



Cultural Mandate in Business Ethics: Theological Study and Practical Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to conduct a theological study of the cultural mandate as found in Genesis 1:27-28, to understand its basic concepts and moral-ethical dimensions, and its practical implementation in business ethics. In short, the cultural mandate is a mandate given to humans to care for creation, to cultivate and manage creation in divine management as *Imago Dei* responsibly. This mandate becomes a fundamental calling for humans to work, create, cultivate, and manage the earth and its contents responsibly before God. This cultural mandate becomes an important and fundamental moral-ethical framework for humans to work on earth, including business practices and activities. However, it has become common knowledge that there have been so many deviations in the management of the earth, including in business activities, resulting in negative impacts. This is where the importance of implementing the important truths of this cultural mandate in the dynamics of work and all business activities lies. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method based on literature data or library sources. Through this method, the researcher intends to qualitatively examine the concept and meaning of the cultural mandate, to explore and discover the moral-ethical aspects and principles within the cultural mandate, and how these are then implemented in business practices, as theological ethics in business practices.

Keywords: Cultural Mandate; *Imago Dei*; Ethical Framework; Business Ethic; Theology of Work.

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INTRODUCTION

The cultural mandate, as stated in Genesis 1:27-28, affirms the calling of humans as the image and likeness of God to "subdue" and "have dominion" over the earth. In summary, this cultural mandate is a divine mandate to humans as the image and likeness of God to carry out and execute the mandate of stewardship over creation in a pattern of responsible divine management. It includes the responsibility to cultivate, maintain its sustainability, care for, preserve, and utilize it ethically and correctly. Humans are given the mandate as representatives of God on earth to cultivate, preserve, maintain, and utilize creation correctly and responsibly before God. Thus, this text serves as a theological basis for responsible stewardship of creation. The scope of "to cultivate and to keep" in this case includes all forms of creative power, all dynamics of work and effort undertaken by humans on this earth, including business practices.

On the other hand, science and technology have advanced and developed rapidly in this modern era, and have significantly influenced the dynamics of "dominating" and "conquering" the earth. Instead of managing,

preserving, and maintaining creation responsibly, there has been exploitation and various actions that exceed the boundaries of truth and propriety. It is not uncommon for human efforts to "cultivate" the earth, including various business activities, to be solely profit-oriented and neglect moral responsibilities towards creation and God. In the next turn, a lot of damage, imbalance, chaos, and various other serious negative impacts are found, including violations and neglect of human rights and dignity. In the context of such a situation, this cultural mandate is highly relevant for structuring the relationship between humans and the environment, society, and economic activities, including in the business world.

Business ethics itself is a branch of applied ethics that fundamentally focuses on how moral principles are applied in business activities. The fundamental question is: "which moral principles are used as a reference?" In this context, the cultural mandate serves as the theological foundation for the establishment of basic moral principles, which are then applied in various business activities. These moral ethical principles are none other than God's own moral ethics, or the theological ethics expressed in the cultural mandate. Basically, the integration/implementation of the cultural mandate in business ethics provides a framework that leads to an understanding of how business can embody the moral, dignified, just, sustainable, and responsible management of creation before God.

This article aims to examine the fundamental understanding of cultural mandates, the moral-ethical framework within those mandates, the relationship between cultural mandates and business ethics, and to analyze the implications for business practices in the modern world.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method based on literature data or library sources (library-based qualitative descriptive method). Through this method, the researcher intends to qualitatively examine the concept and meaning of the cultural mandate as stated in the Bible through a literature study of various bibliographic sources. Through this approach, this research also seeks to explore and uncover the moral-ethical aspects and principles within the cultural mandate and how these are then implemented in business practices, as theological ethics in business practice. This research is based on a qualitative perspective, as emphasized by Hamzah (2021), that the focus of this study is oriented towards efforts to examine, seek, delve into, discover, and present in a comprehensive and coherent description. In this context, this method is considered appropriate, as stated by Zaluchu (2020), that qualitative research methods prioritize meaning over generalization. Kristanti et al. (2023) also stated that the method was used because this study was presented descriptively and as research to find relatively-theoretical truths by referring to literature sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Cultural Mandate and Imago Dei

The cultural mandate as stated in Genesis 1:27-28 is an inseparable part of the fact that humans are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). The structure of the ideas in Genesis 1:26-28 provides very clear indications that the cultural mandate entrusted to humans (verses 27-28) is a logical consequence of their creation in the image and likeness of God (verse 26). Referring to Wright's assertion, in the Old Testament, the concept of Imago Dei not only indicates the specificity and uniqueness of human status reflecting God and as representatives of God, but also clearly emphasizes its connection with the mandate to have dominion over creation (Genesis 1:28). That both realities point to each other and cannot be separated. Whereas in the New Testament, Christ (who is the

second Adam, and as the head of the new covenant) is depicted as the perfect Imago Dei (Colossians 1:15), where the fullness of God in His identity and all His attributes/qualities are manifested in Jesus (Wright, 1992).

On the other hand, this also indicates that humans obtain the fullness of the image of God through their relationship with Christ. In other words, it can also be understood in the context of this cultural mandate, the qualifications contained in the Imago Dei, which are perfectly manifested in Jesus Christ, become the qualitative corridor and patron for the implementation of the cultural mandate in "subduing and stewarding" the earth and creation. Which then becomes an ethical-qualitative corridor for all human endeavors and work on Earth (Walton, 2015). On this basis, as Imago Dei, it is indeed impossible for humans to detach all dynamics of work on earth, including business practices, from the framework of the cultural mandate. There is no space for humans to work on this earth where the cultural mandate does not apply; if there is, it is essentially a rebellion and denial of their status and nature as imago dei.

Even so, this understanding must always be grasped at the ideal level referring to the creation of humans as the perfect image of God, before humans fell into sin. When humanity fell into sin, their entire being was tainted by sin, and the earth was cursed and affected by sin as well. The Bible also says that since then, when God looked at the earth, it was indeed corrupted, and that all human inclinations are evil (Genesis 6: 5, 11, 12). Of course, this makes the responsibility of humans to cultivate and manage creation in the qualification of Imago Dei very difficult. This can clearly be seen in its dynamics throughout the ages. This is what John Walton then emphasizes about fulfilling the call of the cultural mandate (as stated in Genesis 1:27) for sinful humans, which must be centered on Christ (Walton, 2015). Why is that, because in Christ, sinners experience the renewal and restoration of the broken image of God, and the model is Jesus Christ Himself as the perfect image of God.

Imago Dei as the Qualitative Framework of the Cultural Mandate

The creation of humans as Imago Dei is logically followed by the granting of a cultural mandate to be undertaken by humans. The qualification of Imago Dei on one hand grants humans the divine capacity to fulfill the mandate of creating, cultivating, and managing the earth and its contents. On the other hand, this also implies a fundamental truth that humans are created with divine attributes and a certain "divine capacity" to be representatives of God, carrying out the mandate to manage and cultivate creation in a divine character and divine qualifications responsibly (Walton, 2015). This only reinforces the call to manage and work on earth by reflecting God, representing His presence, character, and works. Packer et al. (2009) also emphasize that the cultural mandate entrusted to humans as representatives of God to cultivate the earth contains the demand to manage it according to God's will and purpose. This demand simultaneously serves as a framework for interpreting all forms of work and effort, as well as all practical manifestations, in accordance with God's will and for His glory (Kaiser, 1998). Humans carry out the cultural mandate through all the dynamics of their work on this earth within a qualitative framework based on fundamental values reflected in their status as Imago Dei. Thus, the entire dynamic of work in cultivating and managing the earth and creation is a manifestation of the cultural mandate carried out within a qualitative framework as imago dei/image of God.

Cultural Mandate as an Expression of Imago Dei

Looking back at the relationship between Imago Dei and the cultural mandate as mentioned above, there is also a fundamental truth that the cultural mandate is essentially an expression of Imago Dei itself. This is related to

the embodiment of Imago Dei as a special creation, as a person with the capacity for reason/intellect, morality, feelings, and will. This uniqueness allows humans to have the creative power to shape culture, build civilization, and even develop science and technology (Wright, 2004), while at the same time also encompassing the creation of ethical values, beauty, and social structures that reflect God's justice and goodness (Mouw, 2002).

From this truth, the next step in fulfilling the cultural mandate as Imago Dei has a strong implication for the management of creation, cultivating creation within the framework of divine moral-ethics, including in the business world. Ideally, in all efforts and dynamics of human work on earth, the qualitative divine values are expressed and reflected. In this context, humans as Imago Dei are called to reflect God's character in the way they manage the world. The cultural mandate is not merely a task, but also a divine calling for humans to reflect God's wisdom, love, and justice in all aspects of life (Wright, 2016). Every form of effort and business practice, without exception, embodies a calling to work as Imago Dei, representing God Himself. Thus, all human work in cultivating and managing creation becomes a "divine work" through humans. Carrying out the cultural mandate is essentially a calling to work as Imago Dei, bringing forth and manifesting the values of imago dei in life and work on this earth.

Cultural Mandate as a Manifestation of Divine Stewardship

When God commanded humans to be fruitful and multiply, and to fill and subdue the earth, it was not meant to grant the right and legitimacy to dominate and exploit. The mandate was given to humans before they fell into sin. It can be concluded here that God wants humans to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth with their descendants (who are, by the way, Imago Dei) to together manage and cultivate the earth and its contents as the image of God. Singgih emphasizes that the use of the words "subdue" and "have dominion" in the text does not point to power or domination over creation, but rather emphasizes the responsibility for maintenance and balance (Singgih, 2011). God did not hand over the earth and its contents to humans as their possession, but entrusted it to them to be managed in divine ways and character as Imago Dei. Humans, in this case, play the role of partners with God to manage creation on behalf of God responsibly before God (Wenham, 1987). The expression "have dominion... and subdue it..." does not imply an absolute right and authority for exploitation, greed, self-indulgence, and being solely results or profit-oriented. However, the statement of the text does indicate the granting of power and authority from God to humans. However, it is clear that this does not lead to full or absolute power or domination to act as one pleases and freely as one wishes, but rather a delegation of divine tasks with full responsibility as partners of God (Patora, 2019).

The fundamental spirit contained in the cultural mandate is stewardship or wise and responsible management before God. This understanding does not negate or deny the elements of "gaining profit," results, or the well-being of human life, but rather that while all efforts to "subdue and cultivate" the earth are undertaken, they are simultaneously accompanied by a moral-ethical calling in responsible management and in obedience to God's will (Middleton, 2005). The call of the cultural mandate as Imago Dei is the trust given to humans as Imago Dei to manage God's possessions in a way of divine stewardship responsibly before God. This will become clear when looking at the parallel expression of this cultural mandate in Genesis 2:15, where the mandate is stated with the terms "to keep" and "to cultivate." This expression clearly does not point to the meaning of domination and exploitation.

Ethical Aspects of the Cultural Mandate: Theological Perspectives

The cultural mandate as found in Genesis 1:28 contains a very fundamental ethical dimension for human life in carrying out its task on earth. The human task to "subdue" and "have dominion" over the earth as recorded in that verse cannot be understood as a kind of license or legitimacy to exploit, but rather as a moral responsibility as stewards of God's creation. Humans are present on Earth as representatives of God to manage creation correctly and responsibly before God. In this perspective, the cultural mandate radiates several fundamental ethical aspects that accompany the dynamics of human life and efforts in cultivating and managing God's creation.

First, the creation of humans as *Imago Dei* affirms the existence of humans as individuals who possess intellect, emotions, and will. Moreover, as *Imago Dei*, humans also possess the attributes and morality of God, as divine attributes that, to a certain extent, exist and are reflected in humans. The implication of this truth is that, as the image of God, humans are called to reflect His attributes and morality in all the dynamics of their daily activities and management of creation, including in their work. As personal beings endowed with the capacity for reason, emotion, and will, humans, as bearers of the cultural mandate, are required to use their creative abilities in beneficial innovations. This can be realized in various forms of inventions, developments, and various creative-innovative actions in various fields of life, including in various business sectors (Wright, 2024). However, it must always be noted that the creative task within this cultural mandate is simultaneously accompanied by the values and characteristics of being "representatives of God," who are present on earth as God's representatives to care for the earth (Crouch, 2008). As emphasized by Cosden, creative tasks, including innovation and all forms of development efforts in business, must adhere to moral principles and not sacrifice ethical values for the sake of profit orientation (Cosden, 2024).

Second, the position of humans as "representatives of God" requires humans to manifest God's attributes and morality in all their creative dynamics and works. Practically, as representatives of God, humans demonstrate and practice God's attributes and morals in all their work dynamics and endeavors on earth (Middleton, 2005). In the business world, this can be realized through all forms of efforts in "striving and managing" that are committed to and support sustainability, such as renewable energy, environmentally friendly product design, and maintaining continuity and balance for the entities of life on earth. The embodiment of this position is also evident in the call for integrity in all forms of economic practice. Specifically in the business world, this is evident in business practices conducted with honesty, sincerity, without deception or forgery, without fraud, accountable to the truth, respecting agreements, as a reflection of God's own nature and morality. In other words, the principle is an economic behavior that is characterized by integrity in truth and divine moral-ethics (Bouma-Prediger, 2001).

Third, the cultural mandate given to humans places them in relation with others in collectively "cultivating and managing" creation, and becoming part of the effort to strive for goodness/blessing for life, even for other creations. Wright emphasizes that the cultural mandate explicitly states the dimension of socio-ethical responsibility towards others, both in the form of protection, social justice, welfare, and bringing about shalom (Wright, 2006). This dimension of the cultural mandate is also commonly known as social responsibility, which must be concretely implemented in human life and work on earth, of course, including in business practices (Volf, 1996). Jacques Ellul (1954) in *The Technological Society* reminds us that economic and technological development often neglects this social responsibility, or if not neglecting, does not take it seriously in its implementation. Sometimes, the profit-centered orientation and the rationale of efficiency in business practices cause the social responsibility mandated by this culture to be neglected.

The values contained in this mandate emphasize work ethics and human efforts that are not solely aimed at seeking profit. In this context, all fields of work, including business, involve socio-ethical responsibilities towards others. Therefore, business activities within it carry a calling to serve others, becoming a blessing and benefit to others. In the framework of the ethical values of the cultural mandate, business should "glorify" human dignity and not distort human values. Business becomes a means of realizing and expanding the value of social justice for humanity (Velasquez, 2014). Included in it are fair treatment for employees or all related parties, attention to employee welfare, commitment to positive impact and the expansion of benefits for the surrounding community, and even the Earth (Novak, 1996).

Fourth, in the context of the cultural mandate, all forms of "working and managing" the earth (including business activities) inherently carry a responsibility towards other creations. This is also emphasized in Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Business, with all its goals and dynamic forms in practice, must not neglect the responsibilities of its actors towards other creations. Within the corridor of this cultural mandate, the ethical values upheld in business practices are very clear: paying attention to, preserving, and striving for the continuity of creation; not disturbing the balance of the ecosystem, committing to and striving for good ecological continuity; preventing and avoiding destructive impacts, treating and using resources and elements of creation wisely and responsibly (Wright, 2004). As emphasized by Hapsarini and Pige, the understanding of the cultural mandate and its implementation can never be separated from constructive efforts with full commitment to preserving and caring for the environment and the continuity of creation (Hapsarini & Pige, 2021).

Wilkinson (1991) refers to the ethical dimension of the cultural mandate in this context as placing humans in the position of guardians of the environment and responsible for the sustainability of the planet Earth. Although Wilkinson's statement may seem excessive, it is certainly understandable that his line of thinking is that humans are the parties who have a key role and position in this matter. Referring to Psalm 24:1, all forms of resource management and utilization must adhere to the principles of sustainability, maintaining ecosystem balance, and environmental preservation as a form of responsibility to God, the owner of all creation (Richards, 2009).

Implementation of Cultural Mandate in Business Ethics

In the Christian faith, it is understood that ethics in its most fundamental sense is essentially theological ethics, or in short, the ethics of God Himself. Lehman, in his book *Ethics in a Christian Contexts* as quoted by Marisi et al. (2021), states that in general, theological ethics can be defined as ethics that is based on theological presuppositions, in this case sourced from the Bible. If we remember that humans have fallen into sin, and that everything produced by humans and everything in this world, besides being relative, is also tainted by sin. This fact leads to the realization that humans and everything in this world cannot be made the moral-ethical standard. That is why John Frame (2008) states that true ethics (Christian ethics) is essentially divine ethics, sourced and grounded in God's moral and truth standards, in God's justice, in God's holiness, in God's love, in God's own character. Of course, in its implementation in practice, this does not refer to a series of legalistic moral-ethical rules, but rather how life with all its dynamic works on earth (including in business practices) expresses God's truth and morality (Wright, 2011).

This statement leads to a fundamental awareness that in a world and humanity that have fallen into sin, ethics must be built and anchored in the truth of God and His word. There is no neutral zone in this matter, including the

business world, because everything is before God and in a position to be accountable before God. This call becomes a challenging task, especially in the business world. It is not uncommon for business practices to lead to situations filled with tension with this divine ethical principle, or even to conflict with it. In the context of Genesis 1:27, business ethics within the framework of the cultural mandate can be understood as a moral responsibility to act as the image of God in accordance with God's values, attributes, and morality, to fulfill the calling to work, including in the business world, centered on God's moral-ethics.

If this principle is then drawn out in its ethical implications in business practice, it is clear that business is not only viewed from an economic profit perspective, but more than that, it is also seen as a spiritual calling. Proverbs 11:1 states, "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight." Implicitly, this statement clearly shows that business activities are spiritual activities in the eyes of God. This principle highlights the importance of integrity in all economic activities. That there is no dualism in the dynamics of life in the presence of God. There is no separation, whether in areas or works, that there are areas and works categorized as secular and others as spiritual. What exists is divine integrity in every dynamic of effort and work, including business practices.

The cultural mandate provides a strong theological foundation for shaping business ethics in the modern context. Through the principles of creation stewardship, social justice, and innovation, business actors can contribute to human welfare and environmental sustainability. By integrating the cultural mandate into business practices, all business activities can become agents of positive change that reflect God's love and will in the economic world. The ethical aspect of the cultural mandate provides a solid theological foundation to address social, economic, and ecological challenges. With responsibility towards creation, social justice, and integrity in work, the cultural mandate is not only a spiritual guideline but also a practical tool for building a more just and sustainable world. In a global context, the cultural mandate invites all humans to take on the role of faithful stewards in caring for the earth for the well-being of all of God's creation.

The ethical implications of the cultural mandate in business behavior go beyond the pursuit of profit, as they add value to business practices and profit itself. This mandate provides a moral foundation for building businesses that focus on responsibility towards creation, respect for human dignity, and long-term sustainability. By integrating the values of the cultural mandate, businesses can become agents of positive change, reflecting God's love and justice in economic activities. The integration of the ethical values of this cultural mandate is not only at the level of concepts or slogans but, more importantly, in business practices. As emphasized by Bonhoeffer, ethics demands real actions in practice (Bonhoeffer, 1995). However, there is a close correlation between the adoption/agreement of these values within the business corridor and business practices that genuinely integrate these values. However, as is often encountered, there are problems or obstacles in truly integrating the values believed in (for example, the ethical values of this cultural mandate) into practice. It is not uncommon to find a disparity between the values believed in and their manifestation in practice.

The ethical and practical implementation of the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:27 is very important for responsible business behavior. On the other hand, if viewed qualitatively, business practices must understand that long-term success does not only depend on financial profits but also on the social and environmental impact of their operations. By embracing and applying ethical values, implementing social responsibility, and innovating in business practices within the corridors of divine ethics, businesses/companies can create sustainable value for all those associated with them, as well as have a positive impact. In this context, business is not only oriented towards

profit and the welfare of its actors, but more than that, it is part of the complete tapestry of life and work as an embodiment of the values of Imago Dei and the calling to fulfill the mandate for the glory of God.

Basically, the values contained in this cultural mandate serve as a theological framework to guide and shape ethical behavior in business practices according to God's will, based on God's own character and morality. In this direction, the cultural mandate is not only a (formal) spiritual guideline but also a practical tool to genuinely build hope for a more just, humane, and sustainable world, including through business practices. In a broader context, the cultural mandate invites all humans to take a real role as faithful stewards in caring for, cultivating, and managing the earth for the sustainability and well-being of all of God's creation.

CONCLUSION

The cultural mandate, as stated in Genesis 1:27-28, affirms humanity's calling as God's image-bearers to "subdue" and "have dominion" over the earth, which is understood as a divine mandate entrusted to humans to bear and execute the responsibility of stewardship over creation in a pattern of divine management. This mandate encompasses the "power" and responsibility to create, cultivate, maintain its sustainability, care for, preserve, and utilize it ethically and appropriately. Thus, the cultural mandate does not indicate that humans have absolute rights and power to dominate and act arbitrarily and exploit the earth and its contents. Rather, as Imago Dei, through this mandate, humans are present and work as God's representatives on earth to cultivate, preserve, and maintain creation correctly and responsibly before God, not as owners and rulers, but as God's partners to manage on God's behalf.

Thus, the cultural mandate as stated in this text serves as a theological foundation and divine moral-ethical framework for responsible stewardship of creation. The scope of "to cultivate and to manage" in this context includes all forms of creative power, all dynamics of human work and endeavor on earth, including business practices and activities. In this context, the cultural mandate becomes a foundation that provides a moral-ethical framework for humans to work on earth.

A logical consequence of this cultural mandate is the call to integrate and tangibly implement the core values of this mandate into all dynamics of work on earth. More specifically, referring to the topic of this research, it is to integrate and implement the values of this cultural mandate into business activities and practices, becoming divine ethics (theological ethics) in business. The cultural mandate becomes the theological foundation for establishing fundamental moral principles that are then applied in various business activities. That business practices are not solely oriented towards results and profits, but within the moral-ethical framework of the cultural mandate, all dynamics of business activities must be carried out and accountable in accordance with God's own morality and character. At the same time, all business activities also bear socio-ethical responsibilities, responsibilities towards other creations, and responsibilities to maintain and preserve life on earth sustainably and balanced.

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