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Jesus and Competition

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Abstract: *Whether competition is a process compatible with Christian thought is a perennial question. Christians possess divergent views on the matter, ranging from viewing competition as consistent with Christian belief to holding it as contradictory. This paper makes an assessment of the issue. First, it offers some definitions of competition, emphasizing neoclassical understandings of the concept. Then, a selection of Jesus' sayings is analyzed that might bear on competition, as interpreted by a range of academic biblical exegetes. The conclusion is that Jesus does not seem to tolerate or encourage competition. How Jesus' sayings might bear on aspects of contemporary business practice is assessed, including how Christians might respond to them. This includes ways by which Christians might attempt to change modern business practice and organization. Some examples of how Christian business people* have *attempted to ameliorate competition are also discussed. JEL Codes: A10, A12, A13, Z12.*

How Christian belief accords with the practice of competition is an enduring question. Probably the most common presumption in the Christian and non-Christian economics and business literature is that competition is a good thing. Some definitions and characteristics of competition in business are outlined below. In the next section, particular sayings of Jesus that might relate to competition attributes are discussed, including whether they are intended to apply in society today and how they might affect the field of business. It is possible that further statements of Jesus with bearing on competition are not considered in this paper. The setting of Jesus' sayings is invariably personal relations on a local scale, rather than at a societal level. As Hagner (1993, p. 131) points out, such "directives are for the recipients of the kingdom, not for governmental legislation;" or, as Bock (1994, p. 591) puts it, "the ethic described is personal and not governmental." An issue is whether they can be, or are meant to be, transposed to the social, political or economic realms (Harrington 1991, p. 88). Unavoidably, individual Christian behavior may have social impacts. If a Christian conducts her business on the basis of the ethical stances to which Jesus calls His followers, her business activities will inevitably influence other people and businesses,

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and the actions will necessarily have social effects. If "social" means more than one person, most personal behavior has social effects. It is hard to envisage any personal behavior not affecting other people.

The methodological position concerning the relation of scripture to the world used in this paper is that advocated by Chewning (1989) and Kaiser (1989). It is taken as an assumption underlying the subsequent argument, but is not justified here. The stance is expressed by Chewning that "the Bible is absolutely sufficient to guide business conduct in every era of history and in every type of business situation." The "need to discover God's universal *biblical principles*" is paramount "as we move away from the time and features of the agrarian and theocratic society in which the original Scriptures were given" (Chewning 1989, p. 265, original emphasis). In this line of thinking, contemporary topics not discussed in scripture can still be analyzed on the basis of God's eternal principles. Kaiser (1989) and others argue that a high degree of consistency exists throughout the Old and New Testaments concerning the principles and their intentions, in contradistinction to the detail and minutiae of how and when they were applicable. In keeping with these methodological perspectives, a further assumption underlying this paper is that Jesus articulated the principles and is the only legitimate authority by which they can be interpreted.

Disparity exists among Christians in how they regard competition in business (and elsewhere). Thus, Grudem (2003, p. 66) concludes that business competition "is good and pleasing to God, and provides many opportunities to glorify him." On the other hand, Tiemstra *et al.* (1990, pp. 110, 115) suggest that competition does not accord well with Christian belief. Somewhere between these positions is Griffiths (1984, p. 73) who contends that while "competition is not a Christian ideal," competitive markets "are superior to other practical forms of economic organization in terms of allocating resources." This paper does not assess such Christian responses to competition but has a different focus. This is to analyze Jesus' sayings that might bear on competition, something the three Christian discussions above do not pursue. A Christian response to competition between business firms might be that competition is a realistic means of achieving efficiency by accommodating to the fallen and sinful nature of humankind. Nevertheless, a problem in the way of Christian consensus is that competition is a two-edged sword. It not only produces benefits like efficiency, but also costs. An example of the latter could be if a firm responded to competitive pressures by cutting costs, but that because of the cost cuts some employees lost their jobs, or stockholders received lower dividends so that more profit could be directed to innovation within the firm. In both cases, the lives of former employees and of existing stockholders could be disrupted adversely, in which case they would incur private costs. Similar and other costs could be generated from a firm to its competitors, suppliers etc. A Christian attitude to business competition might want to enhance the benefits and reduce the costs, if the costs were viewed as unwelcome consequences or by-products of normal business practice, and could be identified. Christian business persons might then want to consider in practical terms how to increase net benefits. They might even regard this as part of their Christian duty in so far as God and Jesus continually seek to extricate people from the undesirable and sinful states in which they find themselves.

Competition in a business context is often regarded as "a conscious striving against other business firms for patronage…for potentially incompatible positions" (Scherer and Ross 1990, p. 16). Similarly, George Stigler (1987, p. 531) defines competition as "rivalry between individuals (or groups or nations), and it arises whenever two or more parties strive for something that all cannot obtain." These conventional or neoclassical definitions of competition are akin to standard dictionary definitions of competition as rivalry between parties for the same objective, or "mutually exclusive goal attainment" (Kohn 1992, p. 4; Reavely 1992, p. 3). In these understandings, competition can occur also *within* firms, say, as between workers seeking promotions, or avoiding being next in line for firing in a business slump. Nevertheless, competition is not defined identically between different schools of economic thought. In the Austrian view, for instance, competition is seen as a rivalrous process, not depending on the number of participants, "spreading information" and creating "unity and coherence of the economic system" (Hayek 1948, p. 106). The view of competition discussed in this paper, however, is oriented mainly to neoclassical conceptions.

In this understanding, competition involves more than one entity (occurring both between firms and between employees etc. in the firm) who cannot achieve the same objective. All comparable businesses are not necessarily in competition with each other, however. Two adjacent corn farms might not compete against each other because "the market for corn is so large relative to the two farmers' potential supply" (Scherer and Ross 1990, p. 16). The objectives of the two farms can be compatible, therefore; they have common not disparate aims. Even workers in most firms might not be in competition with each other for much of the time. Following Scherer and Ross' definition, competition between firms occurs only where a firm's decisions seek to achieve a market share that is potentially incompatible with a share other firms try to attain. However, decisions by firms can be made without the aim of trying to increase market shares, even though a decision might unintentionally have potentially adverse effects on other firms' economic positions. How competition articulates itself in business practice, therefore, will not necessarily be readily identifiable. Competition between firms is sometimes viewed as marred only by certain types of intentional questionable business behavior such as price fixing and bribery. A difficulty in identifying and proscribing unethical modes of behavior is that "virtually everything that a business does can influence its competitive position" (Sternberg 2000, p. 105). Any response to potential competitors is acceptable to Sternberg, except that business people should "avoid lying, cheating, stealing, physical violence and illegality" (Sternberg 2000, pp. 105–106). Whether Christians also should go no further than this in business is the question explored in the next section in which the criterion is the behavior to which Jesus calls His followers.

Jesus' Sayings Potentially Bearing on Competition and Their Implications

The selection of Jesus' teachings examined here are from the books of Matthew and Luke (cited from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible) as interpreted by academic biblical exegetes.

One potentially relevant text is Matt. 5:39–41 (=Lk. 6:29–30), "…if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also…and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." Jesus seems to be instructing His followers not to retaliate, not to do to others as one is done by, or not to respond to bad actions with bad actions, where the victim of the action (Jesus' follower) assesses the action as "bad." If competition requires measure-for-measure as firms strive against others for mutually unobtainable market shares, this form of behavior seems to be off limits for Christians.

Matt. 5:39–41 is interpreted by exegetes as proscribing tit-for-tat. To Gardner (1991, p. 109), the text means "do not retaliate against those who injure or harm you." Indeed, "in each instance," the victim should do "the opposite of what is expected," for example, "pursuing a new level of reciprocity." Thus, the follower of Jesus can show what it means "to love without limit, offering peace even to those who threaten and oppose us." This "is to love as God loves." The Christian is to act like this today, and not insist on what would commonly be regarded as her legal or moral rights. Requiting perceived wrong or unfairness to oneself is prohibited. Instead, "rather than demanding strict justice, or allowing for retaliation of any kind, the disciple of the kingdom defers to others. The disciple does not insist on personal rights" (Hagner 1993, p. 132). This required behavior by Christians appears outlandish in so far as "members of the kingdom should cause utter amazement by the way they respond" because Jesus "wants us to be his ambassadors in the human kingdom" (Green 2000, p. 97). Jesus' demands in Matt. 5:39–41 appear to call for responses that to conventional secular thought are eccentric, unusual, odd, abnormal, alien, even fantastic and bizarre. This is because they "strike at the very core of human selfishness, summoning his disciples to value others above themselves in concrete and consistent ways. They have no honor or property worth defending compared with the opportunity to show how much they love God and everyone else" (Keener 1999, p. 195). At the least, these exegetes' interpretations suggest that retaliation, reprisal, retribution and blow-for-blow are precluded for Christians.

How these directives might relate to competitive business-related situations can be envisaged. An instance might be if a competitor sought to gain a share of a Christian's business by, say, price cutting. It would seem that the Christian business is not to retaliate with more severe price cuts, to return like for like or take reprisals. This applies even if the bad action is compounded, say, if the competitor had affiliations with a supplier to the Christian who is persuaded by the competitor to reduce the Christian's credit rating. Matt. 5:38 describes the conventional *lex talionis* retaliation that might be more typical of contemporary business behavior, but this no longer applies to Jesus' followers. They should not seek to harm their rivals, nor should they initiate such actions. Jesus' demands were especially radical in ancient society where customary and conditioned modes of behavior affecting honor, shame, status and material production were so important. In so far as these were all largely understood as limited goods subject to a "zero-sum game," any attempt to disrupt conventions (as per Jesus' teachings) would be viewed with hostility. Conventionally, an insult might require retaliation in terms of existing customs. If I did not respond to a blow, I might invite further blows from my persecutor. Since economic roles then were more constrained by kinship and political considerations (Malina 2001, p. 103), Jesus' admonitions could disrupt customary economic relations (for instance, by exhorting the powerful not to retaliate). His commands probably did not appear to be workable in Mediterranean antiquity. But Jesus' demands appear equally radical today, and the issue arises as to how practical they might be in a competitive business environment where most business people may not be Christian.

The practicality issue can be approached by noting that required Christian behavior carries more than just negative connotations—of *not* responding to perceived unfairness to oneself. It contains positive implications, providing guidelines for how Christians should behave pro-actively and pre-emptively. Matt. 7:12 (= Lk. 6:31) is the key, "so whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them." This Golden Rule principle "*must guide one's daily treatment of others*" according to Keener (1999, p. 249; original emphasis), and is not just to be accorded to fellow believers. Evidently, it is intended to apply to all relationships Christians have with the world, business included, because, to Green (2000, p. 107), "God wants to see his characteristics embodied in his servants" in their dealings with humankind. The Golden Rule is the hallmark of Christian inter-personal behavior. It "is to be understood and applied as a *Christian* principle, that is, as a summary of *Jesus'* interpretation of the law and the prophets" (Hare 1993, p. 81; original emphasis). The Golden Rule is advocated also by Jesus in Matt. 22:39 (=Lk. 10:27) as "you shall love your neighbour as yourself." The love Jesus espouses is not just an emotion, as Hagner (1995, p. 648) points out: "love for one's neighbor means acting toward others with their good, their well-being, their fulfillment, as the primary motivation and goal of our deeds."

Another expression of Jesus' Golden Rule is Luke 6:31, "And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them." This "command to give the same sensitive consideration to others that one might want others to give" is Bock's interpretation (1994, p. 596). Another way of putting it is that "as you wish to be treated with sensitivity to your preferences, so treat others with sensitivity to their preferences"(Bock 1994, p. 598). Presumably, this implies that a Christian business person should not want to treat other business people in ways that would harm their livelihood or those of their employees, or be so treated by other businesses. It seems to preclude Christians from engaging in legally permissible practices that might have such effects. Luke's Golden Rule comes in the midst of Jesus' practical advice in verses 27–34, "repeating the triad of love, doing good, and lending/giving, and by contending that all three must be exercised freely, without calculation, without expectation of return," as Green expresses it (1997, p. 273). This summary does not seem to fit comfortably with the idea of competitive business strategy in which decisions are usually taken on the basis of careful calculation including assessing how competitors might respond, and only in the expectation of return. Jesus seems to turn this seemingly rational mode of decision making on its head. Evidently this is the case as Green (1997, p. 273) understands it for Christians, because to "this new people," "theirs will be a countercultural existence indeed, for their lives are based on an inverted understanding of their social world."

Whether this "inverted understanding" is irrational nonsense for grappling with the sinful real world, however, is moot, because (p. 274) "those who act without expectation of return, even on behalf of their enemies, will be rewarded. Now, however, their reward does not consist of acts of gratitude from the recipients of their benefaction; rather, God rewards them." This is a "new economy," in which behavior is "rooted in the imitation of God" (Green, 1997, p. 275). Encouraging believers to behave like this now might appear to fly in the face of common sense, but we have here academic biblical exegetes (none of whom could be classed as fundamentalists) drawing such conclusions from the Golden Rule.

Such seemingly impractical advice requires elaboration. Both Matthew's and Luke's expression of the Golden Rule come in the context of verses in which Jesus seems to promise material sufficiency to those who obey His commands. Thus Lk. 6:38 (=Matt. 7:2) has Jesus exhorting His followers to "give, and it will be given to you…For the measure you give will be the measure you get back." The first part of this text to Nolland (1989, pp. 301, 303) means that "one is not only to forgo the right to recompense but beyond that to extend open-handed generosity to the other person…one's action to the other should be determined not at all by the actual behavior of the other, but only by what one would recognize as the good if one were on the receiving end." Again, seeking to gain a competitive upper hand at the expense of one's adversary seems to be prohibited in so far as a Christian business person presumably would not want to be treated in such a manner. The second part of Lk. 6:38 concerning what one gets back by the right behavior means for Nolland (1989, p. 301) that "he who extends such generosity may do so in confident expectation that he will be the beneficiary of God's superabundant generosity…." In the verses adjacent to Matthew's and Luke's Golden Rule, this "superabundant generosity" appears to involve material sufficiency more than prosperity, and it is not all in the form of material provision anyway, thereby undermining a theological prosperity doctrine. Rather Lk. 6:38 "expresses God's promise to reward the disciple's gracious actions toward others…which does not so much involve the eschatological judgment of one's salvation before God as it involves God's evaluation of the character of one's life and the pleasure he expresses at the way one has lived. In fact, some of the divine response may spill over into how God treats one in this life…." Nevertheless, "such generosity need not be equated with prosperity…it is God's forgiveness and absence of condemnation that are in view" (Bock 1994, p. 608).

A solution to the matter related to business might appear to remain ambiguous since Nolland and Bock above stress different consequences.

According to Bock, a Christian practicing the Golden Rule should not necessarily expect that she *will* receive material recompense from God, only that she *may*, whereas Nolland is more confident that she *will*. The question persists, therefore, whether Jesus' teachings above provide practical guidelines for Christian business people today because, from a secular perspective, they seem to be a recipe for business insolvency, bankruptcy and ruination. A further key to an answer might be found in Lk. 12:31 (=Matt. 6:33), "…seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well," in which "these things" can be understood from adjacent verses as material sufficiency. Again this is a conclusion by Jesus emphasising that God will look after His followers' material provision while advising them not to become obsessed with it. Bock's interpretation of Lk. 12:31 is more in line with Nolland's above: "God's commitment to disciples is to offer care, to provide fundamental things such as food and shelter. The reference to 'the things added' alludes to life's basics, not vast material gain…God promises to provide basic needs for his disciples" (Bock 1996, pp. 1164–5). For Matt. 6:33, the interpretation by Keener (1999, p. 237) is that when God's people "care for others in need among them that God supplies the needs of his people as a whole…." "God's people" and the "others in need among them," however, are not just Christians. Again, these are practices required for today in everyday dealings. For Matt. 6:33, we must "pray and press daily for the coming of God's sovereign rule not in some other, distant time or space but here and now in the midst or our communities" (Smith 1989, p. 119). Thus, "the world's ethics are to be surpassed…But one will accept the demand only if one believes that God will see, that he will reward the faithful, and that he will be just in his final evaluation. Without such a theological view of reality, the ethics of Jesus wilt into futility and foolishness as the follower is exposed with no hope of justice" (Bock 1994, p. 595). Evidently, Christians have to take the risk of how much of the reward in this life will be material versus non-material, and how much of the reward will be in the next life.

If these are the principles of behavior that Jesus calls His followers to adopt in business and elsewhere, "why does Jesus expect the impossible of us?" asks Hare (1993, p. 58). Yet, for this exegete, Christians are called to act in this way because only this response accords with "the *nature* of God"(1993 p. 59; original emphasis). If Christians are to be Jesus' servants in initiating the New Kingdom, they have no choice but to act in the required manner. In so doing, they can glimpse with Jesus "a totally other world, one of disproportionate generosity, odd and unbalanced giving, lopsided, careless and irrepressible sharing," for "Jesus points…to a new world and its righteousness" (Smith 1989, pp. 102, 103). Needless to say, "some totally reject the teaching as unworkable," comments Bock (1994, pp. 594, 595) referring to Lk. 6:30b. But they are "hyperbolic commands" that Christians have to interpret in the contexts in which they find themselves. Compromise may be required in given situations.

It is via compromise and trade-offs that the Christian business person (and any Christian) grapples to apply Jesus' commands. The matter becomes one of identifying and interpreting Jesus' commands, and assessing how they might be applied in the specific situations in which Christians find themselves. For instance, suppose a Christian business owner can take action to produce a better product that will bring benefits to her employees and customers, but that potentially harms another firm and its employees. The Christian business person would not expect that a determinate answer to this issue could be ascertained just by applying financial calculation expectations (unlike the approach her secular peers might adopt). Cognizant of Jesus' commands and the principles contained in them (as she interprets these), the Christian would need to ask for God's guidance as part of her continuing prayer life, to pray specifically about the matter, as well as apply her intellect to it. She would anticipate that God would show her the appropriate solution. This might sound like a "cop-out" in so far as the principles discussed above might not provide clear-cut categorical solutions to specific problems. But given the imperfect spiritual links fallen humans have with God, Christians included, there may be no other approach. All Christians will not necessarily arrive at the same solution to a given problem even utilizing this route.

Thus, variability would be expected in the responses Christian business people make to the competitive situation confronting them in any given context. For instance, some Christian business people might not mind too much losing a market share to a company that offered better value to customers. But they might mind much more losing to a business that did not offer customers a better deal if, say, the competitor achieved this by extensive advertising. Responses by Christian business people might differ also between the type of competition characterising different market structures. A Christian working in a monopolistically competitive industry, as employer or employee, is likely to be faced with more difficult ethical decisions affecting competitive behavior than one working in a perfectly competitive industry (such as the corn farmer above). Her responses would also depend on whether she was employer or employee. If employer, she would have to decide on how much of her advertising portrayed her product as containing "real" differences as distinct from those that might be contrived. As economics texts point out, "product differentiation can be real or imagined" in the market structure of monopolistic competition (e.g., Layton *et al*. 2002, p. 235). Advertising is just one example of "non-price" competition that can extend to packaging, product quality, and even to hours of service provided. Monopolistic competition, characterised by many small sellers with relative ease of entry and exit, is probably the most common form of firm market structure, and Christians working in such industries are likely to be faced with unenviable ethical choices. For instance, they may have to trade-off hours worked against the Christian desire to maintain minimum qualities of family life. These sorts of decisions have competitive implications affecting the economic viability of the Christian's firm (as well as her personal and social viability). Analogous but different choices relating to competitive behavior would affect those working in oligopolistic market structures (where a few big firms control the market).

Despite all these problems of dealing with competition and other ethical decisions in business, Jesus is still calling His followers to take enormous risks by the standards usually followed in business. Competitive capitalism practiced as a secular system involves severe risk taking. But Jesus seems to be requiring His followers in any socio-economic environment to take more drastic and acute risks. These risks are qualitatively different from those commonly prevailing in the business world, are unamenable to human calculation, and seem to defy it. Christian business people, therefore, are likely to experience severe tensions as they contemplate the counterintuitive choices called for. As Novak (1982, p. 342) observes, "Christian teaching runs in so many ways counter to worldly success that its appearance…is almost certain to generate moral anxiety." Clearly, a leap of faith is required by Christians taking the risks that Jesus' commands demand, for no empirical data exists to observe what does actually flow from following His admonitions. One could imagine the type of data that might test the hypothesis that God does look after the material needs of those who behave in the ways Jesus requires, but this data does not exist.

Conclusions that might flow from this section overall are as follows. From the selection of texts examined above, Jesus' commands can be encapsulated positively as "behave toward others as you would want them to behave to you." Where competitive practices in the business world would involve Christians in conscious retaliation, reprisal, tit-for-tat, blow-for-blow, measure-for-measure, payback, giving as good as they get, seeking to become even and quits with, counterstroke, retribution and *quid pro quo*-type behavior, Jesus calls Christians to eschew it. Assuming that

Christians themselves would not want to be treated in ways that would harm them, they should not seek to engage in practices that might be to the detriment of others. This intention applies even though the forbidden actions might be directed at non-Christians or practiced in a predominantly non-Christian business environment. At minimum, Christian business people (owners and workers) are required to act in ways that avoid the censured qualities, as far as they can discern them in their intentional behavior, and in the effects their business decisions might have on other people. This discernment requires the dual and mutually-supporting use of reason and prayer. The perception and application of Jesus' principles, however, does not save Christians from decision making in which elements of the proscribed behavior may be unavoidable. Christians live in a fallen world and have to adjust their behavior to it as best God shows them how. Nevertheless, part of the Christian mission is also to endeavor to change the *status quo*. How much of existing business behavior does intentionally involve the forbidden qualities is unknown. Yet, it is difficult to conceive of practices both within and between firms that currently do not embody at least some of the behavioral traits Jesus condemns. If the undesirable qualities *do* encompass a spectrum of behaviors that *are* practiced in the existing business environment, Jesus' exhortations encourage Christians both to change their behavior, and to seek forms of business organization and operation designed to reduce the undesirable tendencies.

On the latter score, the challenge for Christian business people is to conceive of appropriate firm structures that can maintain the freedom for Christian entrepreneurs to put good ideas and innovation into operation, where "good ideas" mean those compatible with Christian beliefs. The issue under scrutiny here is whether it is possible to achieve increased efficiency and grapple with scarcity with fewer of the proscribed traits of competition being practiced within firms and between them. An instance of a Christian business seeking to compensate for the effects of competitive pressures *within* the firm is reported by U.S. Reell Precision Manufacturing Company. Reell's mission statement declares that it is "dedicated to the purpose of operating a business based on the practical application of Judeo-Christian values for the mutual benefit of: *co-workers and their families, customers, shareholders, suppliers,* and *community*" (Alford and Naughton 2001, p. 35; original emphasis). When in 1995–96 one of Reell's largest customers (Apple Computer) severely cut back orders, Reell did not respond by competitive lay-offs discriminating between employees. Other responses got the firm through the slump, preserving employee security and workplace solidarity (Alford and Naughton 2001, pp. 147–148).

The example here is not that the reduction in Reell's orders was a consequence of competition between firms (although this is unknown), but that competitive criteria were not applied to employees within Reell to determine job termination.

Not only might firm responses such as Reell's allow Jesus' commands concerning personal behavior to be followed more closely, but they rest on an additional assumption: that cooperative behavior (within the firm in this case) rather than competitive behavior optimizes efficiency as well as equity, and can deal with the problem of scarcity. Presenting evidence and the rationale for this counterintuitive assumption is not the aim of this paper though these have been documented for a wide range of applications in works such as Kohn (1992) and Johnson and Johnson (1989). Nor is this paper's purpose to compare the economic performance of co-operative arrangements in firms with traditional firm structures and interrelations (on which see, for example, Ben-Ner *et al*. 1996).

Firm structures that might encourage cooperation even at a secular level within a firm include partnerships and producer cooperatives (Roels 1995). Rarely-described instances of such currently functioning specifically Christian-based firms illustrate the contention. An example is the U. K. Daily Bread Co-operative, operating since 1976, seeking to function according to explicitly Christian principles, including prayer and worship during work time to assist in production decisions (Sawtell 2001). Since such Christian-based operating examples of firm structures that have sought to reduce competition within them are uncommon, it is difficult to draw conclusions on how they survive and relate to the existing competitive economy in which they function, that is, on how they fare as between firms. Much less is it possible to conclude how a private-property based economy made up largely of such organized firms might fare. Tentative inferences can only be made from more common secular instances of similar phenomena.

The most successful interrelated cooperative conglomerate of firms in the world today operates under the umbrella of the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in the Basque region of Spain. Here, over a hundred cooperating producer cooperatives in manufacturing, tertiary education, retailing and banking, employing over thirty four thousand cooperators, was started in an explicitly Christian context in 1956, although by now has lost that connection, to its operational detriment (Cheney 1999). Nevertheless, its innovative success in high technology-based industries, such as robotics and fuel cell development, suggests that cooperative forms of business organization and the ways they relate to each other are not barriers to sound economic performance. Likewise, neither cooperative supra-firm alliances nor inter-firm partnerships between conventional independent joint stock firms (O'Boyle 1998, pp. 181–201) seem to pose barriers to sound performance. Cooperation and a lack of competitiveness within and between firms need not equate to a lack of innovation, status quo stagnation, or inability to deal with scarcity. Griffiths' conclusion (1984, p. 73), therefore, might become debatable among Christians, that "in a world of scarcity" competitive markets "are superior to other practical forms of economic organization in terms of allocating resources." Perhaps cooperative but privately-based markets, especially those seeking to operate within Christian guidelines, might also be able to deal with scarcity. That they have not been adopted on any scale does not necessarily demonstrate their inapplicability.

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper regarding Jesus' teachings on competition and their modern application can be summarized below, via inferences ranging from the general to the particular. A general inference is that Jesus calls individual Christians to conduct all aspects of their lives, commercial business included, in accordance with the ethical stances and principles He teaches. As Bock (1994, p. 591) observes, Jesus' sayings—His commands—have long been taken to illustrate general principles He taught. One of these principles is obedience to the intentions and purposes of God, as interpreted by Jesus. Many biblical texts, other than those cited above, indicate a comparable message—that loving Jesus means following His commands (such as Jn. 14:21, 23). Jesus explains that if we love him, we will keep His word. We follow His commands because we love Jesus. A second general inference is that Jesus' teachings are meant to govern the behavior of individual Christians today in their dealings with the world. Jesus' precepts are not confined to behavior between Christians or to governing the way Christian groups, as distinct from individuals, should respond to the world. Nor do Jesus' sayings just have eschatological implication. The teachings call for action now in the fallen world, and are not restricted to feelings of love or goodwill.

A third more particular inference that might be derived from the selection of Jesus' teachings analyzed here is that none of them seems to tolerate or encourage competition. No further sayings of Jesus were isolated that might lead to a contrary inference. Texts by New Testament writers other than Jesus, not analyzed here, could be interpreted as supporting this trajectory. For instance, Gal. 5:19–6:5 has Paul putting the focus on testing one's own actions, rather than comparing them with others as competitive tendencies might imply. Whatever the behavior people engage in, Jesus calls people to assess the cost of so doing (Lk. 14:28). A final inference is that Jesus' requirements might not seem to make sense in the business world or to fit comfortably into a competitive environment. One verdict might be that they are not meant to apply to the fallen and sinful context of existing business behavior. An alternative judgment has been proposed here, that Jesus' teachings *are* meant to apply, but that Christian business people should endeavor to adopt different standards from conventional norms for their business behavior. Some examples of how they might be applied have been discussed in the body of the paper. As well, a sample of problems the exercise might pose for Christians business people in the specific business contexts in which they might find themselves has been raised throughout the text.

How realistic and practical are Jesus' teachings with implications for competition for the fallen world? The objection is sometimes raised against Jesus' ethical demands that they are impossible to follow because they contradict human nature. Competition, which might intrinsically contain the behavioral qualities that Jesus rejects, is seen to be an inevitable part of human nature and reality. Even God and the devil are engaged in competitive spiritual warfare for human beings. What is *described* in the Bible is not equal to what is *advocated* by the triune God, however. People might experience life as a contest between God and evil, but they have free will to make choices. Undoubtedly, Jesus saw that undesirable traits characterize much existing human behavior, competitive and otherwise. What Jesus does not accept is that such behavior precludes alternative action, that it is inevitable, unavoidable, and unable to be altered. People *can* behave differently if they seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit living within them. A secular atheistic or naturalistic interpretation, instead, might see human nature only as something biologically derived and/or guided by chance influences of natural selection, in which competitive tendencies might play a major role. This interpretation cannot envisage or accept that the life of Jesus dwelling within the believer can enable her to behave differently from how her genetic make-up might predispose her, say, as "naturalistically" inclined toward competitive traits. That competition is so widespread does not mean that it is inescapable or desirable. Competition's popularity might merely indicate the world being in the power of the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19), a reflection that "what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Lk. 16:14).

Jesus' sayings that bear on competitive behavioral traits lead to an overall conclusion. To meet Jesus' demands, the most practical means of running one's life, of maintaining the closest possible relations with the triune God, of optimising good relations with other people, including operating businesses, is on a basis that does good to other people for which the guidance of God is a prerequisite. If a Christian business person does not want other firms to capture a share of her market, she should not seek to do the same thing to them. Jesus' required behavior speaks more of mutual reciprocity, more of cooperation than competition, of reconciliation than conflict. At the least, where Christians practice competition in any area of life (unavoidably or by choice) they should try to ensure that it does not hurt others, that it does not have outcomes likely to injure them or to leave them with long-term disadvantages.

Were Jesus' teachings to be followed in business overall, however, the question arises whether the advantages of competition might not be achieved. After all, Christians as well as non-Christians advocate the good of competition because of its efficiency, scarcity-coping, and freedom of choice effects. This paper has argued that sufficient precedents exist in business organization today to suggest that even in a secular context, cooperation rather than competition might be able to achieve comparable benefits. Comparisons between competitive and cooperative types of business organization do not normally appear in economics texts, however, where the typical contrast is between more and less competition within prevailing systems of business structure. Jesus' admonitions would lead to businesses operating, being structured, and relating to other firms differently than happens today. This is the relevant comparison to be made with existing modes of business operation. This risk confronting Christian business people is put by Bakke (1995, p. 717), CEO of AES, to take "biblical values into business because they are right, not because they work, and to let the economic consequences fall where they might."

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