

The
REFLECTIVE
EXECUTIVE

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EMILIE GRIFFIN

The
REFLECTIVE
EXECUTIVE

*A Spirituality of
Business and Enterprise*

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A Spirituality of Business and Enterprise
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*for my mother
Helen Russell Dietrich
and my grandmother
Lucy Powell Russell
mentors in spirituality and enterprise
and for my father-in-law
Henry Francis Griffin I
who believed in Wall Street*

CONTENTS

To the Reader	9
1 • EFFECTIVENESS	13
2 • TIME	40
3 • CONTRIBUTION	61
4 • BUILDING ON STRENGTH	76
5 • FIRST THINGS FIRST	102
6 • DECISION MAKING	117
7 • WEIGHING FAILURE AND SUCCESS	126
8 • LORD OF THE MARKETPLACE	145
THEMES FOR REFLECTION	170
Notes	172
Selected Bibliography	178

TO THE READER

I remember, somewhat, how I crossed over the thin rope bridge between the creative arts and commerce. What day it was I can't remember, but something about my first visit to New York, at nineteen, laid open for me a vision of that city as a pulsating center of life, teeming with hope and opportunity. Later on—when it was I scarcely know—I began to bridge another gap: the seeming chasm between faith-experience and the marketplace.

If God is one, if God is loving, if God is everywhere, why this gap? In fact, the gap is within us, in our divided hearts, in our splintered understanding. This book—and the talks and lectures that have given rise to it—are meant as simple faith-statements. In these chapters I mean to ex-

press a whole, unified vision of who we are in God's sight and what we can become.

In November 1989 I was invited to speak to a new group of managers and leaders, called together as the Business Vocation Conference. In that setting I was able to learn—all at once, and most surprisingly—how many others shared the vision I was there to express.

Since that eventful meeting in Chicago, the group has evolved into a focused national effort under the auspices of the Woodstock Theological Center in Washington. To all those in this significant enterprise I say thanks. I'm especially grateful for encouragements from Thomas Bausch, dean of the Business School at Marquette University; James Connor, S.J., of Woodstock; Michael Flynn, now national director of the conference; Arthur Gray, president of Dreyfus Personal Management; John Haughey, S.J., and Father John Langan, S.J., thinkers and writers whose work is extensive and influential; John Stollenwerk, who heads the Allyn-Edmonds Shoe Company; and Joseph Sciortino of SYSCO, Inc., in Florida. Frank Butler of FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities, Washington) has been a strong friend and resource.

To many in the National Center for the Laity—among them Clyde Evans, John Fontana, John McDermott, Greg Pierce, and Peggy Steinfelds in particular—I say thanks. Their remarkable effort to encourage faith in the marketplace is, I think, dif-

ferent in character from other lay movements. This long-established group is good at celebrating grace in our everyday lives.

Since 1970 I have read Peter Drucker's book *The Effective Executive* often. For me this book has the force of a meditation. Between the lines in Drucker's book I find a spirituality of executive life, a faith-level not spoken aloud but still accessible. His clarity and reasonableness have been, from time to time, as strengthening to me as the Psalms.

During the 1980s I read widely in theology and looked for clues in the work of scholars to the puzzles of executive life. Among many fine teachers who have encouraged me in this process I need especially to mention Stephen J. Duffy, whose grasp of the ideas of Karl Rahner and of Paul Ricoeur have affected the flow of my thought.

Out of such sources, and my own thirty years in executive life, this book has been imagined and written. My hope is that you will find in it experience, strength, and hope for the challenges of the marketplace.

Emilie Griffin

New Orleans

1

EFFECTIVENESS

Cities are metaphors of consciousness. In and through them we see visions and dream dreams. In New York, Chicago, and London, massive economic power is felt in the roar of traffic, the howl of machinery, the tuning-fork vibrations of bridges, and the moan of tugs and barges. In search of fulfillment we rush down into subways, jounce to and from appointments on jarring, crowded buses, run to hail cabs, hurtle to airports, check in, rush to board, and wait on runways while frustrations mount. Disenchantment seizes us. Discouragement sets in. What, we wonder, are we living for? What path are we following? Sometimes, because of our disenchantment, we become

more open to reminders of a simpler way. Whirlings of clock towers and sounds of church bells—even in the heart of the metropolis—call us to reflection and inwardness. Is God with us in the marketplace? Or must we executives leave our posts in order to experience faith?

From my first office in New York City, on the thirty-seventh floor of a Fifth Avenue tower, I could look down on St. Patrick's Cathedral. It looked like a child's plaything, a toy cathedral that I could lift and carry somewhere. Something about this troubled me. Cathedrals, I felt, should be looked up to. Later, when I visited England, I saw how cathedrals can dominate landscapes. Then I understood the new power balance of twentieth-century life. Lever House and the Seagram's Building, I concluded, are our new cathedrals. The Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building are our statements of value. Dwarfing the little churches on Park Avenue and Wall Street, they have created a new ethos. These buildings are proclamations of power.

We know that power corrupts. We do well to be wary of exalting power as power. Yet in candor we should also confess that these giants of the metropolis bear witness to our dreams. The naïve beauty of these sleek, upward-soaring towers is meant to lift us up. From their new heights and vantage points we can see whole valleys and rivers stretching before us, an ocean at our feet. In these and other dazzling ways, cities embody a vision.

They are fueled by our energies, drives that are clues to God's creative power working within us. Only because of the specks in our eyes do we say that in secular matters God is absent. The truth is otherwise. Faith tells us that our God is in charge of all endeavor. Our God works everywhere.

The presence of God in daily affairs was known to the ancient Hebrews as *Shekinah*, an intense, fiery perception of holiness seen not with the naked eye but with the inner eye. Closer to our own times, new mystics, persons of learning and prayer, have seen God's presence in the world. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins tells us that the world is charged with the grandeur of God. "It will flame out, like shining from shook foil." Another mystic, the philosopher-scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, speaks to us of (jarring phrase!) *holy matter*. From clues such as these we take courage. Possibly we will also be able to grasp God's presence in the marketplace.

Perhaps, however, a healing must come first. Our blindness must be taken away, our eyes must be transformed. A curious ailment afflicts us, a terrible double-mindedness that thinks some things are pure and others impure. These things are matters of faith; *those* are matters for the world. We are trapped in a habit of mind that conceives of business as unholy. This unholiness in the marketplace, it seems, is a prophecy that generally comes true. Where shall we go to escape

this division in our lives, this gap in our understanding?

The flaw is not in God but in us. Once again we need to ask for a fresh burst of grace. When we left God out of our daily struggle, thinking we could manage without his help, when we set our agendas without him, when we built our businesses on something less than prayer, we took the chance that we would fail on the deepest possible level. When we forgot the faith of our childhood and set out to achieve things *by ourselves*, things that were either beneath God's notice or too worldly for his consideration, we made a foolish mistake. [How, precisely, in any given deal, were we planning to cut the Lord out? How, exactly, did we plan to slip things by him? Were we planning not to invite him to the meetings? Not to share the figures with him till we got things a bit farther along? Not to ask his advice because he is so overcontrolling? Were we planning to exclude him because our plans are so early-on, we don't need help? Do we, on the other hand, suppose that our projects are too small to interest him? Have we forgotten that this is the Lord who cares about the sparrow? Don't we know that this is the Lord who sees fit to forgive escalating debts?] My own sense is that we fail to include God not deliberately but through neglect. We don't so much exclude him as overlook his presence in the marketplace. God is the awkward, unfashionable outsider, the unwelcome guest. His dress is not

contemporary; he is oblivious to the latest style. In our mind-picture he is painted by Michelangelo. All very well for the nineteenth century, but it will not do for us.

Intimacy with God is the simple truth that earlier, more hopeful generations knew. Prayer, unself-conscious friendship with God, is the stuff from which they once shaped businesses, skyscrapers, cities, and nations. Now the question nags at us. Where will we find this new power of vision, to see God in the marketplace?

Manhattan's towers rise as a clear sign of hope for the heroine of the film *Working Girl* as she rides the Staten Island ferry to her menial job on Wall Street. Director Mike Nichols speaks with wit and irony in this contemporary fairy tale, no more than a Horatio Alger story turned inside out. What enlightens us in the film, however, is neither the story nor its message, but Manhattan itself: civilization itself. That image of the metropolis, the skyline of lower Manhattan, rising in sunlight as the camera plunges across New York harbor, is a city seen in dreams, an image of perfection and desire. That picture stays with us long after the rest of the film has faded away.

The bright vision is underscored with a nearly biblical message. Carly Simon sings God's *fiat*, she asks creation to be. She asks rivers to run, dreamers to wake the nation. She heralds the sight of cities bathed in morning light. Sons and daughters of the morning arise. They are filled with

hope and longing. The imagery is both American and biblical. If Nichols meant to be ironic, his irony has been swamped with deeper, archetypal meaning. For anyone conversant with Scripture the meaning is clear. What is revealed in the marketplace is a mystical vision: that of the New Jerusalem. Looking with secular eyes, one sees nothing more than steel and concrete, trash-filled streets, escalating poverty and homelessness, society out of control. But with eyes transformed by a biblical vision, one can see the face of God through the power of Manhattan, the splendor of the East River, Hudson, Harlem, in the singing bridges, the haze over Brooklyn and Queens. The metaphor of the metropolis, be it London or Chicago or Detroit, whether the vastness of Los Angeles or Miami, shows God present in ways seen only with the eyes of faith. Silver cities rise. Your sons and daughters sing the greatest song.

God is here! He is actually present! It is not beneath him to dwell on the Staten Island ferry, heading for Lower Manhattan. He is willing to descend with us into the underground chambers of the subway, to be with us in discomfort, boredom, alienation. He accompanies us to the boardroom. He attends the year-end meeting. In the community formed by us, by colleagues, by purchasers, buyers and sellers, customers satisfied and unsatisfied, he is present, bearing our sorrows, acquainted with grief.