



# The Restoration of the Dignity of the Church in the Marketplace

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## Abstract

This article delves into the profound interrelationship between the church and the marketplace, examining the historical context and outlining a path towards restoring the church's dignity in economic affairs. By engaging in ethical business practices and providing spiritual guidance, the church can fulfil its responsibility to promote justice, compassion, and moral integrity within the marketplace. Through a concise exploration of ethical practices such as fair trade, sustainability, and social responsibility, as well as the importance of spiritual guidance through workplace ministry programs, counselling services, and prayer groups, this article emphasizes the transformative potential of the church in shaping a more ethical and spiritually enriched economic landscape. By heeding the call to action and actively participating in the marketplace with integrity and faithfulness, the church can bring about positive change, restoring its influence and fulfilling its mission in today's complex economic world.

**Keywords:** restoration, dignity, church, marketplace

## Introduction

The church and the marketplace have always been intertwined. In the early days, persecuted Christians had to make a living in the marketplace, using their success to support the church and promote Christian values. During the Middle Ages, the church-owned land operated businesses, and set ethical standards. However, the Industrial Revolution led to a decline in the church's role as businesses grew more complex and secularism rose. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the church's responsibility to promote ethical business practices and offer spiritual guidance in the marketplace.

To grasp the significance of the church's involvement in the marketplace, we must define the terms again to contextualise them, "church" and "marketplace" and understand their interrelationship. The church represents a community of believers who gather in worship, fellowship, and spiritual growth, while the marketplace encompasses economic activity, trade, and commercial transactions. However, the church and the marketplace are not separate; church members actively participate in the marketplace as entrepreneurs, employees, consumers, and more.

The interrelationship between the church and the marketplace goes beyond believers' presence in

economic systems. The church can shape the ethical landscape of the marketplace, while the marketplace presents opportunities for the church to manifest its values and contribute to society's well-being. Recognizing this interrelation is crucial to understanding the church's involvement in economic affairs and its potential for positive change. It prompts us to explore how the church can engage ethically in the marketplace and examine historical interactions between the two spheres. This article explores how the church can restore its dignity in the marketplace by engaging in ethical business practices and providing spiritual guidance to those who work there. By doing so, the church can positively influence economic systems and contribute to a more just and compassionate marketplace.

### The Early Church

Jesus and the apostles functioned within the society in which they were found. Hence, the socioeconomic and political factors of the day greatly influenced the teachings of Jesus and his disciples. In taking sides with the poor, Jesus attacked the Pharisees and Sadducees for their self-indulgence and greed (Matt 23:25-33). They were known for their oppression and exploitation of the poor peasants. Society was conditioned by social and group distinctions and it relied on a slave economy (Batey 1972:5). Jesus' preaching about the 'Kingdom' made it abundantly clear that God took seriously the concerns of the poor and needy: the poor would be blessed in the realisation that the 'Kingdom of God' was theirs (Lk 6:20-26); even tax collectors and harlots would gain entry before those who appeared to be religious and respectable (Matt 21:31-32), and the rich and saturated would become acquainted with want and hunger. The arrival of the 'Kingdom' contained the seeds of economic revolution and social reversal. With all these, we, however, do not find a pattern of a fully orbited programme to transform society in the life of the early church. This, however, radically changed when the church moved out beyond the borders of the Graeco-Roman frontiers.

Bruce Winter in his careful and well-documented discussion of public life in the 1st century shows how early Christians took part in public life in the Greco-Roman communities in which they lived (Winter 1994:200f.). He argues that 'the early church taught a civic consciousness among its members'. Christians were not to abandon life in the public sphere (*politeia*<sup>2</sup>) but to address their obligations as citizens from the perspective of the Christian ethic. Furthermore, Winter holds that the Christian community while maintaining a commitment to the tradition of the benefaction of the classical city, required all its citizens, whatever their financial resources, to contribute to the welfare of the city even in the face of persecution. They thus saw themselves as practising a new and strange *politeia*. Winter concludes that the Christian social ethic was an unprecedented social revolution of the ancient benefaction tradition. Every Christian had an obligation to promote the welfare of the city and help the poor, even without the rewards that were traditionally accorded the benefactor.

David Bosch points out that transformation (humanisation) has been a part of the Christian mission and influence in society right from the beginning (Bosch 1999:180). In a society described as 'macabre'<sup>3</sup>, lost in despair, perversion, and superstition, Christian communities emerged as something entirely new in the populous and far-flung Roman Empire. The early church was on the periphery of society. It found many of its earliest adherents among slaves, women and foreigners - people who had no special influence on the shape of society. Yet it was to have an impact on society, especially over the next two millennia. Christianity began by preaching and practising the gospel of love and charity which included almsgiving and care for widows, orphans, slaves, travellers, the sick, the imprisoned and the poor (Von Harnack 1967:147-198). Driven by the love of Jesus believers went out and expressed their love for the neighbour. The early

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<sup>1</sup> In its most basic sense, the kingdom of God is the realm over which God reigns as King. This realm is not limited to a particular place or time, but exists both in heaven and on earth. It is also not limited to a particular group of people, but includes all who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

<sup>2</sup> The word "*politeia*" is a Greek word that means "state," "government," or "constitution." It is derived from the words "*polis*," meaning "city," and "*politeuomai*," meaning "to be a citizen." The word "*politeia*" has a rich history and a complex meaning. It can refer to a particular state or government, the ideal state, or the kingdom of God. It is a word that has been used to describe many different forms of government and societies, but it always has at its heart the idea of citizenship and the common good.

<sup>3</sup> The word "macabre" comes from the Middle French word "macabre," which means "ghastly" or "gruesome." It is thought to be derived from the Latin word "macula," which means "spot" or "stain." The word "macabre" is often used to describe things that are related to death or the macabre, such as horror movies, haunted houses, and death metal music.

disciples showed true mercy and compassion. Peter, who had no silver or gold on his person, gave a crippled beggar what he did have: the gift of health (Acts 3:6). Tabitha (Dorcas) is cited as an early disciple 'full of good works and acts of charity' (Acts 9:36).

### Definition of Terms

For a better and easy understanding of this work, the operational terms are:

**Restoration** is the process of returning something to its original state or condition. It can be used to describe the restoration of a historical building, an ecosystem, or even a person's health.<sup>4</sup>

**Dignity** refers to the quality or state of being worthy of respect, honour, and esteem. It involves maintaining a sense of self-worth and displaying a composed and honourable demeanour even in challenging situations. Dignity is often associated with the inherent value and worth of every individual, regardless of their background, circumstances, or abilities.<sup>5</sup>

**Church** has several different meanings, but it is most commonly used to refer to a Christian congregation or denomination. The word comes from the Greek word "ekklesia," which means "assembly" or "congregation." In the New Testament, the word "church" is used to refer to both the local congregation of Christians and the universal body of Christ. The local church is a group of believers who gather together to worship God, study the Bible, and serve others. The universal church is all of the people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, regardless of their denomination or location. The church has some important functions in the Christian life. It is a place where believers can come together to worship God, learn about the Bible, and grow in their faith. It is also a place where believers can serve others and make a difference in the world.<sup>6</sup>

**Marketplace** is a physical or virtual location where buyers and sellers can come together to trade goods or services. In the physical world, marketplaces are typically open-air spaces, such as farmers' markets or flea markets. In the virtual world, marketplaces are online platforms, such as Amazon or eBay.<sup>7</sup>

### The Church's History in the Marketplace

The church's historical involvement in the marketplace, with positive and negative examples, has had a profound impact on societies worldwide. Monastic orders<sup>8</sup> like the Benedictines<sup>9</sup> and Franciscans<sup>10</sup> exemplify positive engagement by using economic activities to support themselves and their communities, creating employment opportunities and combating poverty. During the Industrial Revolution, church figures like Wilberforce and Day fought for workers' rights, leading to labour laws and improved conditions.

However, negative instances highlight the dangers of the church's involvement in the marketplace. Corruption and exploitation occurred when the church's influence intertwined with political and economic

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/restoration>

<sup>5</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dignity>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/church>

<sup>7</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marketplace>

<sup>8</sup> "Monastic Orders" refers to groups of men or women who dedicate themselves to God and live in an isolated community or alone. Typically, monks and cloistered nuns practice an ascetic lifestyle, wearing plain clothing or robes, eating simple food, praying and meditating several times a day, and taking vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience. (learnreligions.com)

<sup>9</sup> The "Benedictines" are a monastic religious order of the Catholic Church following the Rule of Saint Benedict. They are also sometimes called the Black Monks, in reference to the colour of their religious habits. They were founded in 529 by Benedict of Nursia, a 6<sup>th</sup>-century monk who laid the foundations of Benedictine monasticism through the formulation of his Rule. (en.wikipedia.org)

<sup>10</sup> The "Franciscans" are a group of related mendicant Christian religious orders within the Catholic Church. Founded in 1209 by the Italian saint Francis of Assisi, these orders include three independent orders for men (the Order of Friars Minor being the largest contemporary male order), orders for nuns such as the Order of Saint Clare, and the Third Order of Saint Francis open to male and female members. They adhere to the teachings and spiritual disciplines of the founder and of his main associates and followers, such as Saint Clare of Assisi, Saint Anthony of Padua, and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary (en.wikipedia.org). The word "Franciscan" comes from French François, from Old French Franceis meaning "noble, free," as a noun "a Frenchman, inhabitant of Ile-de-France; the French language," from Late Latin Franciscus, literally "Frankish," cognate with French and frank (adj.) (etymonline.com)

power. The indulgence trade and the distortion of teachings on wealth exemplify such negative consequences.

By examining both positive and negative examples, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the church's marketplace involvement. Learning from the positive, the church can engage in ethical business practices, championing fair trade, workers' rights, and sustainability. Simultaneously, it must remain vigilant against greed and corruption, emphasizing integrity and integrating faith into economic practices.

### **The Restoration of Church's Dignity in the Marketplace**

The church can restore its marketplace dignity through two key approaches: ethical business practices and spiritual guidance. Embracing these interconnected endeavours allows the church to regain influence and integrity within the economic sphere.

Ethical business practices are essential for restoring dignity. The church's teachings emphasize honesty, fairness, justice, and stewardship, which should be actively practised and promoted in the marketplace. Supporting fair trade ensures just wages and protects workers from exploitation.

Embracing sustainable business models showcases environmental concern and responsible stewardship. Socially responsible practices, such as community involvement, diversity, inclusivity, and employee well-being, embody the church's teachings of compassion and justice. Alongside ethical business practices, the church can restore dignity by providing spiritual guidance to those in the marketplace. The church becomes a source of support, wisdom, and guidance in the fast-paced, competitive business world.

Workplace ministry programs create spaces for individuals to seek solace, engage in spiritual practices, and receive encouragement rooted in faith. Bible studies, prayer groups, and counselling services address professionals' unique challenges, fostering spiritual growth and resilience. Furthermore, the church equips believers with the moral framework and ethical discernment needed for decision-making in economic matters. Integrating teachings on ethics, stewardship, and justice into sermons, workshops, and education empowers individuals to align their marketplace actions with their faith values, promoting a virtuous and principled economic landscape.

### **The Importance of Ethical Business Practices in Church**

The importance of ethical business practices for the church cannot be overstated. As a moral authority, the church has a responsibility to uphold values such as honesty, integrity, justice, and compassion, including in economic affairs. Engaging in ethical business practices is both an expression of faith and an opportunity to positively impact individuals, communities, and society.

Ethical business practices align with the core teachings of the church, emphasizing the worth and dignity of every human being. Treating employees, customers, and stakeholders with respect and fairness reflects the church's commitment to human flourishing and justice.

Ethical business practices also serve as a witness to the world, demonstrating the transformative power of the gospel. When the church engages in business ethically, it becomes a visible embodiment of its values, inviting others to consider the impact of faith in their own lives.

Furthermore, ethical business practices contribute to the common good and societal well-being. The church's concern for others drives the promotion of economic justice, reducing exploitation, and fostering a just society.

Practising ethics in business enhances the church's credibility and reputation, building trust among its members and the broader community. A reputation for ethical conduct strengthens the church's influence, allowing it to have a significant impact on economic systems and policies.

By embracing ethical business practices, the church fulfils its responsibility to embody its teachings, positively influence society, and contribute to the flourishing of individuals and communities.

### **Ethics of Church Business Practices**

The church has numerous opportunities to engage in ethical business practices that align with its values and principles. Here are examples of such practices: fair trade, sustainable business practices, social responsibility, ethical investment, and transparent financial practices.

The church can play a significant role in promoting ethical business practices in the marketplace. One way the church can do this is by supporting fair trade. This can be achieved by promoting and consuming products with fair trade certification, such as coffee, tea, chocolate, and handicrafts. Advocating for fair trade helps create a more equitable marketplace and combats exploitation and poverty.

Another way the church can make a positive impact is by embracing sustainable business practices. This involves reducing carbon emissions, implementing energy-efficient measures, recycling, and using eco-friendly materials. The church can demonstrate environmental stewardship by incorporating sustainable practices and encouraging its community to do the same.

The church can also promote social responsibility by supporting local businesses, promoting fair employment practices, and investing in community development projects. These actions address societal needs and promote well-being.

Ethical investment is another way the church can apply its values to business practices. This involves divesting from industries that contradict its values and investing in socially responsible initiatives.

Finally, upholding transparency and accountability in financial practices builds trust and affirms the church's commitment to integrity and responsible resource management. By engaging in these ethical business practices, the church can make a positive impact in the marketplace and demonstrate its commitment to its values and the well-being of individuals and communities.

### **The Importance of Spiritual Guidance for Marketplace Professionals**

Recognizing the importance of spiritual guidance for those in the marketplace is crucial for holistic well-being and growth. Here are key reasons why providing spiritual guidance is paramount:

Spiritual guidance can play a significant role in helping individuals integrate their faith into their professional lives. By finding purpose and meaning in their work, individuals are encouraged to view their work as an opportunity to serve God and make a positive impact.

Spiritual guidance also equips individuals with a moral framework rooted in their faith, enabling them to navigate ethical dilemmas with wisdom and integrity. This can help individuals make ethical decisions in their professional lives, promoting a more just and equitable workplace.

In addition to guiding ethical decision-making, spiritual guidance can also support individuals' emotional and mental well-being. By offering comfort and resilience, spiritual guidance provides a safe space for individuals to express their emotions and seek solace in their faith.

Spiritual guidance can also help individuals strike a healthy balance between work and other aspects of life. By nurturing holistic growth, spiritual guidance helps individuals prioritize their values and find fulfilment in all areas of life. More so, spiritual guidance can help individuals discern their calling and view their work as a vocation. By understanding their unique gifts and talents, individuals can find fulfilment in their work and make a positive impact in the world. By providing spiritual guidance, the church supports individuals in integrating their faith, making ethical choices, maintaining well-being, balancing priorities, and finding purpose within the marketplace.

### **How Churches Offer Spiritual Guidance to Marketplace Professionals**

The Church can provide spiritual guidance to those who work in the marketplace through a variety of programs and services. These can include workplace ministry programs that facilitate discussions on integrating faith and work, navigating ethical challenges, and finding purpose. The Church can also offer faith-based counselling tailored to address work-related stress, career transitions, ethical decision-making,

and work-life balance. Additionally, the Church can create supportive prayer communities within the church or workplace where individuals can share burdens, seek guidance, and experience the power of collective prayer. Mentoring and discipleship programs can also be implemented to pair individuals with mentors who provide guidance and support for spiritual growth within the workplace. Finally, the Church can incorporate teachings and sermons that address the intersection of faith and work, offering guidance on topics such as purpose, ethics, relationships, and stewardship.

### Call for Action

The church must take proactive steps towards ethical business practices and provide spiritual guidance in the marketplace. The Church can have a transformative impact on individuals, communities, and society at large by embracing ethical business practices. This includes engaging in fair trade, sustainable practices, social responsibility, and transparent finances to uphold values and promote a just economic system. The Church can also empower individuals to see their work as a calling by integrating faith and work, aligning actions with faith and bringing Gospel transformation to the workplace. Providing spiritual guidance through workplace ministry, counselling, prayer groups, and mentoring can help individuals navigate challenges and find spiritual well-being in their work. The Church can also foster collaboration with ethical businesses, non-profits, and community organizations to create a just and compassionate marketplace. By showing leadership and advocacy, speaking out against unethical practices, advocating for economic justice, and influencing public opinion and policies for positive change, the Church can make a significant impact.

### Conclusion

The church has a long and complex history of involvement in the marketplace. In the early days of Christianity, the church was often marginalized and persecuted, and its members were forced to make a living in the marketplace. However, the church also played a vital role in providing social welfare and economic support to its members and the wider community. During the Middle Ages, the church became more powerful and wealthy, and it began to own land and operate businesses. This led to some abuses, as the church sometimes used its power to exploit the poor and the vulnerable. However, the church also played a positive role in the marketplace, promoting ethical business practices and providing spiritual guidance to those who worked there.

In the modern era, the church has faced a decline in its influence in the marketplace. This is due in part to the rise of secularism and the increasing complexity of the global economy. However, there is a growing movement within the church to reclaim its role in the marketplace. This movement is based on the belief that the church has a responsibility to promote ethical business practices and to provide spiritual guidance to those who work in the marketplace. The church can restore its dignity in the marketplace by engaging in ethical business practices and providing spiritual guidance. Ethical business practices are essential for restoring dignity, as they demonstrate the church's commitment to honesty, fairness, justice, and stewardship. Supporting fair trade ensures just wages and protects workers from exploitation. Embracing sustainable business models showcases environmental concern and responsible stewardship. Socially responsible practices, such as community involvement, diversity, inclusivity, and employee well-being, embody the church's teachings of compassion and justice.

Alongside ethical business practices, the church can restore dignity by providing spiritual guidance to those in the marketplace. The church can become a source of support, wisdom, and hope for those who are struggling in the marketplace. The church can also provide a moral compass for those who are making decisions in the marketplace.

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