

Pretzels with a Purpose:  
The Role of Christianity in the Auntie Anne's Brand

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Auntie Anne's began in 1988 as a single stand selling pretzels at a farmers' market in Downingtown, Pennsylvania. In its early years Anne Beiler, the company's founder, instilled in the workplace her sense of Christian evangelism and ethical consumerism. She considered her employees and franchisees friends and, in ways, her extended family, united in building a business founded on Christian principles and dedicated to good works. Her cousin Sam Beiler, the company's second owner, introduced several new directions for the company, but largely followed the founding vision. But in 2010, Sam sold Auntie Anne's to FOCUS Brands, a large corporation that owns a number of large restaurant chains. The company represented some of the tensions and contradictions between faith and business. The corporation has maintained its success through the perception that the Auntie Anne's brand has a higher purpose beyond profit. But the company has fallen short in carrying out a Christian mission, particularly under the new management.

### **The Ethical Company**

Many scholars have examined the concept of Christian consumerism. Sociologist Max Weber was one of the first to investigate this idea through his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Combining economic and religious studies he described how the Protestant Reformation helped make way for modern capitalism to emerge. Focusing on Western Europe and the United States, Weber connected the idea of credit and delayed gratification in economic pursuits to justification by faith or pardoning of sins through belief in Jesus' sacrifice. In *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, Bethany Moreton described how the faith and work movement came into clearer focus among white-collar managerial classes during the 1970s when corporations like Wal-Mart, for example, were expanding. She argued:

The new Republican coalition compromised a pair of strange bedfellows: laissez-faire champions of the free market unevenly yoked to a broad base of evangelical activists. . . . The foot soldiers of this long, patient political counterrevolution were Christian family women, galvanized to public action by issues like school prayer, gay liberation, and *Roe V. Wade*.<sup>1</sup>

The Auntie Anne's company and Anne Beiler fit into the cultural shift of this period through a melding of conservative ideology and Christian based convictions within business.

Recently Jeff Duzer, professor of business law and ethics at Seattle Pacific University, defended the compatibility between Christianity and business on a personal, corporate, and global level. His article explaining why business matters to God circulated widely through various Christian journals and he expanded the text into a book published in 2010. More and more books have provided guidelines for how to thoroughly integrate faith into work life. But few have critiqued faith-based businesses or examined the possible contradictions between Christianity and capitalism. Even Stacy Perman and Michael Briznek, authors who examined Christian-based chains In-N-Out Burger and Chik-fil-a, took a surface level approach, explaining how these Christian-based businesses enabled a flourishing of the human condition. Chik-fil-a founder Truett S. Cathy has been one of the most important practitioners and advocates for Christian consumerism. He has written more than five books about motivating workers and building profits while maintaining Christian principles.

Only scholar and professor Calvin Redekop has acknowledged the tension between Christian ethics and capitalist consumer culture. As founder of the Church, Industry and Business Association (CIBA) in 1969, he has worked to bring the worlds of business and church closer together. He hoped the group would find a way to reconcile the frequently opposing ideas

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<sup>1</sup> Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 4.

in faith and business. The organization quickly merged with the Mennonite Business Associates (MBA) to become a parachurch organization. The group's current form, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), encourages dialogue about the connections between and ways to integrate faith, academics, and business.<sup>2</sup> Redekop's opinions make him an outlier in the larger debate, rather lack of debate, about the merging of Christianity and capitalism. But his work and a critical examination of the Auntie Anne's company challenge prior notions of a seamless and logical integration of faith and business endorsing instead a more liberal social-justice model in practice.

No one has yet written any books about Auntie Anne's except its founder, Anne Beiler. Auntie Anne's is a unique case study because not only is Beiler a Christian evangelical but she was born Amish. Interviews conducted in 2013 synthesize the perspectives of associates Anne Beiler, Sam Beiler, and Tracey Grinestaff to explore the role of business as a higher calling.

An Auntie Anne's pretzel is more than flour, yeast, and salt. This pretzel is an American cultural product that is literally consumed and worthy of interdisciplinary study. Throughout history bread products have been laden with religious associations. According to many scholars, "Food has long ceased to be merely about sustenance and nutrition. It is packed with social, cultural, and symbolic meanings."<sup>3</sup> Bread is important to Christians as the figurative body of Jesus. Muslims eat bread at the celebration following the month-long fast of Ramadan. Jews have challah for Shabbat and matzo for Passover. In this way, Auntie Anne's utilizes the pre-existing connotations of bread to create spiritual significance in its pretzel product.

The history of the pretzel has been somewhat mysterious, but Auntie Anne's attributes its invention to an Italian monk around 610 A.D. The company history describes how "these

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin Redekop, "Alphabet soup and the 'new' MEDA," *The Market Place*, November/December 2003, 73-79.

<sup>3</sup> David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 3.

‘pretiolas,’ Latin for ‘little rewards,’ were rolled and twisted dough resembling his student’s folded arms across their chests while praying.”<sup>4</sup> Beiler perpetuates the spiritual significance of the pretzel by explaining that the three holes signify Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Additionally, in a WITF interview, she connected salting pretzels to the mention of salt of the earth in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>5</sup> A common interpretation of this phrase calls on Jesus’ followers to preserve the goodness in the world. Both understandings attach a sense of sacredness to this common Pennsylvania snack food which actually originated overseas. Most likely, Southern German and Swiss immigrants brought the pretzel to the United States. Coincidentally, the Central European immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania were primarily part of the Mennonite and Amish movement.

Beiler grew up with Old Order Amish parents in Gap, Pennsylvania. Eventually the family became less conservative and joined the Amish-Mennonite Church. She described her family as black car Amish. This phrase means she had some modern conveniences such as electricity, mainstream clothing, English church services, and a plain car. But her family wanted to remain in an isolated and close-knit society. According to Beiler, her parents took their children “to church every Sunday and taught us obedience to God and the fear of God.”<sup>6</sup> God was particularly important at the kitchen table. In her first book, *Auntie Anne: My Story*, Beiler recalled sitting around a long table laden with foods of the season as her family sat side by side. They recited the following prayer, “God is great and God is good and we thank Him for our food. By his hands we are all fed; give us Lord our daily bread. Amen.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Auntie Anne’s Inc., “About Us-Company History,” *Auntie Anne’s*, 2012

<http://www.auntieannes.com/AboutUs/CompanyHistory.aspx> (November 2012).

<sup>5</sup> “Auntie’ Anne Beiler-witf’s Beyond the Bio,” 29 May 2012, video clip, accessed November 2012, Youtube [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=c89J9Y2ZLqM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=c89J9Y2ZLqM).

<sup>6</sup> “God Has a Plan,” *Assemblies of God USA*, December 2001

[http://www.pe.ag.org/conversations2001/4570\\_pretzels.cfm](http://www.pe.ag.org/conversations2001/4570_pretzels.cfm).

<sup>7</sup> Anne Beiler, *Auntie Anne: My Story* (Gap, PA: Auntie Anne’s Inc. Publications, 2002).

Beiler also remembered how her parents would invite other families over for Sunday suppers and the group, often twenty or more people would spend time together after the meal resting and reflecting. According to an interview by the General Council of the Assemblies of God, “When she was 12 years old she baked her own cakes and pies for a Philadelphia market stand . . . By the age of 14 she had her first job as a waitress in a truck stop, where she developed her philosophy that kindness and a smile would open the door to anyone’s heart.”<sup>8</sup> At this job Beiler learned that one must put people before profits, yet they were connected: because of her smile and personality she often received more tips in her apron pocket. At the age of nineteen Beiler married her husband Jonas, who was also Amish-Mennonite. But the couple left the Amish-Mennonite Church and joined an evangelical Christian church where they served as youth pastors. Even so, in a recent presentation at York College, Beiler said you can take the girl out of the Amish but it is “hard to take the Amish out of the girl.”<sup>9</sup>

Anne Beiler “began twisting pretzels in 1987 to support her husband’s vision to open a free counseling service in their community.”<sup>10</sup> The couple had experienced the worst of tragedies when their nineteen-month-old daughter Angela was killed in a farming accident. The couple slowly emerged from the darkness in their lives after seeking help and finding hope in the counsel of others. They both realized how much the family could have benefited from therapy and guidance earlier. Jonas Beiler felt a calling to channel his compassion into free counseling for others. So Anne went to work to help fund what would eventually become The Family Center of Gap. As she explained in her speech at the 2008 Republican National Convention,

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<sup>8</sup> Sherry Robinson and John Finley, “Auntie Anne’s Pretzels: A Knotty Problem,” *Proceedings of the International Academy of Case Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 36.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Beiler, “Twist of Fate,” The Henry D. Schmidt Lecture Series in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Women’s Business Center Organization, York College, PA, 9 April 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Beiler, “Twist of Fate,” 9 April 2013.

“Out of my pain my purpose was born.”<sup>11</sup> Currently, The Family Center serves four to five thousand people a month, including approximately one-hundred and twenty-five children.

The structure of the Auntie Anne’s company had a basis in Beiler’s religious convictions to maintain community, be a steward of God, and emulate the life of Christ. The company first used only family members as employees when her stand opened in 1988. Later, Beiler hired young Amish girls to work at different market locations. In this way, she capitalized on her background as a key component of the company’s business strategy. As John Hostetler has explained in his ethnographic studies, the stereotypical image of the Amish has been of Bible-centeredness, simplicity, and discipleship.<sup>12</sup> Employing the Amish at market stalls perpetuated the image of Beiler’s benevolent Amish-Mennonite roots. Once Beiler began to franchise, she selected sisters, brothers-in-law, and cousins as the managers for her local stores. For example, “Beiler had tried to keep everything in the family: Her husband and brother-in-law were building all the new shops themselves; her sister was making all the pretzel mix by hand; a brother made all the deliveries.”<sup>13</sup> In her autobiography Beiler lauded the blind faith of her father-in-law, who loaned her \$6,000 to purchase her first market stand in Downingtown, PA sight unseen.<sup>14</sup> Pretzels were fifty-five cents or three for \$1.50.<sup>15</sup> Eventually she franchised to an Amish entrepreneur, Ben Lapp, in Intercourse, Pennsylvania. Journalist John Mehegan described how “Amish participation in Auntie Anne’s concept adds a dash of authenticity to an eight-year-old company that likes to highlight its Pennsylvania Dutch roots.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anne Beiler, “Country First: Prosperity of Spirit,” *Republican National Convention* (speech Saint Paul, MN, 3 September 2008).

<sup>12</sup> John Hostetler, *Mennonite Life* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1959), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Ballon and Meeks Flemming, “Pretzel Queen,” *Forbes* 155, no. 6 (1995).

<sup>14</sup> Beiler, *Twist of Faith*, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Beiler, “Twist of Fate,” 9 April 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Sean Mehegan, “The Modest Merchants,” *Restaurant Business* 95, no. 6 (1996).

To Beiler, the pretzel recipe and success were part of God's plan for her family. The business was a calling she felt the need to obey. In particular she wanted to be "salt and light" for all of her employees, business contacts, and the world.<sup>17</sup> These metaphors from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount related to preserving goodness and positively influencing others. In particular, Beiler hoped to "walk the talk" and help any employees who were struggling. In many interviews, she used similarly spiritually charged terms to describe how Auntie Anne's was a modern day business miracle. Beiler ascribed to the prosperity gospel, a belief that God allowed a person to overcome barriers to upward mobility, which intersected with theological conservatism. In prosperity theology, faith has been an activator leading to the triumph of optimism in which "American Christians came to see money, health, and good fortune as divine."<sup>18</sup> Beiler trusted that God would make her thrive and help her fulfill a duty to give to other people in need, saying,

The spiritual aspect of it was so powerful. I didn't have high school or college degrees, so I had to rely on the Word of God. I dug into the Book of Proverbs and we based and built our business on its principles. God encouraged me along the way. I remember in June 1990, I was sitting in a church service on missions Sunday, and I saw myself rolling pretzels and Jesus standing there. It wasn't a vision; it was just a clear impression from the Lord. Jesus spoke to my heart and said, 'I want you to use Auntie Anne's as a vehicle for missions.' There was a big smile on His face and I understood clearly for the first time God's purpose for Auntie Anne's.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Anne Beiler, Interview by Leslie Lindeman, Written notes, York, PA, 9 April 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>19</sup> "God Has a Plan," *Assemblies of God USA*, December 2001  
[http://www.pe.ag.org/conversations2001/4570\\_pretzels.cfm](http://www.pe.ag.org/conversations2001/4570_pretzels.cfm).

Beiler explained that she had left the Amish-Mennonite church not to reject her parents or her faith but because she “sought greater spiritual freedom.”<sup>20</sup> This spiritual freedom refers to the Christian post-denominational yet culturally Anabaptist identity she crafted into her own ideology. Acknowledging that there are multiple versions of Christianity within the New Right conservative ideology, Beiler could pick and choose which elements to preach and which to practice. In this way she could ignore the rise of the evangelical Christian doctrine of creation care, for example, which includes efforts to reduce global warming through sustainable initiatives. By not affiliating with one particular church or a mainstream denomination she could espouse rhetoric but not be held accountable by a faith community for choosing to do something to the contrary. For example, she claimed that a richness of spirit was all that mattered to her but she is known for pulling up to speaking engagements in her new \$36,000 Cadillac El Dorado of which she might get another in a couple of years.<sup>21</sup> In this way, her spiritual freedom allowed her to enter the world of consumerist materialism which had been barred during her Amish-Mennonite life.

Within one year, Anne Beiler moved from her first stand at the Downingtown Farmer’s Market to Harrisburg, Middletown, Morgantown, and finally Park City Mall in Lancaster. Auntie Anne’s never advertised the availability of franchises; instead popularity spread by word of mouth and encounters with the chain. The first international Auntie Anne’s location opened in July of 1995 in Jakarta, Indonesia followed by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore the following year.<sup>22</sup> The overseas franchisees initiated contact with Beiler. But upon reflection, Belier felt that it was a natural connection. In her autobiography, Beiler explained how “an Indonesian missionary to the U.S. had led me to a more spirit-filled life way back in 1974. And

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<sup>20</sup> Beiler, *Auntie Anne: My Story*.

<sup>21</sup> Marc Ballon and Meeks Flemming, “Pretzel Queen,” *Forbes* 155, no. 6 (1995).

<sup>22</sup> Wen-Szu Lin, *The China Twist* (USA: BC Publishing, 2012), 19.

now, over twenty years later, I returned to her country with pretiolas, little gifts.”<sup>23</sup> In Auntie Anne’s international expansion, Beiler felt a duty to impoverished countries. Mennonite entrepreneurs, specifically, have “accepted as an economic principle that the poor anywhere had a right to be helped by the rich.”<sup>24</sup> Christian American businesses, in particular, have started to have a greater impact on Third World countries. Beiler wondered, “How could it be faith that God blessed me with so much yet seemed to leave these people in their misery . . . In the years to come, we would begin exploring how to channel some of Auntie Anne’s resources into helping people like the ones I saw in Indonesia.”<sup>25</sup> Eventually she joined Global Disciples, which aids international Christian business leaders as they reach out to people in areas of the world where access is greatly restricted. Auntie Anne’s became a “part of a much larger set of communications and practices through which US evangelicals are becoming increasingly aware of the poverty, social injustices, and political crises.”<sup>26</sup>

The original mission statement for Auntie Anne’s advised workers to “Go LIGHT your world: Lead by example, Invest in employees, Give freely, Honor God, and Treat all business contacts with respect.”<sup>27</sup> During Beiler’s time as owner, employees had the opportunity to participate in prayer time every Monday at work. A prayer opened business meetings as well. And associates had access to free faith-based counseling.<sup>28</sup> In the corporate office there was a full-time in-house chaplain. It was important for employees to be able to “connect to their spiritual side at work.” More importantly, Beiler claimed that the largest benefit for employees was the ability to find satisfaction in their work. Particularly appealing were the personal ties

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<sup>23</sup> Beiler, *Twist of Faith*, 168.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Entrepreneurs* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 231.

<sup>25</sup> Beiler, *Twist of Faith*, 171.

<sup>26</sup> Melani McAlister, “What is Your Heart For? Affect and Internationalism in the Evangelical Public Sphere,” *American Literary History* (December 2008): 877.

<sup>27</sup> Beiler, *Twist of Faith*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Kelley Butler, “Spirituality programs offer chicken soup for the employees’ soul,” *Quality of Life* (April 2006), 40.

and the service ethos created by employees. At the Pretzel University training center Beiler explained to new franchisees how participating in the production of the pretzel product, they were contributing to a higher purpose. In this way Auntie Anne's had "corporate cheerleading for its front-line workers".<sup>29</sup> Beiler likened herself to Abraham Lincoln when she described how she practiced "management by walking around" and tried to use her position of influence to empower her employees.<sup>30</sup> She hoped to promote a culture based on giving to others rather than focusing on what others could do for the individual. Additionally, Beiler felt that "consistently solid ethics are vital in business. If you say you're going to call someone back today, then do it. If you say you can't do a deal, don't make up stories. Always tell the truth. Simply telling the truth is probably the most impacting principle of Auntie Anne's."<sup>31</sup>

There were a few parts of the business Beiler found to be difficult to align with Christian principles. Although she believes that one cannot separate faith and business, and has tried to live out the Christian faith through her career ambitions, there have been compromises that leave her feeling uncomfortable. Unlike Chik-fil-a, which closes on Sundays, for example, Auntie Anne's has not always put "principles before profits."<sup>32</sup> Beiler's first interaction franchising in a mall was with Park City in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. This mall was unwilling to negotiate a contract and allow the store to close once a week, which it denied to other outlets in the mall. When Beiler discussed this issue recently she wished she had set a precedence of closing on Sunday and had not satisfied the mall's criteria. Chik-fil-a values the Sabbath as a time when employees should go to church and be with their families. This company sacrifices profits by

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<sup>29</sup> Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Beiler, "Twist of Fate," 9 April 2013.

<sup>31</sup> "God Has a Plan," *Assemblies of God USA*, December 2001, [http://www.pe.ag.org/conversations2001/4570\\_pretzels.cfm](http://www.pe.ag.org/conversations2001/4570_pretzels.cfm).

<sup>32</sup> Michael Briznek, "S. Truett Cathy: From Young Entrepreneur to a Foodservice Industry Leader," *Journal of Hospitality & Tourist Education* 19, no. 4 (2007): 9.

closing one day a week while its competitors remain open for business. Truett S. Cathy explained, “How could I teach the thirteen-year-old boys in my Sunday school class to observe the Lord’s Day if my cash registers were jingling in my restaurants.”<sup>33</sup> The darkened store front of a Chik-fil-a on Sundays within the landscape of a mall, for example, sends a powerful message about what the company believes is important. Park City Mall in Lancaster, Colonial Park Mall in Harrisburg, and Westmoreland Mall in Greensburg, PA feature not one but two Auntie Anne’s stores.<sup>34</sup> It might be easier for citizens to notice, understand, and perhaps become inspired by the company’s religious founding if both were closed on Sundays.

Another difficult decision Beiler had to make regarded allowing the placement of an Auntie Anne’s franchise in Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey. After deliberating and hearing the concerns of her associates she eventually decided to allow the location because ultimately it would be making money for the kingdom of God. In 2011, FOCUS Brands allowed a franchise in Harrah’s Casino in St. Louis, Missouri. While the Christian Bible does not explicitly discuss gambling, many passages condemn harmful desires and greed. There is a sense of cognitive dissonance between espousing the teachings of Jesus while simultaneously gaining wealth from gamblers.

Beiler claimed that buying an Auntie Anne’s pretzel was giving back to God’s work. Through this she indicated that “it matters morally how and what we eat.”<sup>35</sup> Authors David Bell and Gill Valentine similarly depicted ethical consumerism as a sense of responsibility people feel in their purchases. Buying products that appear to aid others positively feeds the

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<sup>33</sup> Truett S. Cathy, “It’s Easier to Succeed than to Fail,” (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1989), 70.

<sup>34</sup> Auntie Anne’s Inc., “Store Locator,” *Auntie Anne’s*, 2012  
<http://web.archive.org/web/20010604192524/http://auntieannes.know-where.com/auntieannes/region/intl.html> (November 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe, ed., *Food & Philosophy: Eat, Think, and Be Merry* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 178.

conscience.<sup>36</sup> Author Bryant Simon found a comparable pattern of ethical consumption through brands such as Starbucks that laud their responsible fair trade sourcing, for example. He explained, “If we buy right, not only will the lives of others improve, but so will our lives and our self-images.”<sup>37</sup> In this way he revealed how doing good is good for business. But this should not be the main reason for doing things ethically, particularly since the right thing may not always be in the company’s own self-interest. Bryant was also critical of this business mentality, stating that if “Starbucks, that big guy, wanted the business of the people who cared about little guys, it had to convince them that it walked softly in the global order and that it made the world a better place for the people at the bottom and for its customers.”<sup>38</sup> Auntie Anne’s version of ethical Christian consumerism could have grown out of the Amish-Mennonite belief in *Gelassenheit* which is a yielded-ness to God’s will and a concern for fellow members of the community.<sup>39</sup> But Wal-Mart also participated in this trend representing family values through mass consumption and waged service work.<sup>40</sup> Auntie Anne’s has come to represent family-oriented, middle-class values, particularly since mothers with children are the chain’s core customer.<sup>41</sup>

The phrase Christian ethical consumption is an even more complex and in some ways contradictory concept. In fact, Mennonite business professor Calvin Redekop said in a recent interview, “Capitalism, in an extreme and uncontrolled form is contrary to everything Jesus

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<sup>36</sup> David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 196.

<sup>37</sup> Bryant Simon, *Everything but the Coffee* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 203.

<sup>38</sup> Simon, *Everything but the Coffee*, 201.

<sup>39</sup> Beth Graybill, *Amish Women, Business Sense: Old Order Women Entrepreneurs in the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, tourist marketplace* (Baltimore, MD: University of Maryland, 2009), 251.

<sup>40</sup> Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, 122.

<sup>41</sup> William Dunn, “How Franchises Choose Charities,” *Franchise Interviews*, 10 November 2011 <http://ww2.blogtalkradio.com/franchise-interviews/2011/11/10/how-franchises-choose-charities-on-franchise-interviews>.

said.”<sup>42</sup> Although born and raised in the same Mennonite traditions as Beiler, Redekop comes to a different conclusion concerning business. Beiler bought into the idea of altruistic Christian evangelical consumerism. But in Redekop’s opinion, at the end of the day, it still comes down to profits over people. He explains how Adam Smith’s philosophy of unrestrained capitalism is motivated solely by self-interest. Capitalism as an economic system, Smith argued, most readily turned human’s sinful nature into socially responsible behavior. For Smith, not only were Christianity and capitalism compatible, but capitalism was the only economic system that satisfactorily accommodated mortal weakness. He argued that in order for capitalism to work, it required the very virtues that are in concert with those associated with righteousness: faith, trust, cooperation, honesty, creativity, and hope. Promoting one’s own interests frequently promoted the interests of the society and encouraged creativity and innovation.<sup>43</sup> In fact, there is even a capitalist’s prayer:

Lord, I give thanks for the privilege of participating in an activity that benefits all humanity. Recognizing that you are the source and owner of everything, I acknowledge that I am simply a steward of what is yours. I commit myself to behavior reflective of your moral and ethical standards demonstrated on earth by Jesus Christ and of your directive simply to love my fellow humans, each of whom is your creation. In all my dealing in the material realm let me remain ever focused on you. As the apostle Paul taught me, you are my creator in whom I live, move and have my being. In all that I do I listen for your guidance.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, Redekop has argued that simply based on Jesus’ sermons on the poor, Jesus would never have been a free market capitalist. He explained that the main problem is the

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<sup>42</sup> Calvin Redekop, Interview by Leslie Lindeman, Typed notes, Harrisonburg, VA, 23 March 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Richards, *God and Business* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002), 36.

<sup>44</sup> Richards, *God and Business*, 444.

subjective individualism of Protestants. He cited Max Weber, who argues that in order to be capitalist, one has to be individualist. The Protestant Reformation gave moral purpose to the capitalist endeavor and people's professions became God-given tasks. But Weber explained that striving for profits was not the only way for people to approach work; one could strive for subsistence or a traditional way of life like the Amish and Mennonite. But current Evangelicalism has come to embrace Christian consumerism by allowing their message to be accommodated to the spirit of contemporary culture.<sup>45</sup> Redekop has concluded that the Christian evangelical interpretation of the Bible and business has given way to a selfish economic model.

The inaugural issue of the *Christian Business Review* supported the role of businesses in the world. Contributor Jeff Duzer argued that businesses were essential to “generate the funds necessary to sponsor God’s desired activity.”<sup>46</sup> His article highlighted how businesses enabled the community to flourish and produce God’s desired results. In addition, companies provided goods and services that enhance the quality of life. Theologian John Calvin also endorsed the notion of business in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, saying, “Paid occupations could aid the unfolding of God’s kingdom by providing basic goods and services needed to sustain a just and orderly society.”<sup>47</sup> Echoing Beiler, Duzer claimed that businesses have both an intrinsic and instrumental purpose in God’s kingdom. He reasoned, “When businesses produce material things that enhance the welfare of the community, they are engaged in work that matters to God.”<sup>48</sup> Author Robert Richards went even further: businesses create the opportunity for the poor to better their condition and for consumer needs to be satisfied. Additionally he claimed that corporations have

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<sup>45</sup> Mark Noll, *God and Mammon* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 172.

<sup>46</sup> Jeff Duzer, “Why Business Matters to God,” *Christian Business Review* (July 2012), 21.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Chewning, *Business Through the Eyes of Faith* (New York, NY: Christian College Coalition, 1990), 171.

<sup>48</sup> Duzer, “Why Business Matters to God,” 24.

not kept enough profits, “In the 1990’s corporate profits accounted for a modest 11% of national income . . . Wages and salaries to employees accounted for 65% . . . All those hundreds of billions of dollars and all of that creative brainpower spent on product research and development to serve the consumer, and the only return that those organizations get for it is 11% of the pie.”<sup>49</sup> But Jesus espoused that the needs of the poor should take precedence over the desires of the rich. In Richard’s book he asked if the government was supposed to call a halt to all skiing (surely a luxury), for example, until everyone in the society received a sound education? Richards said this type of government intervention was too close to demagoguery. But Jesus’ teachings called on humans to give to the less advantaged, giving not something of their own but giving something of God’s back to society. This model of servant leadership calls on managers to serve God and the community first before emphasizing accumulation of wealth.

The role of executives is to be stewards or trustees, explained Duzer: businesses do not actually belong to them or any earthly owners. Beiler similarly described how the company was not about her but about God and his plan when she said,

If God creates something, it will work. It will be effective. I never could have planned all this, I never could have conjured up this complex business on my own. Only God was capable of that, and God always has a purpose and a plan. So if He created this business, then it was meant to be shared with others, and that means it must work and grow.<sup>50</sup>

The founder of the Christian-based chain In-N-Out Burger echoed this sentiment saying, “This is God’s company . . . not mine.”<sup>51</sup> Coincidentally, Duzer used a food related example to describe

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Richards, *God and Business* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002), 41.

<sup>50</sup> Doug Wenrich, “How ‘Auntie Anne’ surprised herself and built million dollar pretzel business,” *Lancaster New Era*, November, 25 1991.

<sup>51</sup> Stacy Perman, *In-N-Out Burger* (New York, NY: Collins Business, 2009), 160.

how humans act as stewards: “Human beings were created with a capacity to pool their resources (what we now call capital), to design and build an oven (technical innovation), to order and receive shipments of flour (supply chain), to bake bread (operation) . . . [and] take the bread that God intended to provide for a hungry world and make delivery on God’s behalf.”<sup>52</sup>

But Duzer absolved businesses from complete accountability, saying they are not responsible for “green” initiatives, for example. In this way, Duzer leaned on his own interpretation of the Bible rather than providing evidence from the Bible to enable business owners to avoid being stewards of the land. Duzer used the Bible to justify what had already been decided rather than to shape business decisions. He defended the separation between business and sustainability by describing how certain institutions are simply better suited for certain tasks. Duzer said he did not believe that protecting the environment would “make God’s list of fundamental purposes for the institution of business as a whole.”<sup>53</sup> But John Hostetler has claimed in an essay concerning responsible growth and stewardship that, “Biblical dominion over the land too often has been mistaken as a license for its exploitation through human arrogance.”<sup>54</sup> Instead, Biblical ecology has called humankind to be earth keepers and stewards of the land, using resources in a way that honors divine intention.

Chik-fil-a boasts of sustainability efforts on its website. The company is working to use ecological packaging, decrease energy use, conserve water, and increase recycling. Additionally, the chain has built its first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified restaurant. The company emphasizes how it is called to be concerned for the environment and to

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<sup>52</sup> Duzer, “Why Business Matters to God,” 28-29.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>54</sup> John Hostetler, “Toward Responsible Growth and Stewardship of Lancaster County’s Landscape,” *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 12 (July 1989): 7.

be “a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us.”<sup>55</sup> In this way, Chik-fil-a is attempting to balance its profit with an obligation to the community and to creation. Businesses should not isolate themselves from participating in solving environmental problems; instead they should demonstrate corporate moral leadership.<sup>56</sup> Auntie Anne’s has provided significant local charity. Still, Hostetler believed “sharing the material goods which emerge out of affluence is honorable but does not eliminate the task of stewardship.”<sup>57</sup> Auntie Anne’s only sustainable effort has been in donating surplus food to its community partner, Food Donation Connect.<sup>58</sup> Auntie Anne’s cannot be held accountable for failing to attain perfection in goodness, but there is little evidence that the company is continually striving or making new efforts to fully embody Christian values. The company seems unwilling to sacrifice larger profits or a conservative ideology to meet these goals.

During Beiler’s time as owner of Auntie Anne’s, the company sponsored one faith-based entertainment program to help spread the word of God and increase sales. In 2003 Auntie Anne’s partnered with Big Idea Productions for the DVD and VHS release of *Jonah – A VeggieTales Movie*. Auntie Anne’s public relations manager Valerie Kinney described *VeggieTales* as “a very wholesome brand. It complements what we stand for and what we want to offer our guests — quality.”<sup>59</sup> The company actively supported this children’s film by offering a special deal, a half price Jonah plush toy for customers who purchased two pretzels and a drink. Additionally three million of the film copies contained a coupon for one free pretzel

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<sup>55</sup> Chik-fil-a Inc., “Environmental Stewardship,” *Chik-fil-a*, 2012

<http://www.chick-fil-a.com/Company/Environmental>, (December 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Scott Rae and Kenman Wong, *Beyond Integrity: A Judeo-Christian Approach to Business Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>57</sup> John Hostetler, “Toward Responsible Growth and Stewardship of Lancaster County’s Landscape,” *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 12 (July 1989): 9.

<sup>58</sup> Nancy Weingartner, “A new twist-Auntie Anne’s rebrands,” *Franchise Times*, September 2006.

<sup>59</sup> Tim Mekeel, “Auntie Anne’s, VeggieTales cook up promotion,” *Lancaster New Era*., November 11, 2005.

with purchase of a pretzel and a drink. This endeavor also sought to “take advantage of the ‘tremendous impact that children can have on a purchase decision.’”<sup>60</sup>

The plot of the film, based on the Biblical story of Jonah, focused on compassion and mercy. In this movie, the wholesome vegetable main characters proselytized Christian values. In the story, the city of Nineveh, known for its Cheese Curl factory, was corrupt and violent. Jonah, depicted as an asparagus spear, was called by God to help the citizens reform their ways. At one point, Jonah’s friend Kahlil explained how “the world doesn’t need more people who are big and important”; it needs more people who are nice, compassionate, and merciful.<sup>61</sup> The film seemed to parallel the way in which Auntie Anne’s used wholesome pretzels as a way of spreading God’s message. Auntie Anne’s promoted this animated film through its product which embedded the Christian association with the company.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Philanthropic Company**

In 2005, Anne placed her trust and the fate of the company in her second cousin, Sam Beiler, by selling him the company. Anne wanted to fully invest her time and energy in The Family Center at Gap project. Sam Beiler had been managing an Auntie Anne’s franchise in Florida and served as a regional representative. He attended Auntie Anne’s first franchise convention and was approached by one of Anne’s employees, Elli Ziemer, about moving into the corporate level. Anne felt that God brought Sam to the business and was a divine match to continue the business. She believed his integrity, faith, values, and understanding of the Auntie Anne’s philosophy made him the best candidate to take over as owner.

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<sup>60</sup> Gregg Cebrzynski, “Pretzel chain Auntie Anne’s adds twist to marketing,” *Nation’s Restaurant News* (2004): 14.

<sup>61</sup> *Jonah: A VeggieTales Movie*, Directed by Mike Nawrocki (Santa Monica: Artisan), 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Auntie Anne’s Inc., “Pressroom,” *Auntie Anne’s*, 2012

<http://web.archive.org/web/20030604214149/http://www.auntieannes.com/pressroom/> (November 2012).

Although the business has not followed through completely in its Christian mission, Christian roots are integrated into Auntie Anne's marketing. The company prominently placed coin canisters on the counters of franchises to collect donations for local or national charities. The displays usually featured a small blurb describing the charity and its importance according to Auntie Anne's. In this way, the company's Christian philanthropy was placed at the foreground. In 2006, after Anne Beiler sold the business to Sam Beiler, the company added a halo above a pretzel to the logo. The logo is on all of its merchandise, including posters, cups, and its website. The company also created the perception of religious grounding through a 2010 tagline, "You either know us well, or you're curious and seeking pretzel truth." This slogan related to the spiritual journey of discovering Jesus and the Word as truth. Similarly spiritually charged slogans included: "Auntie Anne's- suddenly life makes sense again" and "From this earth, out of this world perfection." Another Christian-based food franchise, In-N-Out Burger, discreetly places Bible verses on its packaging. The bottom rim of soda cups, french fry holders, and burger wrappers feature scriptural quotes. Their milkshake cups feature Proverbs 3: 5.<sup>63</sup> This passage urges, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."<sup>64</sup> In this way, the franchises shared their faith through mass culture.

Former Auntie Anne's employee Tracey Grinestaff felt as if Anne and Sam, though using different management styles, worked within the same framework of manifesting Christian principles by giving back to the community. As an employee for eight years, she experienced the company under Anne, during the transition, and under Sam. Sam felt as though he had a new vision for the company that still respected Anne's founding principles. To start he decreased the number of corporate-owned stores and focused on the franchises. Sam also tested out an Auntie

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<sup>63</sup> Stacy Perman, *In-N-Out Burger* (New York, NY: Collins Business, 2009), 158.

<sup>64</sup> Prov. 3: 5 ESV.

Anne's Café concept in five Lancaster County locations including Columbia Avenue and North Charlotte Street in Lancaster City. The cafes served breakfast, lunch, and dinner featuring items like egg sandwiches, cinnamon rolls, paninis, salads, and milkshakes.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, he moved the company's headquarters to downtown Lancaster from its original rural location in Gap, Pennsylvania. Sam considered Lancaster to be a strong county and a strong city full of energy. The move, he thought, increased the productivity of his employees.

Anne and Sam's attitudes toward employees were very similar. Through an application to the Auntie Anne's Scholarship Assistance Fund, Anne and Sam provided full scholarships for employees to go to or continue their schooling. Sam also helped his associates by providing the down-payments for first time home owners. In order to receive this benefit, associates submitted a ten page application. Five internal employees and five franchise managers received this award per year. Anne and Sam believed in these efforts because the assistance meant Auntie Anne's would have a lasting impact on those families for generations. The application was available to all employees, their dependents, and grandchildren. FOCUS Brands has continued the inward corporate philanthropy, but it annually allots only six scholarships, not exceeding \$5,000.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, Chik-fil-a awards \$1.6 million in college scholarships each year.

Beiler's faith did influence a component of charity within the business, even though fulfillment of a Christian mission has fallen short in other areas. In this aspect of business her entrepreneurial spirit was motivated by the spirit of Christ. Although Beiler admitted that back in 1988 she "didn't even know what entrepreneur meant," her understanding evolved to mean

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<sup>65</sup> Patrick Burns, "Restaurants Restaurants Close," *Lancaster Intelligencer Journal*, 10 October 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Auntie Anne's Inc., "Newsroom," *Auntie Anne's*, 2010, [http://www.auntieannes.com/aboutus/newsroom/newsroom/10-08-16/Auntie\\_Anne\\_s\\_Inc\\_Awards\\_30\\_000\\_in\\_Scholarships.aspx](http://www.auntieannes.com/aboutus/newsroom/newsroom/10-08-16/Auntie_Anne_s_Inc_Awards_30_000_in_Scholarships.aspx) (April 2013).

entrepreneurs do what other people do not feel like doing.<sup>67</sup> Beiler said she was taught “to always give back a portion of the gifts God gives” and to share blessings with those in need. These ideas eventually became her passion. To her, success was not a point of arrival. Instead, true prosperity meant richness of heart and spirit.<sup>68</sup> Her overall philosophy was to have a great product, great people on her team, and a purpose greater than oneself.<sup>69</sup> This attitude permeated the company, even as she allowed non-family members to manage other store locations. In 1994 the company earned \$350,000 pretax on revenues and “gave \$150,000” to various charities. Out of the earnings she underwrote the family counseling center in Gap, PA. In 1995, Auntie Anne’s employees founded the C.A.R.E.S. (Community Action Requires Employee Support) Committee. This group provided focused community assistance through time and resources. Beiler looked to this organization for support and allotted to the committee twenty-five percent of the company’s money reserved for philanthropy to give to a charity of their choice. Her only guidelines were that the charity should be family oriented and not divisive. For example, she gave with a conservative world view, explaining how she would not support a gay rights charity or an organization that supported pro-choice rights. In 2010, for example, C.A.R.E.S. raised \$32,500 for First Book, which is an organization that provides books for schools and services that care for children in need.<sup>70</sup>

In Beiler’s autobiography she began a chapter by quoting Methodist theologian John Wesley, who said, “Make all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.”<sup>71</sup> She believed one should “try giving ten percent, not on what you are actually making, but on what you feel you

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<sup>67</sup> Beiler, “Twist of Fate,” 9 April 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Beiler, “Country First: Prosperity of Spirit,” 3 September 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Nancy Weingartner, “A new twist-Auntie Anne’s rebrands,” *Franchise Times*, September 2006.

<sup>70</sup> Kim H., “First Book Makes a Hole-in-One at Auntie Anne’s Benefit Golf Tournament,” *The First Book Blog*, 15 July 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Beiler, *Twist of Faith*, 31.

should be making, and trust that God will help you reach that new income level.”<sup>72</sup> This belief demonstrated a new model of stewardship of doing God’s work in a novel way. Rather than being a steward of the land, Beiler believed it was virtuous for Christian business people only to be stewards of their personal time, talent, and money to make the community a better place.”<sup>73</sup>

One should not discount support Auntie Anne’s has provided by partnering with two national charitable organizations. From 1999 to 2009 Auntie Anne’s raised over four million dollars as a corporate sponsor for the Children’s Miracle Network. This non-profit organization benefits Penn State Hershey Children’s hospital. FOCUS Brands has tried to build on this legacy of charitable giving since it acquired the company in 2010. In 2011, Auntie Anne’s joined Alex’s Lemonade Stand in the fight against childhood cancer through support of research, prevention, and treatment. During the first year of partnering Auntie Anne’s raised more than \$150,000 through coin canister donations, local pretzel rolling contests, and the C.A.R.E.S. Golf Tournament. In addition, Auntie Anne’s supports local communities through Food Donation Connection. This “program enables stores to donate surplus pretzel products through a hunger relief organization, such as a rescue mission or after-school program . . . to feed those in need, reduce food waste, and improve employee morale.”<sup>74</sup> In 2011, Auntie Anne’s locally raised \$60,000 for the Lancaster-based foundation, Children Deserve a Chance. The company sought brand distinction through strategic philanthropy that aligned the organization’s passion for helping others. Internationally, Auntie Anne’s celebrated its fifteenth anniversary in Malaysia by giving away thousands of free pretzels. The franchisor also donated \$5,500 to Precious Children’s Home after pledging to contribute a portion of the profit from one month of sales. In

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>73</sup> David Walbert, *Garden Spot* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 192.

<sup>74</sup> Auntie Anne’s Inc., “About Us-Community Involvement,” *Auntie Anne’s*, 2012  
<http://www.auntieannes.com/aboutus/Community.aspx> (November 2012).

this way, Auntie Anne's fulfilled its public promise to provide goods and services that enhance lives and to allocate business resources to community projects.

There is a connection between Auntie Anne's international expansion and the religious demographics of the areas. None of the first countries to have franchises were predominantly Protestant Christian. In Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore the majority of the population practice either Islam or Buddhism.<sup>75</sup> In some ways this franchising could be considered "a new form of 'virtuous globalization.'"<sup>76</sup> Richard Chewning, a professor of Business at Baylor University, examined how Christian businesses have been called to do business in problem areas and to model the kingdom of God in this way.<sup>77</sup> To him, a particular approach to food is a way in which people can come to understand one another.<sup>78</sup> In 2013, Thailand had the most locations of the twelve countries in Auntie Anne's International program with more than eighty-five stores.<sup>79</sup> The company was a form of proselytization by promoting Christian beliefs in a less obvious and original way. The business was integrated into the existing environment of Christian missionary work in Asia. In this way, the business encouraged spiritual transformation in the countries in which the operated.<sup>80</sup> But Beiler claimed franchise managers did not need to be Christian, they just needed a "teachable spirit," strong work ethic, and embrace the company's values of having a quality product, clean stores, exceptional guest service, and philanthropy. According to a Huffington Post investigation, Chik-fil-a preferred applicants who participated in community, religious, or professional organizations. Additionally, it was implicit for potential managers to share Christian values, close restaurants on Sunday, and

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<sup>75</sup> "Mapping the Global Muslim Population," *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, October 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Wilk, ed., *Fast Food/Slow Food* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>77</sup> Chewning, *Business Through the Eyes of Faith*, 194.

<sup>78</sup> Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe, ed., *Food & Philosophy: Eat, Think, and Be Merry* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 264.

<sup>79</sup> Lin, *The China Twist*, 19.

<sup>80</sup> Scott Rae and Kenman Wong, *Business for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 241.

be willing to participate in group prayer during training or management meetings. The law allows for companies to be more discriminating in selecting franchise operators who are essentially business partners but these practices would not be legal if applied to employees.<sup>81</sup>

Auntie Anne's has adapted its product to cultural preferences. In Singapore, the franchise offered a seaweed-flavored pretzel. In Saudi Arabia, customers could order a pretzel with dates. One of the favorites in Thailand included pretzel sticks coated with sweet coconut and powdered sugar.<sup>82</sup> A global brand has to be consistent but willing to modify to meet local taste. FOCUS Brands' international efforts continue to experience momentum by surrendering some of Auntie Anne's cultural origins in order "to develop strong relationships with consumers across different countries and cultures."<sup>83</sup>

Although the pretzel has adapted to other cultures, part of the success of this product rests in its novelty. "The pretzel is arguably an icon of Central Pennsylvania" since Julius Sturgis Pretzel Bakery in Lititz, PA, founded in 1861, became the first commercial pretzel bakery in the country.<sup>84</sup> Pretzels have continued to dominate the area's many snack food companies. Eating has become a window through which people can explore an area and its people through food tourism. People from outside of the United States may feel as if they are experiencing authentic Pennsylvania Dutch cuisine through Auntie Anne's.

To date, Auntie Anne's has 1,200 locations worldwide.<sup>85</sup> "Some perceive the enterprise as getting 'too big.'" Beiler has conceded, "It's very un-Amish, what I've done."<sup>86</sup> Rather than

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<sup>81</sup> Ian Reifowitz, "Chik-fil-a Franchise Operators Must 'Espouse Christian Values' and 'Participate in Group Prayers,'" *Huffington Post*, 6 August 2012 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ian-reifowitz/chickfila-franchise-christian\\_b\\_1737408.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ian-reifowitz/chickfila-franchise-christian_b_1737408.html)

<sup>82</sup> Paula Holzman, "International Twist: Auntie Anne's grows globally," *Central Penn Business Journal* (25 June 2010), 19.

<sup>83</sup> Nigel Hollis, *The Global Brand* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 25-26.

<sup>84</sup> Holzman, "International Twist: Auntie Anne's grows globally," 3.

<sup>85</sup> Auntie Anne's Inc., "About Us-Company History," *Auntie Anne's*, 2012 <http://www.auntieannes.com/AboutUs/CompanyHistory.aspx> (November 2012).

overextending through excessive and unnecessary franchising, Auntie Anne's could have focused on the mission of serving a larger purpose. By thinking globally to capitalize on potential opportunities, Auntie Anne's lost some of the personal connectedness that ethics and faith demand.<sup>87</sup> The company has the resources to make a physical, sustaining impact in needy communities, but it has continued to simply emphasize conversion as the main way to improve one's life. In some ways, the brand has become its own religion and religion becomes its brand rather than just reflecting values by selling pseudo-spirituality.<sup>88</sup> As one franchisee in China explained, "The brand had taken on a very nostalgic, comforting feeling. Many consumers could often recall a personal experience with Auntie Anne's. Few brands could claim this kind of emotional bond."<sup>89</sup> Sam Beiler recounted multiple experiences where customers stopped him in the street "simply to relive the details of their fond experiences with the brand. Customers developed emotional ties . . . which was a powerful connection."<sup>90</sup> This process turned religion into a commodity that could simply be purchased, not necessarily practiced. Customers could feel morally assuming they were participating in Christian ethical consumerism rather than buying from a secular counterpart.

Catholic philosopher Michael Novak has argued that the goal of religious corporations in a globalizing world is to provide for social needs and strengthen social morality.<sup>91</sup> Author Robert Richards similarly stated, "The real purpose of business is service (which is another word for ministry)."<sup>92</sup> Novak explained how the role of Christian executives is to make their company significant for a larger purpose. Citing the Bible, he argues that "we were created for good

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<sup>86</sup> Sean Mehegan, "The Modest Merchants," *Restaurant Business* 95, no. 6 (1996).

<sup>87</sup> Laura Nash, "The Brave New World of Business Ethics," *Sojourners*, January-February 2000.

<sup>88</sup> Rae and Wong, *Business for the Common Good*, 221.

<sup>89</sup> Lin, *The China Twist*, 19.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>91</sup> Michael Novak, "Religious Faith, Corporate Life, and the Betterment of Society," *Business & Professional Ethics Journal* 23, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 18-25.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Richards, *God and Business* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002), x.

works, that we should use our resources, opportunities, and even our positions of authority in ways that benefit others.”<sup>93</sup> Christian executives have been charged to faithfully carry out the dual mission of serving investors and helping the less fortunate. But this role involves inherent contradictions. Companies and their executives integrate both responsibilities into a single business strategy but are “trapped between the cultural expectations” of the Christian and secular world.<sup>94</sup>

### **The Corporation**

Since FOCUS Brands acquired Auntie Anne’s in 2010, the company has struggled to balance financial health with Christian values. Sam Beiler explained how his commitment to keeping the company private was to free Auntie Anne’s from the demands driven by short-term quarterly results. He did not want to take from franchisees who then take from employees in order to please investors. In addition, he shared many of Anne’s core religious beliefs, although he was not as vocal about it. Sam explained how Christ demonstrated the “guiding principles and actions” that were best for Auntie Anne’s.<sup>95</sup> In this way, Sam believed he walked beside and served God through the business. But Sam abandoned this position to pursue other ventures in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area through his company, Shadow Lawn Enterprises. He sold Auntie Anne’s to an impersonal corporation that also owned Cinnabon, Carvel Ice Cream, Moe’s Southwest Grill, and Schlotzky’s Deli. When interviewed, Sam did not comment on FOCUS Brands lack of faith-based efforts; he simply stated that the conglomerate was the best fit and

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<sup>93</sup> Michael Novak, “Religious Faith, Corporate Life, and the Betterment of Society,” *Business & Professional Ethics Journal* 23, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 25.

<sup>94</sup> Redekop, *Mennonite Entrepreneurs*, 78.

<sup>95</sup> Sam Beiler, Interview by Leslie Lindeman, Written notes, Lancaster, PA, 2 April 2013.

gave the best offer.<sup>96</sup> This moment marked an explicit shift and disconnect from the company's founding purpose. Sam did not limit his potential buyers to small, family oriented corporations. Instead he chose the best offer in order to pursue ventures through his own company such as building the Spooky Nook Sports Complex in Manheim, Pennsylvania. His own priorities took precedence over transitioning the company to another owner who would pursue the Christian mission.

The profit-driven principles of a large corporation clash with the religious convictions Anne Beiler sought to embed within the business. FOCUS Brands is an affiliate of Roark Capital Group, a private equity firm focused on investment through family-owned business transfers. Since the company is private, consumers have few ways of knowing if FOCUS Brands has continued Beiler's pattern of giving. Without the personal relationships franchisees built with the Beilers, they are not treated as extended family. Such a large corporation has too much distance between those working at the top and at the bottom. This gap makes the uniform application of ethical practices and accountability to faith nearly impossible. While FOCUS Brands continues to advertise the company's religious founding, the business is not held accountable to Christian ethics and does not appear to be as committed to promoting philanthropy as was its founder. Unlike the Beilers' evangelical mission, the goal of the private equity firm is to see the potential for profitability and maximize returns.<sup>97</sup>

CNBC described Auntie Anne's as the great American success story which has endured, opening on average two stores a week, even during the recession. William Dunn has been the President and Chief Operating Officer upon Sam Beiler's sale of the company to FOCUS Brands. He noted how "giving back to the communities where we work and play is one of our

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<sup>96</sup> Sam Beiler, Interview by Leslie Lindeman, Written notes, Lancaster, PA, 2 April 2013.

<sup>97</sup> Roark Capital Group, "About Us," *Roark Capital Group*, 2013 [http://www.roarkcapital.com/about\\_roark.php](http://www.roarkcapital.com/about_roark.php).

critical values, and we take a great deal of pride in our partnership.”<sup>98</sup> In his opinion, the company is continuing to build upon the founder’s vision, saying that, Auntie Anne’s has not lost “a focus on the values and culture. . . . The twenty-three years of giving back and focusing on people has been instrumental in our ongoing success.”<sup>99</sup> The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 is not a priority included in Dunn’s commitment to community. Instead the company has shown concern only for employees’ spiritual wellbeing. Religious “programs are just a natural part of a full and complete employee benefits slate . . . we want them to be healthy in all ways that matter, and we’re here to help them. It makes for a better employee and a healthier employee.”<sup>100</sup>

Calvin Redekop has explained how the specific actions of businesses should be consistent with the judgment of Christ but conceded that this is a sociological as well as a theological question.<sup>101</sup> Part-time employees do not currently receive healthcare through Auntie Anne’s. Yet the book of Proverbs, upon which Beiler based the mission of the company, states, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.”<sup>102</sup> Some Christian business scholars have provided specific guidelines that executives’ salaries should be a maximum of seven times the amount the person cleaning the building makes.<sup>103</sup> Concerning healthcare, Dunn explained, “We work strategically with a company that helps provide the service to our franchise partners around the country . . . our preference certainly would be for us to work with our franchise partners on the health insurance side and not have the government do

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<sup>98</sup> “Tying Up the competition,” July 2012, CNBC, Video.

<sup>99</sup> William Dunn, “How Franchises Choose Charities,” *Franchise Interviews*, 10 November 2011  
<http://ww2.blogtalkradio.com/franchise-interviews/2011/11/10/how-franchises-choose-charities-on-franchise-interviews>.

<sup>100</sup> Kelley Butler, “Spirituality programs offer chicken soup for the employees’ soul,” *Quality of Life*, (April 2006).

<sup>101</sup> Redekop, *Mennonite Entrepreneurs*, 238.

<sup>102</sup> Prov. 3: 27 ESV.

<sup>103</sup> Bonnie Lofton, “The Counter-Cultural Role of a Minority Sect, the Mennonites, Within the ‘American Identity,’” Eastern American Studies Association Conference, Harrisonburg, VA, 23 March 2013.

that . . . we just feel as though we know our business, we know the employees.”<sup>104</sup> Dunn emphasized the company’s self-reliance. But Richard Chewning argued, in *Business Through The Eyes of Faith*, that,

Christians need to examine their views of government regulation of business. Many of us rather glibly suggest that the least government is the best government. That is far too simple an answer. Government is one way that people in a country do things together. It is also a way of taking care of things that no one person or group can take care of themselves. We need to recognize the positive roles government can play in partnership with business.<sup>105</sup>

From Chewning’s perspective, the duty of Christian businesses is to go beyond the minimum legal requirements or government standards to express justice and provide a quality work environment.<sup>106</sup> Dunn’s unwillingness to comply with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is additionally hypocritical within the framework of the charities to which he directs the company’s contributions. While Dunn is interested in giving back to Alex’s Lemonade Stand, he does not provide preventative care or superior services for children whose parents work at Auntie Anne’s. While corporations often fight for fewer regulations, they need the visible hand of government to ensure justice, honest dealings, and fair economic opportunity.<sup>107</sup>

According to many scholars, brands have responsibilities: “They are not simply money-making machines working in some kind of pure, soulless economy. They have an influence on some real issues and real people . . . In a world where brands are blamed for everything from

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<sup>104</sup> “Tying Up the competition,” July 2012, CNBC, Video.

<sup>105</sup> Chewning, *Business Through the Eyes of Faith*, 204.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 29; 66.

<sup>107</sup> Rae and Wong, *Business for the Common Good*, 163.

obesity to child labor, it pays to be good.”<sup>108</sup> Additionally, brands attempt to be highly visible, almost omnipresent, in order for customers to gain faith in what they have to offer.<sup>109</sup> Auntie Anne’s has so much faith in its product that the company has free pretzel day once a year. In addition they frequently have one sales associate passing out free samples close to the store. The executives think once a potential customer tries the product they will believe in the superior taste experience and become a loyal patron. This is a form of “Eucharistic hospitality” in that Auntie Anne’s shares and cares for others and hopes its customers will reciprocate.<sup>110</sup> Laura Nash, a Harvard Business School professor, condensed these keys to success into “four deep aspirations: to achieve, to be considered of service and value to others, to experience pleasures and peace, and to create a legacy that will help others succeed in ways that continue your values.”<sup>111</sup>

A 2005 study found that Christian based companies are generally more successful than their secular counterparts. In particular, Mennonite entrepreneurs’ self-perception of their success is attributed to their religious tradition and characteristics of honesty, integrity, dependability, and practicality.<sup>112</sup> Beiler similarly attributed her company’s success to its faith based purpose. One measure determined that Christian companies had a higher sales growth rate and smaller employee growth rate. This outcome indicated that their workers were more productive than those of secular companies. Faith-based businesses tended “to inspire loyalty among both employees and customers.” In particular, “the full range of economic and human benefits that accrue to leaders who treat their customers, operators, and employees in a manner worthy of their loyalty, is at the core of most of the truly successful growth companies in the

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<sup>108</sup> Matt Haig, *Brand Royalty* (Sterling, VA: Kogan Page, 2004), 156.

<sup>109</sup> Haig, *Brand Royalty*, 2.

<sup>110</sup> Norman Wirzba, *Food & Faith: A Theology of Eating*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 168.

<sup>111</sup> Laura Nash, “Lasting Success for the Christian in Business,” *Business & Professional Ethics Journal* 23, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 46.

<sup>112</sup> Redekop, *Mennonite Entrepreneurs*, 162.

world today. And there is no clearer case study of the loyalty effect than Chick-fil-A.”<sup>113</sup> Auntie Anne’s and similarly-founded businesses emphasized a determination to be loyal to their suppliers through fair and honest negotiations. The organizational cultures and the strong positive relationships Christian companies built led to these results.<sup>114</sup>

For Auntie Anne’s, Beiler’s spiritual story and image are part of its brand. Brands have meaning and carry associations such as belonging, community and even transcendence. This perception of the product creates an emotional relationship with patrons. Through this attachment, Christian brands in particular can become successful and powerful.<sup>115</sup> But Bryant Simon is skeptical of this loyalty. Using the example of Starbucks he argued,

In corporate-designed narratives of change, the poor . . . become symbols as the buyers emerge as the main subjects. . . The ‘little’ people on the ground moreover, will pay us back for our generosity by liking us and maybe even embracing our values. If wealthy customers know that a luxury brand is socially responsible they will give the brand greater purchase consideration over a brand with similar quality and service.<sup>116</sup>

But in this case businesses may not work toward a larger purpose because it is the right thing to do but the profitable thing to do.

In 2012, Bill Dunn accepted an opportunity for Auntie Anne’s to participate in the reality television show, *Be the Boss*. This program put two Auntie Anne’s employees in a competition for what they believed to be a big promotion leading to the Auntie Anne’s Management Team.

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<sup>113</sup> Cathy Enz, *Hospitality Strategic Management* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 107.

<sup>114</sup> Nabil Ibrahim and John Angelidis, “Christian Companies and Their Secular Counterparts,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 58, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 188-191.

<sup>115</sup> Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe, ed., *Food & Philosophy: Eat, Think, and Be Merry* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 97-98.

<sup>116</sup> Simon, *Everything but the Coffee*, 202-203.

Eleazar Puente, a store manager in Oregon, worked to support his blind father and a mother who struggled with diabetes. Shonta Moore was an assistant manager of a franchise in Florida working as a single mother to support her two children. Both had been with Auntie Anne's for nearly ten years. The competitors were encouraged to outdo each other in store running challenges as well as to tell Dunn why the other contestant should not receive the promotion. Dunn was deceitful, allowing Moore to leave the competition believing she had won a piece of the American dream by gaining the corporate promotion. Moore kissed Dunn's hand, embraced her family, cried, and said it was "the best thing in the world. . . My American dream is starting now."<sup>117</sup> But Puente actually won the bigger prize and received the keys to his own franchise store. Dunn said, "It's rewarding to help somebody achieve the American dream, and that, for me, as the president, was the most important and rewarding part."<sup>118</sup> But participation in this competition did not inspire Christian-like behavior. The show was degrading to the employees and exploited them as free advertising for potential customers and franchisees. Providing living wages and supporting universal healthcare could have improved the lives of these associates much more directly through positive structural changes.

Dunn believes that there is no inherent conflict between the pursuit of business and the basic values of religion. Similarly, Chik-fil-a founder Truett S. Cathy said,

Without profit, we cannot take care of our employees, our families, or contribute to the betterment of our communities. . . How do we balance the pursuit of profit and personal character? For me, I find that balance by applying Biblical principles. I see no conflict between Biblical principles and good business practices.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Be the Boss, "Auntie Anne's," *A&E*, 44:00, December 16 2012.

<sup>118</sup> Mark Brandau, "Auntie Anne's executive shares 'Be the Boss' experience," *Nation's Restaurant News*, December, 3 2012 <http://nrm.com/people/auntie-annes-executive-shares-be-boss-experience?page=1>

<sup>119</sup> Truett S. Cathy, "How Did You Do It, Truett?" (Decatur, GA: Looking Glass Books, 2007), 15.

But this environment puts responsibility in the hands of a few executives to determine what actions fulfill the entire company's Christian mission, carry on the established value system, and are fiscally responsible. Christian businesses' efforts to nurture and build community should precede labor and productivity. But Dunn's treatment of employees and opinions against mandated healthcare conflict with this purpose. Dunn directly contradicts the guidelines Christian businessmen have encouraged, to "use our faith, skills, and resources to correct inequities, work toward economic justice, seek righteousness, and bring hope where there is no hope."<sup>120</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Anne Beiler once described the twists of a pretzel as creating three spaces she believed represented the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those twists of a pretzel now embrace three owners, Beiler, her cousin Sam, and FOCUS Brands. Beiler invested her faith in the company, spiritually empowered employees, and used a significant part of the profits to fund philanthropies that carried out what she believed to be her Christian evangelical mission. In her opinion, buying an Auntie Anne's pretzel was a form of ethical Christian consumption. From a single stand Auntie Anne's grew into an international brand advancing Christian principles well beyond Downingtown, Pennsylvania. Sam, the second owner, carried on many of Anne's faith-based initiatives, though without the public zeal of his cousin. Under the leadership of Anne and Sam, the company attracted faithful employees and customers who felt as if they were contributing to a greater good by working in the company or consuming its product. But now that Auntie Anne's has become part of a corporation seeking profits, the business embodies the

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 194.

tensions and contradictions between Christianity and capitalism. Auntie Anne's rolls more than five-hundred thousand pretzels every two days, enough to feed a pretzel to every person living in Lancaster County.<sup>121</sup> FOCUS Brands has and continues to profit from the legacy of ethical business practice and philanthropy that Anne and Sam Beiler instilled in the Auntie Anne's brand. But FOCUS Brands, under the parent company Roark Capital Group, has not continued to put Christian principles into action. Unlike this large corporation, Anne and Sam Beiler, though sometimes falling short, endeavored to fulfill a Christian mission in business. FOCUS Brands continues to sell Auntie Anne's pretzels, but without its founder's purpose.

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<sup>121</sup> Nancy Weingartner, "A new twist-Auntie Anne's rebrands," *Franchise Times*, September 2006.

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