THE NEW MINISTERS

(A Message To The Business & Professional Community)

Business people and ministers may have more in common than pained expressions. In fact, I believe that you, today's Christian business leaders, can be some of the most influential ministers! So, hats off to the "new ministers"!

Track it with me. Up through medieval times the church stood watch over western morals and ethics through the "church." When the church lost clout during the Renaissance, universities replaced the church as "keepers of the flame" and professors served as "ministers." Eventually the torch was handed to the public schools, where teachers played "ministers." But, today, public school teachers are forbidden to teach Judeo-Christian morals and ethics. Now that church, university and public schools have either lost clout or gone AWOL, who will shape tomorrow's values?

Enter the "new ministers"!

Today, the marketplace holds enormous clout and it is business leaders who now broadly influence our values. So, authentically Christian business leaders are strategically positioned to perpetuate our ethical, moral and spiritual heritage. You may not wear the title comfortably, but you are the "new ministers."

Of course, every Believer is a "minister," priests ministering to the world (I Peter 2:9-17), but business and professional people can minister in special ways.

First, you are the "new ministers" to young persons entering the business world. Every year, thousands flock from the campus to the city, following the Pied Piper who smiles at them from the "Wall Street Journal". They desperately need to be mentored by business people who are authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. Young

people who come because they admire your excellence may stay to emulate your values — possibly, even your faith. Without your Christian presence, long-range consequences could be disastrous.

Second, you are the "new ministers" to the business community itself. The free enterprise system began on two basic assumptions: 1) common moral and ethical standards and 2) common concern for the community. However, in today's competitive environment, these values often get shoved aside by whatever promises profit at the bottom line. Concern for community easily capitulates to "every man for himself."

Years back, when Eli Black (a rabbi who was also chairman of United Brands) committed suicide, "The Wall Street Journal" observed, "He believed he could straddle the two worlds — business and sensitive social conscience. In the end the pressure from the two worlds split him apart." "The Journal" went on to ask, "Can a sensitive person with high moral standards survive in an uncompromising financial world?"

Behind this question loom two larger ones: first, can the free enterprise system itself survive the absence of high moral standards? And, more importantly, will America "lose its soul"? Such questions have led some major corporations to re-tool their leadership styles and corporate values. "New ministers" belong in this picture. Who is more credibly and strategically positioned to preserve the values and redeem the culture?

Third, "new ministers" play a major role of witness in the marketplace. You have access to the ears and hearts of people whom church clergy will never know. They will listen, too, if you respect people, stay clean and shoot straight.

I am impressed by the tough questions being raised by some Christian business people:

- Did God make me affluent, visible and powerful?
- If he made me affluent, visible, and powerful, why?
- How do I witness in the marketplace without taking advantage of my position?
- How will I do so without appearing partial to believing employees?

- How will I do so without being typecast with phonies who tout religion for business advantage?

You courageously navigate waters beyond the depth of most churched ministers. We are deeply grateful that God has placed you, the "new minister," where you are.

Fourth, you are "new ministers" to the church itself. High-profile business leaders must step gingerly through delicate complexities into a relationship with the local church. The mice and the elephants make each other nervous. Some mice expect elephants to trample them. Some elephants remain peripheral to the church lest they frighten the mice. And some business people, accustomed to the brisk, efficient pace of the marketplace, grow frustrated with the muddled plodding of volunteer organizations. Being formally a part of that business world for 31 years, believe me, I know the feeling.

At times it may seem easier to follow the church at a detached distance or to zip past the cumbersome thing toward more vigorous para-church enterprises. In either case, both business people and the church lose.

I often hear Christian business leaders confess enormous need for the church. Facing the chill wind of the secular marketplace alone, without the support and accountability of the church, overwhelms even the strongest.

You know you need the church. But some of you ask, "Does the church need me? Am I of any value to the church, given the mouse and elephant phenomenon? Beyond dropping my generous check in the plate, does the church really expect anything significant from me?"

I reply with a thundering, "Yes!" You are profoundly important to the church. Not merely to pay the bills, not only to prop up the sagging self-esteem, but as primary colleagues in ministry. You enrich our understanding of the faith. "Business ministers" help keep "Church ministers" in touch with the marketplace. You call us to accountability and excellence. Personally, I cannot imagine functioning as a balanced Christian without a circle of spiritual confidants from the marketplace. Today, as we face a vacuum of character and the vertigo of change, we look to you. This is your hour. Thank God for "new ministers."