christ and realizes that Christ controls us, knows at the same time that we are concerned with the total claim of Christ's Word on our whole life, also our personal life. He also realizes that "to follow Him" means nothing less than that through the power, the energy of God's Word our whole way of thinking and living is turned about and reformed. Through the power of this Word, therefore, we receive insight into what real freedom, responsibility and community imply for human life. This is the final link of the chain!

At the beginning of this article it was explained that by confronting modern enterprise with norms such as responsibility, love for fellowman and the free development of personality, many authors are able to construct their own view of industry and its problems. Consequently, when we open our hearts to what God's Word has to say about human responsibility, freedom and community, a Christian view of modern enterprise lies within our reach. Or rather, not within our reach but within the reach of the unique and dynamic power of the Word of Jesus Christ.

No Reason for Complacency

The conclusion of the previous paragraph was: the Christian's life in modern enterprise, as well as his thinking about it, stands in the light of the radical following of Jesus Christ. And, in our thinking, this following after Him will also have to be evident in this: that in our study of the problems of modern enterprise, we have to allow ourselves to be guided by a renewed insight, given by God's Spirit, into man's true responsibility, justice and sense of community. Does this mean, however, that we have a ready-made Christian view of enterprise in our pocket? Certainly not. In order to remove all reason for complacency and misplaced self-satisfaction, I would call

your attention to two things in particular.

OUR IMPERFECT LISTENING

In the first place, we as Christians may never lose sight of the fact that our receptiveness to the Gospel is quite impaired. The norms and ideas which we hold, therefore, often have more to do with humanistic common sense than with the Gospel. The contents which we ascribe to concepts such as freedom, justice, responsibility and community are seldom based on a deeply evangelical insight. They are based, rather, on a hodge-podge of libertarian, rationalistic or other prejudices. Only continual contact with the Bible and never-ceasing prayer can free us from these prejudices. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." (Rom. 12:2).

OUR IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE

But there is something else. Responsibility and freedom in an enterprise is quite different from responsibility and freedom in a *state* or *family* or *church*. For such norms as responsibility and freedom¹ do not float somewhere above this earthly life, but time and again direct themselves concretely to various societal relationships. The duty to act responsibly towards the neighbour, for example, holds for all of life—but in a business enterprise it assumes a different form than in the family as in the relation between government and subjects. There is nothing wrong or deplorable in that, for it reveals in a fascinating way that the creation of God is a multi-coloured creation. The mutual relationships among God's creatures are not all of the same pattern, but of an enormously rich variety. And in each of these relationships God's Word and Law are of direct relevance, a rele-

¹ Freedom is indeed a *norm*. The Gospel calls us to freedom (Gal. 5:1).

vance which is directly attuned to the nature of these relationships.

This implies, however, that we must be well informed of the nature of modern enterprise before we can, in a meaningful way, arrive at our own view of responsibility, authority and freedom *in enterprise*. Quoting and applying certain Scripture passages is in itself not sufficient to arrive at an intrinsically Christian view of enterprise. That can be attained only by letting ourselves be governed by the Spirit of God's Law, the Spirit which also drives us out to carefully examine and evaluate the *nature* and *operation* of modern enterprise.

CONTINUATION OF OUR INVESTIGATION

When in the two following installments I will say something about the place of modern enterprise in present-day society and about the Christian view of the relationships within enterprise itself, it will be clear that the foregoing remarks about our imperfect listening and knowledge are also directly applicable there. What will be suggested in the following installments may fall short, on the one hand, due to an insufficient insight into the real content of, for instance, the Christian idea of freedom and responsibility; or, on the other hand, due to an insufficient knowledge of and insight into the nature of the enterprise.

For that reason also, a communal reflection on questions such as these remains urgently necessary. Without a communal reflection, our own individual insights remain too limited and too shallow.

The Place of Enterprise in Modern Society (1)

What can be said from a Christian point of view about the place of the business enterprise in a contemporary society? When seeking an answer to this question, one soon encounters the

important role of the concept of freedom in present-day discussions of this subject. In the name of freedom, one view pleads for a free individual exercise of business activity in which each enterprise is restricted by as few fetters as possible; while another view, appealing to free national development, pleads for a radical subordination of enterprises to the will of the state or the national community. A third sees freedom in economic life guaranteed only when the distribution of power places in balance, each over against the others, enterprises versus labour organizations versus consumers (the theory of so-called countervailing powers). The question naturally arises here: what are the backgrounds of these various views and how do these views come to expression in human society?

THE FIRST VIEW

For the background of the first view—in which free enterprise is restricted by as few fetters as possible—we do not have to look far. It is directly rooted in the humanistic belief that man has the right to be a law unto himself. Or, as is stated in the heading of the well-known magazine, *Canada Month*, "Because we believe that the strongest force for good in the world is the free and responsible individual, our unremitting cause is personal liberty, guaranteed by responsibility on the part of those who enjoy it." Behind this statement lies the quite unbroken humanistic belief that to provide freedom for man, who is accountable only to his own conscience, is sufficient to bring about the maximum attainable happiness for society. The consequences of this individualistic faith in freedom are, in reality, of a totally different nature than promised here. For precisely when the individual is granted the right to act according to his conscience, the evil in his heart gets every opportunity to come to expression. Then business enterprises make life impossible for each other (cut-throat competition); then

enterprises parasite without limit upon the "common resources" of human society (air and water pollution, excessive cultivation); then firms seek to secure a future market by artificially reducing the life span of their products; then — last but not least — they attempt to annex habits and conscience of the consumers for their own commercial ends by means of penetrating advertising methods and force upon them artificial "needs" which are not really such. To put it differently; the attempt at striving towards a free exercise of business with as few restrictions as possible, a striving based on belief in the self-determination of the individual, in practice leads not only to a materialization of culture and a commercialization of our behaviour patterns, but also to business' open neglect of what their neighbours (the consumers, the competitors) need for their life development.

THE SECOND VIEW

No wonder then that in reaction to this conception of freedom there arose out of the same humanism and veering toward the other extreme, the concept of a complete take-over of private enterprise by the national community. Behind this second concept of freedom, too, lies a religious conviction, namely, the humanistic faith in man-in-community as the source for all societal happiness. In this view it is not the individual but the community which can lead mankind to true freedom and true happiness.

In practice, also this belief reverses itself, for it leads straight to a strong centralization of power in the state and also to a thwarting of the direct relationship of responsibility between God and those whom He called to His service in economic life. The multi-coloured character of God's creation is tarnished, dulled by this; for society is here, as it were, forced back to one undifferentiated societal relationship (that of subjection to government), which wrongly takes the

place of the rich diversity of the presently existing relationships (between, for example, the producer and consumer, between firm and labour organization, between employer and employee).

THE THIRD VIEW

The third view — that of countervailing powers — is the most modern and, therefore, also the most diversified one. Theorists adhering to this position often have in the back of their minds the idea that freedom in society will be greatest when every important organization or institution has an approximately equal measure of power, so that the freedom of the one can keep the freedom of the other in balance.

Now it can be said, indeed, that a concentration of power in society can cause much harm and that a certain measure of spreading and dividing power can be desirable. The adherents of the theory of countervailing powers, however, often intend something else and also something more. They strive for a large measure of equalization of power, because they believe that in this way it is still possible to achieve harmony in society by means of the free play of these powers. Putting it differently, also in this view it is generally the belief in the optional results of individual human self-determination which, in the last analysis, plays the decisive role.

Also with regard to this view it must be said, however, that it will not prove capable of establishing definite harmony in society. After all, the various powers in their relationship to each other will display sinful reactions similar to those which individuals can have towards each other. In certain cases, they will partially join forces in order to push other powers into a corner. Moreover, a sharp social contrast can easily arise between those who possess recognized power and those who do not (the well-known distinction between elite and mass).

Also in this view the humanistic belief in free, human self-determination in no way leads automatically to the promised ideal society.

The Place of Enterprise in Modern Society (2)

The relationship between enterprise and society will appear differently, however, when one is guided by the christian and, thus, non-humanistic conception of freedom. Not that on the basis of this concept of freedom an ideal society unaffected by sin could be constructed. To endeavour this would again be typically humanistic. But it is not impossible, however, to form out of this conception of freedom a view of society, in which justice can be done to the real, essential freedom of man: the freedom, namely, to discharge adequately the God-given calling in this life. For, in the Goodnews, freedom does not mean the right to human self-determination, nor does it mean the absence of restraint for the individual or society; but rather freedom means that a person or societal structure is freed from the power of sin, unto the service of God and fellowman. In this task, in this service of God and fellowman in all the societal structures and relationships of the world, christian freedom finds its meaning and core.

CONSEQUENCES

Illustrative of the important consequences which the acceptance of this christian concept of freedom has for the relation between enterprise and society is the situation in which a certain firm, together with others utilizes the boycott or other competitive methods to destroy another firm. Usually action of this sort is frowned upon. Should steps, however, be taken by the government against this action, such steps are considered as a restriction — a necessary one, but still a restriction — of economic freedom.

This opinion, however, is thoroughly

wrong. For the freedom to engage in business is not a freedom which has an end in itself. It is a freedom subject to God's calling; and this calling includes respect for the rightful interests of one's fellowman. When the government, therefore, imposes limits on such a situation; it doesn't do away with this freedom, but only with the misuse of this freedom. It is not the government which in this case attacks the free exercise of business, but the firm which started this dishonest action.

A second illustration is suggested by firms which try to enrich themselves by underpaying their employees or by passing an important part of their expenses on to the shoulders of society (in the form, for example, of intensive pollution of soil, water, and air). This is a direct attack on business freedom, for the meaning and content of this freedom is that companies must exercise their authority, not to the disadvantage, but to the advantage of employees and society who are their neighbours. When a labour organization, therefore, forces them to pay a just wage, or when the government compels them to refrain from passing on their expenses or compels them to compensate for their damages, there is in neither case an attack on the companies' freedom but, in fact, a support of their true character.

The two examples cited show that only the christian concept of freedom — among all those current — enables us to see the rightful meaning of the much-discussed "free exercise of business." It will have to be considered as a freedom which is determined and limited by the service to God and neighbour; a freedom to be restored in its true character by the government when it is misused in such a way that the neighbour is unlawfully hindered from fulfilling his calling.

THE NEED FOR A STRUCTURAL CRITICISM

Meanwhile, we as Christians must realize that in many cases the evil of

the misuse of freedom is so deeply rooted in society that a different structure of society must be aimed for. Sometimes the very structure of society can continually seduce men to disregard the rightful interests of their fellowmen. Then incidental measures will not suffice; a "structural criticism" of the existing societal structure is an inevitable requirement.

In the previous century the lack of a structural criticism occurred in the relationship between enterprise and employees. In the resulting fierce competitive struggle between firms, wages were sharply reduced and also the wives and children of employees were drafted into the production process. A well-intentioned employer who opposed this and who did pay his employees their just wage, suffered such losses that he could not stay in business. Here clearly the societal structure gave rise to sin. The employer as it were, was forced to deal unfairly with his fellowmen. The correction of this situation took place, because, among other things, the employees were allowed to organize and by means of their trade unions could force an improvement in wages and other working conditions.

Also today this structural criticism of society cannot be omitted. We can think here, among other things, of the materialization and degradation of cultural and social life as a result of the predominance of purely commercial standards in the field of film, television and radio.

We must make an even more fundamental criticism of the unacceptable and paradoxical situation that while in our developed society, economic needs are artificially aroused and cultivated by means of psychologically-refined advertising methods, elsewhere in the world even the most elementary needs of life cannot be satisfied due to lack of means. Here again we find the situation that, as a result of the existing societal structure, one firm drives another in a socially unacceptable

able direction; and we find that those recognizing limits in the exercise of their freedom must suffer losses.

Finally, a very important point of structural criticism of canadian society is the lack of freedom for individual employees to join the labour organization which is in harmony with their religious convictions. There are some firms which would gladly grant their employees this freedom but do not because they could be tyrannized by certain labour organizations. It is the government which, for the sake of christian freedom, will have to put a stop to this situation. As long as it does not do this, the structure of canadian society (at this point) gives rise to sin for all those who are engaged in it as employer or employee — for the employer, because he will be tempted to coerce his employees' conscience; for the employee, because he is pressured into joining an organization whose principles he can never accept for Christ's sake.

The Internal Structure of the Modern Enterprise

Is it desirable and possible for employees to have a voice in the enterprise; what is the correct relationship between labour, management and capital in an enterprise; and what are the limits of the employer's authority in an enterprise?

Unfortunately there are often conflicting opinions in christian circles about these questions. On the one hand, there are many Christians, who on the basis of their views of ownership of property and authority feel compelled to deny the employees any right to a voice. On the other hand, other Christians appeal to christian norms such as responsibility and community to advocate a thorough review of the present-day structure of enterprise.

DIFFERENCE OF OPINION: NECESSARY OR SUPERFLUOUS?

These differences of opinion are deplorable and harmful, especially when they arise among sincere Christians. For many outsiders they provide an occasion to say, "You see, from a christian point of view nothing definite can be said about present day problems; Christians themselves are radically divided about them." Their conclusion is obvious: christian labour organizations and christian political parties really have no leg to stand on. On such occasions, christian organizations can be kept alive only artificially because they lack a common social and political insight.

Precisely because of this severe criticism it must be emphasized that such differences among Christians are caused not by the alleged fact that the Goodnews is not clear enough, but rather by the fact that we Christians listen poorly to the Goodnews and are not sufficiently receptive to it. This becomes especially clear in the presently-discussed question of the structure of the modern enterprise.

Do you really think that what the Bible says concerning the meaning of human ownership of property and human authority would contradict what that same Bible claims concerning human community and human responsibility? Of course not. When one group of Christians, on the basis of their view of ownership of property and authority, arrives at different conclusions than does another group which begins with norms such as community and responsibility, only one conclusion is possible: one of these groups, or perhaps both, has a view of ownership of property, authority, community and responsibility which is not intrinsically christian, but in which humanistic and other non-christian ideas play a leading role. Only by a radical removal of these ideas can unity among Christians be restored.

The way in which we will have to

proceed is now clearly marked out. The conflicting ideas of authority, property, community and responsibility will have to be subjected anew to a fundamental, christian evaluation. This incidentally, is not the task of one or two persons, but a communal obligation of all who are concerned with this subject. What the author offers here is to be considered, therefore, as nothing more than a contribution to this so necessary communal reflection.

THE OWNERSHIP ARGUMENT

The most common objection to any structural change in the modern business enterprise is the ownership-of-property argument. Its content is briefly this: "Not the employees but the providers of capital are the owners of the enterprise. Now, to be an owner always means to have control over something. Therefore, it is a direct interference with ownership rights when employees demand a voice and share in controlling the firm. In fact, it is nothing less than theft; for God did not entrust the stewardship of the firm to *them*, but He entrusted it to the *owners*."

TESTING THE OWNERSHIP ARGUMENT

It is not the purpose here to give an exhaustive treatment of the christian view of ownership of property.¹ Instead only one aspect of the ownership-of-property problem will be dealt with, namely, the aspect referred to by the expression "owners of enterprise."

¹ For the best brief discussion in English of ownership of property, see Dr. A. Troost's excellent article, "Property Rights and the Eighth Commandment," in *International Reformed Bulletin* (1677 Gentian Dr., SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49508, USA) January-April, 1966, pp. 23-41.

Those who provide the capital, so it is claimed, are the owners of the enterprise.

There is every reason to consider this expression very critically. The expression does not only inadequately refer to the modern function of the provider of capital (the shareholder) — because in the course of time this function underwent a marked change. Rather, the expression calls attention to the fact that a view of property has crept into Western thinking which is unmistakably of humanistic origin.

What is an enterprise? It is first of all a relationship in which *people* live and work together, people who, in this economically qualified co-operation, use means of production which have been financed by the providers of capital. Now we can generally say of the Christian view of ownership of property that it regards ownership of persons, living persons, as principally objectionable; slavery is a denial of the principal equality of all people before God. This, of course, is true not only of individual persons, but also of persons who constitute a societal relationship. For that reason, those who provide the money can never and may never be the owners of the enterprise, which is a societal relationship of living people. Providers of capital are merely owners of the capital goods, of the *means of production* of the enterprise. Their ownership right is a limited one which can never apply to the entire enterprise and the activities of its members.

It is, therefore, a typical fruit of humanistic thought that many people ascribe to the providers of capital a complete control over the entire enterprise. Here again we meet one of the consequences of the basic belief of humanistic conservatism. Back of it lies a belief in the individual's right to complete self-determination; it is this self-determining individual who thinks that in the exercise of his ownership rights he need not recognize any

limits, because he, after all, has absolute power to control his property.

CONSEQUENCES OF A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF PROPERTY

When in our thinking about property we distance ourselves from this humanistic influence, the way is cleared for a more responsible view of modern enterprise. In this responsible view, the stockholders can at most be recognized as the owners of the *capital goods* of enterprise, which means that for the management of these capital goods—and only for that—the directors of the firm are accountable to the stockholders. This accounting is given by the firm in its function as a legal entity, as a "corporation." Shareholders are actually not members of the business enterprise; they are only members of the corporation. Only the employer and the employees are to be considered real members of the enterprise in its day-to-day economic activities.

The direct consequence of this view, which sees as *limited* the ownership right of the providers of capital, is that enterprise now is entitled to have a development of its own. That is, the enterprise has a right which, if necessary, may be exercised *against* the providers of capital. This right has its direct ground and support in the communal calling of employer and labourer in the enterprise. The interests of the enterprise, including those of the labourers who are part of it, may not become a mere extension of the interests of the providers of capital.

In this view of property and enterprise, there is certainly a place for a real voice on the part of the employees in the enterprise. Such a voice can certainly not be considered to be a form of theft. On the contrary, when the providers of capital have the right to be given an accounting by the corporation concerning what is being done with their capital input, the employees have certainly just as much right to an ac-

counting concerning what is being done with their labour input.

It is obvious, of course, that the accounting is to be given to them concerning the production activities of the enterprise and not primarily concerning the enterprise as corporation.

Authority

A second argument often advanced against proposals to change the structure of modern enterprise concerns *authority*. It usually runs as follows: "As Christians we are told in the Scriptures that we must be subject to all powers placed over us. In the modern enterprise, this power (this authority) is exercised by the owner; it is he who has received this calling from God. In business, a voice for the workers is therefore a rebellion, a revolution, against divinely-ordained authority. The meaning of this authority is undermined in an unchristian way when employees strive for an effective voice in the business."

TRUE AND UNTRUE ELEMENTS

In this argumentation, just as in nearly all argumentation among Christians, there doubtlessly exist important elements of truth. It is indeed true that we, as Christians, must be subject to the authorities placed over us; similarly it is true that, in an enterprise, authority is primarily exercised by the owner. It is very much the possibility that there are situations in an enterprise which are revolutionary in the worst sense of the word. Employees, who do not wish to subject themselves to the management of the firm and who in the spirit of "*no God, no master*" want to make it impossible for the employer to direct his business, have indeed understood nothing of the true spirit of the Goodnews of Christ. For it is the call to *serve* that this Goodnews emphasizes so strongly.

That, however, does not alter the fact that unintentionally a very un-

evangelical element has crept into the argumentation offered by the present-day champions of the argument from *authority*. For the Goodnews does not posit norms only for those subject to authorities; the Goodnews posits norms for *both* the bearers of authority and those subject to it. Also, those called to give direction are *under* the norms which God has given for authority. And it is even the evangelical duty of those who are subject to remind their office-bearers of these norms, as well as of the origin and limits of their authority.

Those, who in their argumentation brush those norms aside as irrelevant, proceed basically in a characteristically humanistic fashion. (For humanism is characterized by the fact that it does not recognize any norms imposed on man without his own consent.) The Christian who introduces *authority* into his argumentation as a *completely independent entity* (which, in all its expressions, is then to be accepted without any correlation to the equally scriptural concepts of *responsibility* and *community*) actually enters—unintentionally—into a synthesis with the humanistic belief that man has the right to be his own law-maker.

Also the additional argument is of no avail here: the argument that the principle of sphere-sovereignty² for enterprise would be attacked. For the word "sovereignty" may not be interpreted as the right to be a law-maker for oneself but instead the principle of sphere sovereignty points each societal sphere to the task of listening directly to the laws which God has appointed for that sphere. "The idea of sphere-sovereignty, eminently Christian . . . is, in the life of the nation, deformed to become a kind of employer-sovereignty which denies all others a voice; whereas a characteristic trait of that idea is: the sovereignty

² For the content of this principle see: Van Riessen, Dr. H., *The Society of The Future* (1952), pp. 69-86.

of divine ordinances in a certain sphere of life, before which both employer and employee, both government and people must reverently kneel."³

THE VOICE OF EMPLOYEES

That is the reason why, in a christian view, there is definitely room for employees having a voice in the enterprise. This room is not room for voicing just any old opinion, however. For, according to this view, only that kind of voice can be recognized which indeed serves a joint subjection of employer and employees, of management and inferiors, to the laws laid down by God for enterprise. Only that kind of voice by employees is acceptable which can help to form a *normed work-community* in the enterprise; that is, a work-community which—under the direction of the employer—aims at an efficient production in such a way that the lawful interests both of the workers in the enterprise and of the neighbour (which includes fellowmen *outside* the enterprise, such as consumers, people living in the vicinity, and members of other enterprises) are carefully respected.

This kind of voice for employees does not deprive the employer of his authority; it rather confirms it. For through this voice of the employees, the employer's authority will be able to function so much better according to the norms imposed on this authority by God.

Concluding Remarks

As to the urgency of a reformation of the structure of modern business enterprise, from the discussion of only two contra-motifs (*ownership* and *authority*), one may not draw the conclusion that regarding the two here mentioned pro-motifs, *community* and

³ Gerbrandy, Prof. P. S., *De Strijd om Nieuwe Maatschappijvormen* (1927), p. 107. Our translation.

responsibility, there is no need to fear any nonchristian influences. Rather the opposite is true.

COMMUNITY

As to the *community* motif, we will have to guard against narrowing the christian *community* motif to a vague feeling of *solidarity* in the enterprise. For the radical difference between humanistic ideas of solidarity and the christian community motif is, that humanistic solidarity always tries to draw boundary-lines between those for whom one should feel a sense of solidarity and those for whom one should not. The christian norm of love and community, however, cannot recognize such boundaries. According to the Goodnews we are to be neighbour to every other person, regardless of whether he is a Jew or a Samaritan, white or black, labourer or capital-provider, Christian or unbeliever. "The Christian is called to his fellowman even when natural or ideological sympathy has ceased; when he can no longer see any natural or historical reason for it; where only walls or chasms of traditional enmity may be distinguished." ⁴ Only by living and acting out of this christian idea of love and community can we principally and fundamentally overcome the idea of class-struggle, rather than by any theoretical discussion.

RESPONSIBILITY

As to the *responsibility* motif, only one aspect can be treated here, namely, that not seldom this motif is used in theory and practice to demand a similar "democratic" structure for every societal relationship. However scriptural in artificial isolation from the other motifs, it threatens to become utilized

⁴ Lochman, J. M., "The Service of the Church in a Socialist Society," in *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World* (1966), p. 246.

as an instrument for wiping out important structural differences between the various societal relationships. Against this it must be argued that, for example, the government's responsibility to parliament cannot be considered identical to the employer's responsibility to his employees—to say nothing of the wholly unique responsibility-relationship in family and church. The way an accounting is rendered in the enterprise will, therefore, have to be different from the way it is rendered in government relations. When an identical pattern of accounting is forced upon all relationships in society, one undermines the varied richness which God has placed in creation for the countless relationships in society. ⁵

A FINAL CONCLUSION

It will be clear that these articles have not provided an exhaustive treatment of the modern business enter-

⁵ Also for this reason, the manner of developing the idea of a "responsible society"—originating from the World Council of Churches, and in itself a legitimate idea—will have to be observed very critically.

prise. A reader who would draw such a conclusion would give evidence of clearly underestimating the problems which really exist.

Rather, these articles were concerned to illustrate how directly we all need a reformation of our thought-and-life world because of the fact that in our ideas of *freedom*, *community*, *responsibility*, *authority* and *ownership* of property, humanistic influences have in various ways entered in.

This insight is indispensable to everyone who agrees that, with regard to the practical problems of modern enterprise, there are indeed no neutral views and solutions. For rejection of neutrality was not and is not a conclusion which enables us to rest on our laurels. On the contrary, it is a diagnosis which will force us to engage in a radical christian self-criticism of our entire thinking and living. *For when a (supposed) neutrality is done away with, the demand to follow Christ comes at us in full force.*

The struggle of a christian labour organization in our day is, therefore, in the first place a struggle against our *own* heart, to ban from it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all conformity to this world in our own thinking and living. ●