

The Common Grace Agency of Capitalistic Corporate Strategy in God's World

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Abstract

The contemporary zeitgeist presents an unapologetically harsh and troublingly distorted perspective regarding the role of capitalistic corporate strategy in the world. I argue that much of this is due to a misunderstanding of the fundamental purpose of business strategy, which is exacerbated by theologically flawed impositions onto the business sphere of the created order. In response, I argue that capitalistic corporate strategy is part of God's good creation and by God's design serves as a primary source of common grace by unleashing prosperity, engendering profit, and showering provision in and on the world—and perhaps will continue to do so for eternity.

Keywords

Common grace, sphere sovereignty, creation, consummation, meta-narrative, strategy, corporate strategy, capitalistic, capitalism

I. *Trouble on Both the Secular and Sacred Fronts*

There is no doubt that capitalistic business and corporate strategy have historically been marred by the curse of the love of money. There are numerous historical examples of businesses in the United States alone having a negative impact on the world due to greed manifest in everything from oppression of workers (e.g., the Homestead Strike) to intrinsically dangerous products (e.g., the Ford Pinto) to financial statement and stock manipulation (e.g., the Enron bankruptcy). And this historical track record has understandably catalyzed organized movements of protest and response in both the secular or societal and the sacred or church camps over time. In a contemporary sense, these protests and responses have merged into a pivotal moment in the history of capitalistic corporate strategy.

1. *Secular Response—From Capitalistic Strategy to Socialistic Strategy*

Contemporary secular culture has increasingly challenged the fundamental design of capitalistic corporate strategy, namely, the pursuit of profit-making through intrinsically risk-based capital allocation in a freely competitive market. This is driven by the presupposition that profit is inequitable at best and outright extortion at worst. A second, related presupposition is that profit only benefits the owner or capitalist; that is, those who have taken the risk and allocated financial capital to support a particular business strategy with the goal of realizing a profitable return on their invested capital. These two related presuppositions have undergirded two significant contemporary secular movements that are clearly reflective of the current contempt for capitalistic corporate strategy.

The Occupy Wall Street Movement: Pushing Toward Redefinition

The Occupy Wall Street movement (and the related, more global, Occupy movement) unfolded between 2011 and 2016. At its core, the movement came about because of the occupiers' perception that corporate profits were pursued and generated solely to benefit wealthy capitalists. It also challenged the very legitimacy of profit-making and capitalism, espousing a more socialist economic ideology. Arguably, the Occupy Wall Street movement gave evidence that the die was cast—the contemporary culture was demanding a redefinition of corporate strategy, one that is decidedly less capitalistic in its orientation.

The Business Roundtable: Redefinition Codified

Fast forward several years, and the Occupiers' message had reached the boardrooms of the world's most powerful US-based corporations, many of which maintain membership in the Business Roundtable (BRT), a nonprofit lobbyist organization focused on promoting the role of business and corporate strategy in the world. Since 1997, the BRT had embraced a Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation delineating profit-making for shareholders as the central purpose of capitalistic business and corporate strategy. In 2019, that statement changed dramatically, replacing profit-making and *shareholder* primacy with value-creation and *stakeholder* primacy. At its core, I would argue that the BRT's redefinition was driven by the perception that corporate strategy needed to be oriented around broad societal or socialistic good, as opposed to narrow profitable or capitalist good.

2. Sacred Response: From Capitalistic Strategy to Spiritualized Strategy

Mostly concurrent with the secular response outlined above, the Business as Mission (BAM) movement emerged and gained momentum between 2005 and 2015 as a parallel sacred response that resulted in an arguably even more drastic redefinition of business and corporate strategy. BAM redefines the core purpose of business and corporate strategy even farther away from capitalistic aims, establishing evangelism, discipleship, and global economic development as the core purposes or aims of business and corporate strategy. At its core, the BAM redefinition was driven by the perception that corporate strategy needed to be oriented around particular spiritual good, as opposed to narrow profitable or capitalistic good.

II. Theologically Grounded Responses to the Secular and Sacred Redefinitions

There is much to be troubled by about the secular and sacred redefinitions of corporate strategy that have emerged in today's culture. This article cannot provide an exhaustive theological response. That said, we can through the lens of Reformed theology offer specific and significant arguments and answers, starting with a principled and specific response to the BAM movement and continuing with some broad application of the specific constructs of the metanarrative and sphere sovereignty, all of which will lead to my primary premise, namely, that capitalistic corporate strategy is designed by God to be an agency of common grace by generating prosperity, profit, and provision in the world.

1. *The Distortion of the BAM Movement*

Given the mission of this journal and the growing influence of the BAM movement in Christian business practice and education circles, it seems fitting to start with a specific and reasonably lengthy response to it.¹ Indeed, the BAM movement has the potential to undermine the very legitimacy of Christian business education and capitalistic corporate strategic practice. This danger becomes particularly clear when BAM is viewed through the lens of the systematic Reformed theological tradition, which helps us to understand better business and its essential role as a key component of God's good creation. Specifically, BAM is fundamentally flawed in the following key ways:

BAM is based on a dualistic foundation. BAM reinforces the false sacred-secular dichotomy by positioning business as mission as sacred and business as business as secular. In contrast, Reformed theology declares *all* legitimate business work as sacred means of imaging God and contributing to the ongoing revelation of his kingdom.²

BAM reinforces a dual-class citizenship. Related to the first point, BAM creates a dual-class citizenship among business academics and practitioners alike. In contrast, Reformed theology declares *all* of God's people working in business or in *any* other context as cocreators with him, equally but differentially contributing to the ongoing revelation of his kingdom.

BAM violates God's sovereign intention for his creation. BAM imposes the God-given or designed mandate of the church onto business, and vice versa. In contrast, the Reformed tradition celebrates God's good intent for business as being separate and distinct from his good intentions for the organized church. More on this below in the section on the applicability of sphere sovereignty.

BAM undermines profit. Whereas BAM distorts the core essentials of business, thereby threatening sustainable business enterprise, Reformed theology reinforces profit-making as a morally and religiously sound mandate unique to business. More on this later in the section on profit-making as intrinsically good in the sphere of business, as pursued through the agency of capitalistic corporate strategy.

BAM is inauthentic. BAM enterprises run the risk of disenfranchising many of their stakeholders due to mixed motives and lack of full disclosure

¹ For the origins of much of my thinking regarding Business as Mission, see Scott A. Quatro, "Is Business as Mission a Flawed Concept? A Reformed Christian Response to the BAM Movement," *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* 15.1 (2012): 80–87, 102–3.

² For grounded explorations of this truth, see Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), and Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012).

regarding the proselytizing nature of BAM enterprises. In contrast, Reformed theology celebrates the ideal of business being a primary means of extending shalom to all people and even to all of creation.

2. The Holistic Truth of the Metanarrative Affirms Capitalistic Corporate Strategy

As a theologically rich frame, the Christian metanarrative illumines and affirms capitalistic corporate strategy³ by helping us to make sense of the God-designed purpose, current state, and future state of humanity and the created order, including capitalistic corporate strategy.

Creation. God created all things good, including capitalistic corporate strategy. By God's design, capitalistic corporate strategy is a primary means by which humans have exercised dominion over God's world. We must be careful not to distort our perception of the rightness of capitalistic corporate strategy with an overemphasis on the wrongness of how humans have stewarded that part of God's creation.⁴

Fall. All things have fallen from their original goodness, including capitalistic corporate strategy. But again, we must be careful not to distort our perception of the rightness of creation with an overemphasis on the wrongness of how humans have stewarded creation.

Redemption. All of creation has been redeemed by Christ's work on the cross, including capitalistic corporate strategy. We must be careful not to limit the application of the gospel only to humans, and specifically only to God's people.

Consummation. All of creation is being made new, including capitalistic corporate strategy. We must be free to consider the possibility of business activity and even some semblance of capitalistic corporate strategy playing a role in the eternal kingdom. More on this later in the concluding thoughts to this article.

3. The Foundational Truth of Sphere Sovereignty Affirms Capitalistic Corporate Strategy

Perhaps even more cleanly and demonstrably, the rich theological construct of sphere sovereignty affirms capitalistic corporate strategy.⁵ It does so by

³ For a substantive and holistic discussion of the metanarrative applied to business and corporate strategy, see Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

⁴ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

⁵ For a concise and actionable overview of sphere sovereignty, see Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 23–27.

celebrating God's good design for business and capitalist corporate strategy as being sovereign and distinct from God's good design for other components of the created order. The concept of sphere sovereignty was codified by the Dutch Reformed theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper. The essence of Kuyper's seminal doctrine is that God intentionally orders creation with diversity and integrity such that each sphere of society is independently good and must be appreciated as such.

The broad implication of Kuyper's thinking is that economic life, family life, civic life, school life, and even church life are distinct and sovereign. The specific implication is that there are different God-ordained norms for each sphere such that a business must not be run like a church, an educational institution must not be run like a governmental agency, and so on. This is *not* to say that God has not ordained universal norms that transcend all spheres (e.g., admonitions against the love of money as discussed above or the command to love your neighbor as yourself). But it *is* to say that some God-ordained norms are constrained to specific spheres (e.g., the command for the state and the church to care for the poor, the command for the church to evangelize the nations, the command for business to prosper resources and generate a profit). Thus, corporate strategy ideally aligns with God's good design for the sphere of business as opposed to his equally good design for the sphere of the church or the sphere of the state. Again, the fundamental lesson here is that God intends for business and the church and the state to be separate and yet complementary spheres of creation. Further, it is a tricky endeavor indeed to merge the mandates imposed on these different spheres of God's creation, as the secular BRT and sacred BAM movements have done.

III. *Prosperity, Profit, and Provision Flow from the Common Grace of Capitalistic Corporate Strategy*

All of this points toward the beautiful and God-designed common grace agency of capitalistic corporate strategy in the world. We return to the thinking and worldview of Kuyper, the theologian most credited with codifying the theological construct of common grace.⁶ With common grace, Kuyper delineated a clear appreciation for how God upholds secure, civil society in our fallen world.

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2011).

1. *Prospering the World by Exercising Dominion*

In this vein, one can argue that the sphere of business is fundamentally about stewarding and prospering creation in line with the cultural mandate articulated in Genesis 1:28. This passage declares that God's image bearers are to care for creation and make it fruitful by exercising dominion and taking charge of the productive capacity of that creation. Directly related to this conversation, businesses are charged with the task of prospering all that God has created through the agency of capitalistic corporate strategy. In doing so, God uses business and capitalistic corporate strategy to extend common grace to all people, meeting legitimate product and service needs, providing livelihoods, and generating wealth for many. Through business activity, God showers common grace goodness equally on both his people and the unredeemed. This is by God's design, and it represents his will for the business sphere of creation.

Further underscoring this is the potentially amazing benevolence that flows from combining the productive capacity of humans, raw materials, and capital. By exercising rationality and creativity, humans combine raw materials and capital into finished products and services that shower goodness on the world. And as God's image bearers, the humans exercising dominion have the greatest impact on the prosperity that flows from combining the productive capacity of the three components. It is a remarkably simple, but profoundly true, equation:⁷

$$\text{Humans}^{100} \times (\text{Materials} + \text{Capital}) = \text{Prosperity}$$

This equation clearly shows the impact that humans operating in the sphere of business have as cocreators with our creator God, regardless of whether those particular humans have been reconciled to that creator God. This happens optimally when the humans are oriented around the gravity of the calling before them, namely, unlocking the prosperity-generating potential of creation consistent with Genesis 1:28. Of course, this does not always happen. Because of the fall, the impact of the human component of the equation can lead to an erosion of prosperity in an order of magnitude consistent with the potential multiplication of prosperity. The impact of humans for good or for ill is arguably one hundred times greater than the impact of materials and capital. This is at once a humbling and motivating

⁷ The work and capitalistic corporate strategy practice of Dennis Bakke, as recorded in his deeply personal and insightful executive memoir, has significantly influenced my thinking regarding a prosperity equation; Dennis Bakke, *Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach to Fun on the Job* (Seattle: PVG, 2005).

reality—all the more reason to bestow honor and dignity on the humans working in business, those charged with developing and implementing capitalistic corporate strategy consistent with its intrinsic purpose and goodness.⁸ Arguably, the BRT and BAM movements profiled above have eroded that honor and dignity, instead imposing an instrumental goodness on business and capitalistic corporate strategy. Stated plainly, the BRT movement codifies the instrumentality of providing social welfare as the focus and intended outcome of good corporate strategy, while the BAM movement codifies the instrumentality of evangelizing and disciplining the nations as the focus and intended outcome of good corporate strategy. Those movements mostly (BRT) or completely (BAM) miss the intrinsic goodness that flows from simply unlocking the prosperity-producing potential of creation through capitalistic corporate strategy.

Starbucks can serve as an example of a company that has not missed the mark in this regard.⁹ Starting over fifty years ago with a single Seattle-based location in Pike Place Market, Starbucks has grown to become the world's largest branded coffee chain operator and retailer. Starbucks now operates over thirty thousand locations globally and ranks as the 114th-largest US-based publicly traded company. From the beginning, Starbucks was intent on unlocking the productive capacity of creation in the form of knowledgeable employees, globally sourced coffee served in well-located and equipped stores, fueled by significant capital investment and profitability. It has not shied away from difficult decisions throughout its history to maintain its ability to foster prosperity, including temporarily shutting down all US-based stores in 2009 to retrain employees and permanently closing down more than six hundred underperforming stores in that same year—all while significantly increasing its commitment to engaging in “fair trade coffee”¹⁰ by buying from the world's coffee farmers and suppliers. Starbucks has remained firmly committed to unlocking the prosperity that comes from optimally combining human capital, material capital, and financial capital, as equated and codified above.

⁸ Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God* (Downers Grover, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 23–25.

⁹ The current CEO, Kevin Johnson, is a signatory of the BRT Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation, although I personally doubt if Howard Schultz would have been; he was a staunch proponent of free trade and markets and the longtime architect of the capitalistic corporate strategy of the company for over 37 years until his retirement in 2018.

¹⁰ Starbucks has codified their particular approach to fair trade coffee as Coffee and Farmer Equity (C.A.F.E.) Practices. Starbucks defines this coffee buying commitment as “a verification program that measures farms against economic, social and environmental criteria, all designed to promote transparent, profitable and sustainable coffee growing practices while also protecting the well-being of coffee farmers and workers, their families and their communities.”

2. *Profiting the World by Multiplying Talents*

The prosperity-generating potential of capitalistic corporate strategy is undergirded and multiplied by the potential for profit to be generated as the result of optimizing the combination of humans, materials, and capital. And the greater the return generated on talents entrusted to a corporate strategist (a reference to Matthew 25:14–30), the more benevolent that prosperity potential becomes. This principle seems clear, but still, many Christians have difficulty with seeing profit-making as morally or spiritually sound.¹¹ Perhaps one of the most central and cherished macro-level Christian doctrines applicable to this tension is the doctrine of stewardship, which declares that humans are stewards or agents charged with the task of prospering all that God has created. They are accountable for their prosperity-generating work, but they do not truly own the humans, materials, and capital that they are stewarding in performing that work.

This perspective has tremendous implications for capitalistic corporate strategists intent upon generating profit. In short, the Christian doctrine of stewardship can be viewed as being remarkably consistent with normative expectations for strategists operating in the sphere of business relative to profit-making. This is true in the following four ways:

First, viewing humans as stewards for God is like viewing strategists as agents for shareholders or capitalists. While I am not proposing that the gravity of the responsibility is the same, nor am I comparing God ontologically to shareholders, I find the principle to be clearly applicable. Just as stewards do not own the components of creation (plants, animals, themselves, other people), strategists do not own the factors of production (employees, property, buildings, equipment, raw materials, inventory, capital). As God owns creation, the capitalists (shareholders) own the corporation. As stewards are accountable to God without ultimate ownership or control, so too are strategists held accountable by shareholders/capitalists without ultimate ownership or control. Finally, just as stewards are charged by God with prospering creation for God's purposes, agents are charged by shareholders and capitalists with maximizing the return on their invested capital.

It is particularly insightful to view these four comparisons as being inherently harmonious as opposed to simply demonstrating remarkable parallelism. Stated more clearly, when strategists consistently live out the

¹¹ Much of my thinking borrows and has evolved from my earlier work regarding the moral and religious soundness of profit-making. See Scott A. Quatro, "Profit Matters: Christian Religiosity as Support for Milton Friedman's Provocative Claim," in *Executive Ethics: Ethical Dilemmas and Challenges for the C-Suite*, ed. Scott A. Quatro and Ronald R. Sims (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008), 49–62.

four points of stewardship outlined above, they are, by definition, demonstrating God-like stewardship. Hence, profit-making is arguably not only morally and spiritually sound; it is a moral and spiritual imperative for strategists operating in the business sphere, most clearly so when those same strategists are also God's people.

As referenced above, perhaps the most compelling passage from Scripture in this vein is the parable of the talents found in Matthew 25:14–30. This passage may be interpreted as nothing less than an explicit command for stewards and strategists to prioritize and even maximize profit-making. In this account, three steward-agents are entrusted with varying amounts of capital according to their abilities. The most effective steward is given the most capital. In the end, when the capitalist asks for an account from each of the steward-strategists, the two that generated a profitable return on the capital are praised, while the one that generated no return or profit is summarily dismissed. Thus, it can be argued that God clearly expects stewards to maximize profitable returns on his capital. And while this lesson is clearly intended to apply more broadly to all resources entrusted to stewards for the spiritual purpose of growing God's kingdom, the direct applicability regarding strategists and profit-making is particularly striking.

3. Provision for the World by Meeting Daily Bread Needs

By unleashing the God-designed prosperity of creation, and generating profit as a result, the benevolence of God's common grace flowing through capitalistic corporate strategy now reaches the level of daily provision for all stakeholders impacted by business. In a very real way, many people have their "daily bread" needs (Matt 6:1 ESV) met through the prosperity and profit of business. Let us return to the example of Starbucks and consider the operation of the local Starbucks store in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, just a short drive from the college where I serve on the faculty. This is *my* Starbucks—and I am thankful that it is so easily accessible. I am a big fan and loyal customer. And I gladly hand over \$2.40 for a Grande Pike Place coffee—partly because it is really good coffee, but also partly because of all the provision that I know flows from that \$2.40. Of course, not all of the \$2.40 is profit. But the fact that there is a profitable return available to Starbucks is what makes it willing to engage in its corporate activities. In short, every penny of the \$2.40 is undergirded by Starbucks's pursuit of profit via capitalistic corporate strategy, and an analysis of the normative financial statements from the last several years of Starbucks operations reveals the provision that eventually flows to the major corporate stakeholders

in virtuous ways because of Starbucks's successful implementation of capitalistic corporate strategy.¹²

Provision for Suppliers

The biggest piece of shared prosperity directly generated by my \$2.40 Starbucks purchase is provision for suppliers. The various suppliers of coffee, packaging, and the other raw materials necessary for cultivating, roasting, packaging, distributing, and retailing my coffee end up receiving approximately \$0.94 of my \$2.40. This includes thousands of coffee farmers located all around the globe, some of them having relationships with Starbucks going back over thirty years. Of course, all of these suppliers have employees and other customers beyond Starbucks, and I suspect that virtually all of them operate in communities where they pay taxes on their own corporate profits. So every other category of corporate stakeholder outlined below relative to the shared prosperity generated by my \$2.40 Starbucks purchase is replicated by each of the individual suppliers that gets a piece of the \$0.94 from that purchase.

Provision for Employees

The second-largest piece of my \$2.40 ends up in the pockets and bank accounts and even the stock portfolios of Starbucks's employees. In fact, roughly \$0.78 is accounted for in this manner. Most of this goes to the employees in the form of direct compensation (base pay, bonuses), but some of it goes to Starbucks's store-based partners (as they are called) in the form of indirect compensation (benefits), and many of these benefits are not typically made available to retail store employees. These include comprehensive health benefits, a company match of 4% to 6% for retirement plan savings, college education benefits, and perhaps most impressively (especially for part-time retail industry employees), a discounted stock purchase plan that enable Starbucks' hourly store-based employees to become shareholders as well.

Provision for Shareholders

Shareholders are next in line. This reality might surprise most of the Occupy Wall Street activists from several years ago, who were remarkably uninformed as to the share of my \$2.40 Starbucks purchase that ends up making it to

¹² Much of my thinking borrows and has evolved from my earlier work regarding the benevolence of profit-making. See Scott A. Quatro, "Profit Profits!," in *Executive Ethics II: Ethical Dilemmas and Challenges for the C-Suite*, ed. Ronald R. Sims and Scott A. Quatro, 2nd ed. (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2016), 63–72.

the shareholders. It seems that most of the occupiers assumed that the largest share ends up in the hands of “greedy” shareholders. But in fact, the shareholders are third in line at Starbucks, with around \$0.28 being their take. In the case of Starbucks, most of that \$0.28 is reinvested into the company rather than paid out to the shareholders as dividends.

Provision for Communities

The next easily identifiable piece of my \$2.40 purchase literally makes it possible for the local community of Lookout Mountain to exist. Again, the occupiers discussed early in this article appeared to have been blissfully ignorant of this piece of the equation. Altogether, roughly \$0.25 of my \$2.40 goes to pay local, state, and federal sales and income taxes, which in turn funds the local elementary school my four children attended, the local police force that patrols our streets, the recent improvement project that resulted in the better paving and traction on those streets, and even illumines the streetlamps that light those streets. All of this is before we consider beneficiaries in the larger communities of the state of Georgia (e.g., Georgia Southwestern State University and Georgia Institute of Technology, where President Jimmy Carter was partially educated), the United States (e.g., the US Naval Academy, where President Carter eventually graduated), and even the global community (e.g., President Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his post-Presidency global diplomacy and human rights-related efforts). All of this is partially funded or undergirded by the \$0.25 in tax revenues generated from my \$2.40 Starbucks purchase.

Provision for Customers

The last easily discerned piece of my Starbucks purchase can be thought of as enlightened “consumer self-interest.” It sounds odd to think about it this way, but without profit, my ongoing and evolving coffee needs will simply not be met by Starbucks via its capitalistic corporate strategy. Of course, the profit potential compels Starbucks to make the coffee available to me—but also to invest in the research and development endeavors, store improvements, and employee training that further enhance my coffee consumption experience down the road. All told, about \$0.04 of my \$2.40 makes its way back to me in the form of future enhanced coffee experiences.

Provision for All Stakeholders Collectively

Then there is the rest of the \$2.40. So far, we have accounted for \$2.29 of my Starbucks purchase. The remaining amount of approximately \$0.11 is

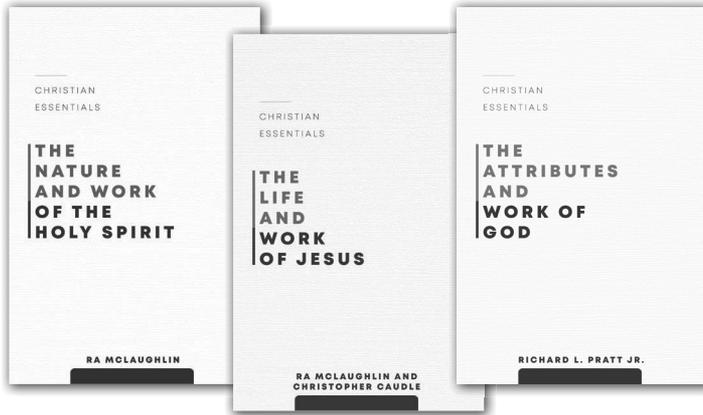
harder to fundamentally trace to any one corporate stakeholder group, but rather it flows as an aggregate to all of them.

IV. *The Eternal City and World*

Let us finish by considering the possibility of the fully consummated kingdom, when heaven and earth come together again.¹³ For me, this involves imagining the God-designed perfection and potential prosperity of the garden, which by God's design was the entire world pre-fall. Consider this reality for a moment. In the beginning, our God created all things good, including us. The world was perfectly created and resourced, but not perfectly prospered. Our God placed us in the center of all things as vice-roys and charged us to make much of the world, to have dominion, and to steward all things wisely. I imagine that we would have filled the earth, building cities and businesses, formulating and implementing capitalistic corporate strategy, weaving together the giftedness of humans, abundant raw materials, and capital to profitably create products and services that help communities to flourish through abundant provision, and through all of this, bringing God's goodness and shalom to the world. Thus, I firmly believe that we must reaffirm God's good intent and design for business and capitalistic corporate strategy, moving away from the socialistic and spiritualized misdirection espoused by the BRT and BAM movements. We must do this boldly, addressing the systemic impact of the fall on God's good creation, enthusiastically working to make all things new in and through business. In my vision, through business, capitalistic corporate strategy works as the powerful and pervasive agent of prosperity, profit, and provision that God designed it to be—maybe for eternity.

¹³ A close friend and colleague here at Covenant College gifted me a copy of J. Richard Middleton's remarkable book *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014). It has spoken to me with clarity about the possibilities of our eternal home and existence and allowed me to dream about what that may be like.

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