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The Business of A Christmas Carol

The 1951 movie, "A Christmas Carol" remains an endearing favorite to many – best for acting, props, music score and content. Past its wonderful Christmas message, Charles Dickens' early Victorian economic insights and social commentary of 1843 closely aligns with our diminished U.S. world position and eroding U.S. cultures – social, corporate and political.

My brothers and I, all with careers in business, often quote "A Christmas Carol." My favorite is from the Ghost of Christmas Present: "We spirits of Christmas do not live one day of the year. We live the whole 365. So it is true of the child born in Bethlehem. He doesn't live in man's hearts only 1 day of the year, but in all the days of the year."

When Scrooge's first employer, Fezziwig, is approached by the 1818 M&A (Mergers & Acquisitions) teams of investment bankers, he is first told "We're men of vision and progress." When he waivers on selling, he is then told "We small traders (businessmen) are old history – dodos." Fezziwig wasn't biting. "The offer is large," Fezziwig acknowledges, "but it's not for money alone that one builds a family business . . . it's to preserve a way of life that we knew and loved.

Jorkinson finally wins out and after some quick years of fraud and embezzlement he announces to his Board of Directors – "Come, come Mr. Snedwick – we're all cut throats under this fancy linen (GQ) and to pack me off to Botany Bay (prison) would be poor compensation for the panic that would arise among the shareholders. Their annual meeting would resemble an orchestra of scorched cats (Enron). Scrooge and Marley immediately recommend a cover-up (Arthur Anderson accountant-consultants) and in an eventual business "takeover" they become the company holding 51% of the stock.

Love of money rules young Scrooge's heart as his fiancée Alice releases him from their engagement. "Another idol has replaced me in your heart – a golden idol." She goes on, "If you were free today, would you seek me out and try to win me over – a dowerless girl with neither wealth nor social standing – you who weigh everything by Gain?"

The first words Marley spoke to Scrooge, "The world is on the verge of new and great changes." Scrooge replies, "The world is becoming a hard and cruel place. One must steel oneself to survive it and not be crushed with the weak and affirmed." Marley agreed. Do you? Will National Health Care be part of 2010 politics as baby boomers pass 60 years?

Marley's ghost cries, "In life my spirit never roamed beyond the limits of our money changing hole." Scrooge recounts that Marley was always a good man of business. His response, probably Dickens' most famous and profound statement on business and humanity – "Business, Mankind was my business! Their common welfare was my business!"

Many hoped the 9/11 catastrophes that shook our world would awaken us – like Scrooge – from a myopic dream of greed and wealth placed above all else and at any cost. Alas, as those before us daily bowed to a golden calf in the desert, we continue to daily check stock portfolios to measure our happiness and comfort.

Following Scrooge's own awakening, he attends Christmas dinner to tell the wife of his nephew, whom he's ignored, "Can you forgive a pigheaded old fool, for having no eyes to see you with, no ears to hear you with, all these years?" Later he leaves us with the words, "I haven't lost my senses, Bob (Cratchit), I've come to them."

It is good to be a child sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself.

Merry Christmas – God Bless Us, Every One!

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