
WITHOUT CHRISTIAN VALUES CAPITALISM IS DOOMED TO FAIL

Editors note: This article was written in the USA about the practices of American companies. I believe however that in the current economic climate its implications for Australia are very real and worthy of consideration by us all. It shows how when Christianity's cultural influence is diminished it often leaves people as dehumanized disposable commodities. We need to pray for a restoration of biblical morality and ethics, and for revival and spiritual transformation in all workplaces.

Background: In the first quarter of 2007 electronics retailer Circuit City announced that it was laying off 3,400 employees. In the last quarter of 2008, Circuit City said it was closing 155 stores.

By Charles Colson, Public Speaker, Author and Chairman of the Wilberforce Forum

What made Circuit City's layoffs noteworthy was not their size but, instead, Circuit City's stated reasons. They had "nothing to do with employees' skills or whether they were a good worker or not." Instead, "it was a function of their salary relative to the market." In other words, Circuit City was laying them off so it could replace them with people who make less. Rotten!

To be fair, Circuit City is not alone in this practice. It is part of a "new way of controlling labour costs in the service industry." Employers "determine the prevailing market wages for particular jobs in various geographic regions" and "then find ways to make sure that their workers' salaries stay within that range."

There is no consideration of an employee's productivity or quality of work. Nor is there any claim that the company can't afford to pay what the workers are currently making -- only that it doesn't have to. It is hard to imagine a clearer example of how rapacious unrestrained economic power can be. With all due respect to the late Milton Friedman, corporations' social responsibility goes beyond maximizing shareholders' returns.

But even if you do not think that unapologetically getting rid of workers so that they can hire cheaper workers is degrading and dehumanizing, it goes against your self-interest. That is because it undermines the moral and cultural consensus that sustains free-market capitalism. Michael Novak has written about what he calls the "three-legged stool" that makes democratic capitalism possible: economic freedom, political freedom, and moral restraint. Take away any of these three and the system collapses.

Christianity's great contribution to this consensus was that it provided capitalism with a moral dimension that capitalism could not provide for itself. Its teachings about the necessity for moral restraint in the marketplace were rooted in the Old Testament concerns for social justice, fair wages, and care for the poor. It incorporated the consistent biblical teaching about human dignity, including the dignity of honest labour.

Thus, when poet William Blake wrote about nineteenth-century England's "dark satanic mills," his criticism invoked unmistakably biblical language and imagery. Christianity provided more than a basis for criticism of capitalism - it helped forge an alternative that kept what John Paul II called "the circle of exchange" going. In the aftermath of World War II, democratic capitalism in Europe appeared to have failed, leaving communism as its likely successor-until, that is, Christian statesmen like Konrad Adenauer of Germany created an alternative to amoral capitalism and socialism. It was called Christian democracy, and it saved Western Europe from communism.

There are companies like ServiceMaster and Herman Miller, which are run explicitly on Christian principles and have proven that a concern for your employees' dignity is not incompatible with making a profit. Christianity has shown that capitalism can be the servant of justice, which is why I am so disturbed at Circuit City's actions. It is yet another reminder of Christianity's diminished cultural influence, which leaves people as disposable commodities and dehumanized. This is a sober reminder of why restoring a biblical worldview and Christian influence is so urgent.

And some pertinent comments by Al Mohler President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Christians should look at this economic crisis as a test of our values. The Bible values honest labour and dedicated workers, and so should we. The Bible warns against dishonest business practices, and we must be watchful. False valuations are, in effect, lies. Dishonest accounting practices are just sophisticated forms of lying. The Bible honours investment and thrift, and Christians must be wary of the impulse for short-term gains and pressure for instant profit.

The current crisis sheds light on what happens when things get out of control. Dishonesty enters the picture at many levels, and the economy is threatened by a lack of trust. Without trust, the entire system collapses. This current crisis should also remind Christians that we are called to be good stewards. Everything we are, everything we do, and everything we own truly belongs to God and is to be at the disposal of Kingdom purposes. This world is not our home and our treasure is not found here. We are to do all, invest all, own all, purchase all to the glory of God.

Source: by Charles Colson