

Corporate Social Responsibility in Christian Ethics and Renaissance Humanism

Bassel Hisham Abou Chacra

Islamic University Of Lebanon, Email: - bassel.aboushakra94@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT:

The Christian perspective on ethical issues of corporate social responsibility is based on a humanist understanding of economic life in the Renaissance. It treats companies as social actors who can affect the dignity of workers, the welfare of consumers, the stability of the community, the protection of the environment, public trust and sustainable development, rather than just profit-seeking entities. Christian ethics provides a moral foundation which brings human dignity, social justice, love in truth and the common good before the rule of wealth, capital or market power. Economic activity is acknowledged but it is required to benefit the person and society and not to turn people into inputs for economic production, consumers into instruments for economic production, or communities into means for generating profit. Reason, conscience, responsible freedom, civil order, cooperation, and public welfare are the supports for this foundation imparted by renaissance humanism. Corporate freedom is not absolute private power, it is only when it is regulated by the law, moral, responsibility of stakeholders and accountability. The authors claim that CSR extends beyond the realm of charity, reputation management and legal compliance. It will require businesses to embed ethical considerations in their profit-making activities, governance, disclosure, employment practices, environmental practice and stakeholder communication. A Christian-humanist definition of CSR only recognizes the economic power of the firm and views its success as tied to human flourishing and sustainable civilizational progress. The study demonstrates that vulnerable groups should be protected, human dignity respected, transparency promoted and the social and ecological conditions that enable business should be preserved, all of which are elements of responsible companies. Within this context, CSR is a moral way of engaging in society, maintaining the rule of law and social stability in the long-term that is effective in achieving business success.

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1. Introduction

In the present days, corporate social responsibility has become more significant as the companies are

no longer viewed as standalone profit making organizations. Companies are actors in the legal,

economic and social sphere which impact upon workers, consumers, shareholders, communities, public authorities, the environment and the sustainable development. They are legally existed by the society and function with the support of social resources and markets, labour, infrastructure and public confidence. Corporate activity is therefore not to be evaluated solely on profitability and according to the legal framework. It is also required to be assessed in the light of ethical responsibility, human dignity, justice and public good.

In particular, the Christian and humanist basis of corporate social responsibility is important in this issue. In the history of Christianity, economic issues have always been regarded as moral issues. The concepts of wealth, exchange, labour and production do not get rejected, but they must be subordinate to human dignity and social justice. The economy should be around the person and the community, not money, capital or profit. This relates to the statement of Marek and Jabłoński (2021), who frame business leadership in relation to a concern for the common good, through the lens of Catholic social teaching.

In this context CSR is not just about philanthropy or public relations. It is a moral obligation that influences how companies make money, run businesses, hire, make products, use resources and relate to society. The Christian ethos is that the human person shall not be made an instrument of production or a target of consumption. The worker, the customer and the community is carriers of dignity. McVea and Naughton (2021) also demonstrate that Catholic social teaching has the potential to enhance social entrepreneurship by urging economic action to be motivated by solidarity and social purpose.

In addition, there is the concern for justice in economic life, which is also a theme in Christian social thought. It contains moral condemnation of greed, usury, money power and the exploitation of laborers. The worries indicate that business has its bounds when it endangers human welfare. This is in line with the work of Melé (2022), which introduces the Catholic social teaching as a base for business ethics. This is because the moral base

for CSR is as important as the external regulation, as CSR cannot solely rely on the latter to guide the implementation of this concept.

In addition to Christian ethics, corporate responsibility has another basis, in the form of Renaissance humanism. It places emphasis on conscience, reason, responsible freedom and the social contract. Human beings have evolved from natural self-interest to civil life, by taking on duties, laws, and moral limitations. This movement is directly applicable to the companies because corporate freedom is only legitimate if exercised in the conditions of civil society. Katamba et al. (2024) is a study on the role of humanism as an institutional motivator of CSR activities, and it is generally believed that humanistic values can influence the behavior of CSR in an organization.

A Christian-humanist perspective also assists an understanding of the difference between CSR and limited charity. Corporate responsibility requires to look at the moral character of corporate practices itself, whereas charity takes care of relieving the suffering. A company can be a charitable institution and a slave-driver and a con man and a polluter and yet be a charitable institution. A company can be a charitable institution and a slave driver and a con man and a polluter and yet be a charitable institution. This sort of behaviour does not meet the ethical content of responsibility. Theories of moral values need to be translated into organizational forms and practices in order to make Catholic social teaching's business principles manifest in the fourth sector as described in Asi (2025).

The economic power can either strengthen or destroy civilization; this is why CSR is needed. Business, without conscience, can worsen inequality, destruction of the environment and social unrest. They can play a role in development and social harmony when they are guided in a dignified, just and public good manner. In the emerging discourse of the human-centered organization, Townsend and Romme (2024) suggest a perspective that is similar to that of a company organized around persons as opposed to capital.

The idea of the public good is thus key. There is a

need for companies to balance the private interest with the welfare of the community that sustains them, in order to have a corporate responsibility. Mandray et al. (2025) have differentiated between notions of the common good as a social good, and call for the common good as a managerial good.

It's a human-centered approach that leads to sustainability. Social responsibility links with sustainable development, protecting the society and concern for future generations. Budini (2024) associates sustainability with the humanistic basis and reiterates that sustainable business should be based on respect for human beings and the common world. In light of this, this article will explore the moral paradigm of corporate social responsibility as a Christian ethical principle and the Renaissance humanist principle of human dignity, conscience, responsible freedom, justice and the public good as a moral framework for corporate activity.

2. Corporate Power and the Search for Ethical Responsibility

It's no longer possible to view the modern company as a private commercial entity established for profit-making purposes. They are legal, economic and social entities that impact workers, consumers, shareholders, communities, public institutions, natural resources and sustainable development. Their legal personality is provided by the society and their continuity relies

on the labour, markets, infrastructure, public confidence and environmental resources. The requirements of this role are considerable, whereas it provides companies with a lot of power. Profits or formal legitimacy are therefore not the only criteria used to determine corporate activity, but also the impact on human dignity, the common good and social welfare.

With the rise of commercial enterprises and multinational firms, it has become more imperative than ever to make an ethical evaluation. Corporate decisions can lead to job creation, production, innovation and economic development, but can also result in exploitation, injustice, consumer deception, environmental damage and social unrest. The community is the basis of their lives, and the law and social order are important to the companies. The only way for corporate power to be legitimate is when it is accompanied by responsibilities to those impacted by corporate action. This encompasses workers who rely on fair employment and their workers' rights, consumers who rely on honesty and safety, communities that suffer social and environmental impacts, and future generations who rely on responsible resource use. The social impact and ethical risk that are created by corporate power can be converted into ethical corporate social responsibility through human dignity, the protection of vulnerable groups, fraternity and accountability as illustrated in Figure 1.

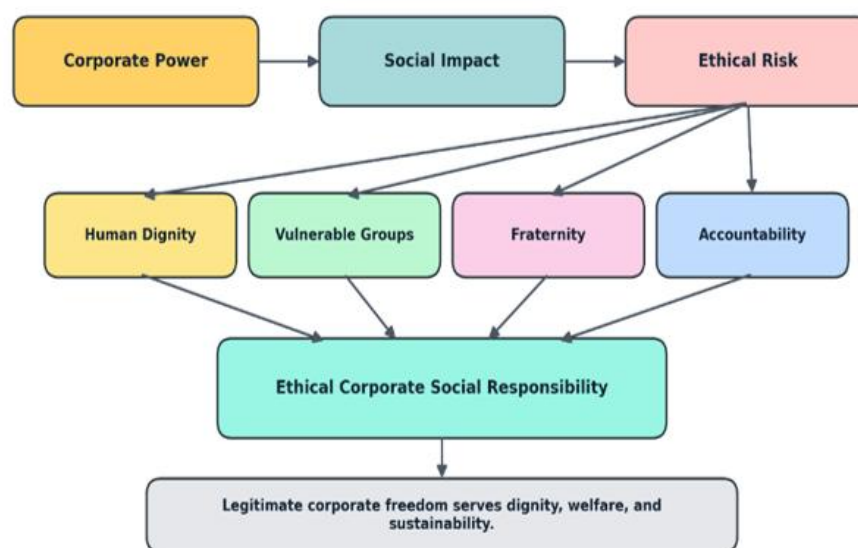


Figure 1. Corporate Power, Ethical Risk, and the Formation of Responsible CSR

3. Christian Ethics and the Humanization of Economic Activity

The dignity of the human person is the starting point to an approach to corporate responsibility that takes the human person as the starting point. Human dignity is considered by Huijser and Nullens (2024) the core of humanistic management. This reaffirms the notion that the workers should not be reduced to mere inputs, the consumer should not be treated as a mere target of the market and the community should not be merely considered as a place for profit. It is at this intersection that Christian ethics and the Renaissance humanism come together, as both traditions have at their core the human person, conscience, and moral responsibility. The beginning of corporate responsibility is when economic activity is not structured around the pursuit of gain, but of protection of persons.

Breaking the law is not sufficient, but is also part of the responsibility. It is entirely possible for a company to be legally compliant and engage in actions which erode trust, disadvantage vulnerable groups, and/or harm the environment. CSR is thus broader than the legal duty. It forces companies to seriously consider the ethical and social implications of their decisions, particularly when it involves decisions that could lead to injustice or harm, just because it is profit-driven. Companies start their responsibility responsibilities where they see that there is a moral obligation for legal permission. All of this requires, however, that corporate behavior be guided by justice and transparency, by good faith and by public welfare and human dignity.

Christian ethics reinforces this trend from compliance to accountability. In 2023, McKinney speaks about the "preferential option for the poor," which he refers to as an "applied principle of Catholic social teaching. This is relevant because businesses need to think about what they do and how they impact weaker groups, such as those that earn low wages, and those that are poor consumers or vulnerable to economic or environmental damage from the business. In Fratelli Tutti (2020), Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of fraternity, social friendship and

the rejection of indifference. This moral perspective is what makes the idea that the economy should be conducted according to the rule of private interest or selfishness seem wrong.

The ethical state, in which corporate liberality and freedom become acceptable to human dignity, protection of the vulnerable, public welfare and sustainable civilizational development is called corporate social responsibility. It turns economic power into responsible citizenship, not exclusive and beyond moral constraints.

3.1 Human Dignity above Wealth and Profit

The emphasis of the Christian ethics on the dignity of the person over wealth, capital and profit is the foundation for the human side of CSR in corporations. Economic activity, as such, is not condemned by Christian teaching but economic activity is condemned when money becomes the master of life. Wealth should be used in a manner that is beneficial to the human and social good and not be used to the detriment of workers, consumers and communities. The principle is directly relevant in the context of corporate responsibility as companies can seek profits, but cannot be doing only that when they have an impact on human welfare. This view does not allow one to assess a company's worth by its production, growth or return on investment alone. It also needs to be assessed on the basis of respect for the dignity of the worker, respect for consumers, lack of exploitation and benefit for the community. The teaching of the Christian faith is seen as a moral statement with economic aspects – witnessing that economic reality and moral responsibility go hand in hand. Responsibility is an ethical value and a company which sees only people as labour inputs or market targets does not satisfy this ethical value. In agreement with this other perspective, Freeman et al. (2020) demonstrate that the stakeholder theory must recognise the conflicts between corporate actions and the demands of stakeholders as a result of corporate activities.

3.2 Social Justice and the Moral Economy

Social justice is the Christian basis of CSR as well.

Economic concern has always been a fundamental concern of Christians, particularly when the economy brings oppression and injustice, poverty or the domination of capital over human welfare. Christian social thinking has to do with fair treatment, human work, social protection and struggle against economic power that misappropriates social resources and undermines human dignity. So therefore justice has to be considered in business activities in addition to efficiency.

Companies have to accept that their decisions has an impact on the social balance in this moral economy. Corporate activity is not ethically valid if wages are unfair, if working conditions are harmful, if consumers are misled or if communities are exposed to environmental damage, even if the activity is profitable. The translation from theory into practice of business ethics and CSR is a topic that Alexiadou (2023) has highlighted.

This principle can be applied to human rights and due diligence as well. It's the duty of the business to detect and forestall hurt before it transforms into a social harm. The Christian moral economy is not just about preventing harm, it's also about empowering people and communities to live in a dignified way, and a capability approach can help to reimagine human rights due diligence. Human rights due diligence is not just about avoiding harm, it's also about enabling persons and communities to live in a dignified way, and a capability approach can help to reimagine human rights due diligence. So, from this perspective, CSR is a concrete means of justice, it is keeping companies to account for the actual situation of human life.

3.3 Love in Truth and the Common Good

Love is not only considered a private feeling but also the basis of duties and responsibilities in social, economic and political life. But love must be based on truth, if it is not, it may turn to sentiment without justice or responsibility. Truth guides love in direction, discipline and in public. In the context of business, this translates to a corporate responsibility that goes beyond the level of symbolic charity and emotional words. It has to

be manifested in the integrity of behavior and fair treatment, in responsibility and care for the common good.

Companies must recognize that society is not merely an outside environment for business to profit from it, but the human environment in which business is possible. Corporate decisions should thus bring about social trust, environmental care and sustainable development. Sabino (2020) relates the "caring for the common home" to ecological conversion as an aid: economic activity needs to take into account environmental and social implications. Business has a duty to not inflict harm today, but also to ensure the conditions of life for future generations.

This Christian perspective also relates responsibility to systemic change. Waddock (2020) states that systemic business transformation is needed for sustainability. This helps to make a point that CSR is not just about giving back, public relations, or social work every now and then. A love-filled company must make its common practice more love and truth in order to make good profit, good government, good labour relations, environmental practice, and stakeholder engagement all human-dignity and public-welfare friendly. So, Christian ethics makes economic activity human when it says that wealth should be for people, justice should be the guide to business and love should be shown in the form of a responsible attitude toward people that is truthful.

4. Renaissance Humanism and the Ethics of Responsible Freedom

4.1 Human Conscience as a Limit on Power

Corporate social responsibility is philosophically grounded in renaissance humanism which emphasizes conscience, reason, and moral responsibility in social life. It clarifies the fact that social responsibility is not only an obligation imposed by external law, but it is also a responsibility which comes from the internal sense of good or evil in individuals and institutions that restrains them from using power in an inappropriate manner. A conscience in this way becomes an essential constraint of economic, technological and institutional power. Where financial resources, organizational skills and social

influence meet, companies can have an impact on workers, consumers, communities and the environment. When it comes to giving people power without conscience, it could be harmful even if it is commercially successful.

The beginning of corporate responsibility is when economic activity is driven by moral awareness. Renaissance humanism teaches that man is not a powerless subject of force; that he is a rational and moral person, who can make judgments, take responsibility and exercise self-restraint. In the business context, it means companies should not be given the power to pursue profit in an unlimited fashion, under the guise of business freedom. They should be judged by the principles of justice and dignity, public welfare, and harm done to others. Barney and Harrison (2020) suggest that stakeholder theory is at a pivotal moment and this makes it important to take a different perspective on business by considering the claims of those stakeholders whose lives are shaped by the business's activity.

4.2 Civil Freedom, Law, and the Social Contract

It draws a link between the movement from natural liberty to civil life and responsible freedom. Natural freedom might imply the desire to pursue individual interest unrestrained, but civil freedom is a different concept; it will be organized by law, duty and the common good. The social contract is a shift from a freedom of private desire to a freedom to take responsibility in society. This idea is relevant for the corporate responsibility due to the existence of the freedom enjoyed by the companies such as freedom to own property, enter contract, hire people, compete in the markets, and make profits. Freeoms are, however, restricted to

a lawful and social system. Duties toward that order can not be separated from them.

There must, therefore, be a law, morality and public interest that restricts the freedom of the corporations. A company that enjoys the protection of the law, access to the market and infrastructure, public trust and confidence, shouldn't behave like it lives outside society. It stresses the link between rights and responsibilities, and that rights are given to society, a corresponding responsibility follows. This principle is based on the reasoning of the social contract: "private interest" is legitimate only if it does not destroy the conditions of common life. According to the Dmytriyev et al. (2021), the connection between stakeholder theory and corporate social responsibility is that in order to achieve CSR, it is necessary to think about social issues in management. This reinforces the notion that the responsibility of corporations to freedom should be measured in relation to the impact on stakeholders and society.

Civil responsibility is also a transformation of ownership. Property and capital is legally protected, but legal protection does not necessarily lead to moral obligations. Corporate ownership needs to be done in a manner that is respectful of workers, consumers, communities, natural resources and future generations. In this understanding, the social contract serves as a solid base for CSR: Companies can seek profit, but in a context of responsibility, social trust and public benefit. Table 1 presents the concepts of responsible corporate freedom as a result of the humanism of Renaissance. The concepts of responsible corporate freedom as a result of humanism of Renaissance can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Ethical Foundations of Responsible Corporate Freedom in Renaissance Humanism

Key Area	Core Idea	Ethical Relevance
Human conscience	Conscience limits misuse of corporate power.	Responsibility begins with moral awareness, not only external control.
Stakeholder claims	Business decisions affect groups beyond shareholders.	Corporate power must consider workers, consumers, communities, and society.
Responsible freedom	Freedom is not unlimited private desire.	Corporate freedom becomes legitimate when

		linked with public duty.
Social contract	Rights granted by society create duties toward society.	Companies must not weaken the order that sustains them.
CSR and stakeholders	CSR connects business conduct with social issues in management.	Decisions should be evaluated through stakeholder effects.
Public welfare	Companies depend on law, labour, consumers, resources, and stability.	Business must protect the conditions that make it possible.
Sustainability clarity	CSR must connect clearly with sustainability and development.	Responsibility should not remain vague goodwill.
CSR performance	CSR can support performance when integrated into practice.	Responsible conduct guides business success toward social usefulness.

4.3 Cooperation, Public Welfare, and Civil Society

Renaissance humanism also supports corporate responsibility through the idea that society is built on cooperation and mutual responsibility. It presents social life as a system in which individuals and institutions depend on one another. No company can function without civil

society. It depends on law, labour, consumers, education, transport, natural resources, public institutions, and social stability. Therefore, companies must not weaken the very conditions that sustain them. Corporate activity becomes irresponsible when it damages trust, deepens inequality, exploits workers, harms the environment, or places private gain above social welfare.

Public welfare is central to this understanding. Corporate social responsibility requires companies to recognize that business success and social stability are connected. A company that ignores social consequences may create short-term financial benefit but long-term social harm. Sheehy and Farneti (2021) distinguish corporate social responsibility, sustainability, sustainable development, and corporate sustainability, showing that responsible business must be conceptually clear and socially grounded.

Cooperation also gives CSR practical meaning. Companies participate in society by creating employment, producing goods, paying taxes, innovating, protecting resources, and responding to stakeholder expectations. However,

participation becomes ethical only when it respects the common conditions of civil life. Lu et al. (2020), through a modified Carroll's pyramid of CSR, show that responsibility can enhance organizational performance, especially when social responsibility is integrated into business practice. This supports the idea that CSR is not opposed to corporate success; rather, it guides success toward social usefulness.

Thus, Renaissance humanism frames CSR as the ethics of responsible freedom. Conscience limits the misuse of power, law transforms private freedom into civil responsibility, and cooperation links corporate activity with public welfare. A company becomes socially responsible when it recognizes that its freedom is not a privilege detached from society, but a duty-bearing participation in civil life. In this framework, CSR protects both business legitimacy and social continuity by ensuring that corporate power serves human dignity, social trust, and sustainable development.

5. Toward a Christian-Humanist Model of Corporate Responsibility

5.1 Protecting the Human Person in Corporate Life

The protection of the human person is the starting point for a Christian-humanist concept of corporate responsibility. In Christian ethics, the emphasis is on dignity not wealth, whereas the Renaissance humanism is on reason, conscience and responsible freedom. These foundations stand

in solidarity against any corporate use of workers, consumers or communities as means of production, consumption or profit. The worker is not only a source of labour, the consumer is not just a prospective target in the market and society is not only an arena for business expansion. The activities of the companies should be geared towards human dignity and community welfare.

This model is not about giving up profits; it's about not allowing profits to be the sole metric of corporate worth. A responsible company should consider if its policies will benefit its employees, the consumer, not exploit anyone and benefit social welfare. When responsibility is implemented into the business practice, a modified CSR pyramid can facilitate the organizational performance improvement in SMEs, according to Lu et al. (2020). This confirms the importance of protecting the human person as a means of reinforcing performance, by providing it with ethical direction.

5.2 Limiting Economic Power through Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility is a moral cap on economic power. Capital, legal personality, organizational capacity, market influence and access to social resources are in the hands of companies. If the powers are used beyond moral boundaries they can create inequalities, damage the environment, unfair labour practices, misdisclosure, or public trust. Profit, wealth and market freedom must be accompanied by justice, accountability, transparency and public good in a Christian-humanist framework.

This balance is rooted in the ethical principles that are translated into decision-making, supervision, disclosure and accountability through corporate governance. According to Hussain et al. (2018), corporate governance is related to sustainability performance via the triple bottom line. This demonstrates that responsibility needs to be part of the governance systems and not a charity. A company becomes responsible when it shows concern in social, environmental and economic consequences of the actions of its leadership and operations.

Transparency reinforces responsibility as ethical claims are open for examination by stakeholders.

Both Mahmood et al. (2018) and Fatemi et al. (2018) demonstrate the relationship between disclosure and sustainability disclosure, and between disclosure and ESG performance and firm value, respectively. Disclosure is not only a technical report, it's a moral report card. In addition, Alharasis (2025) demonstrates that the incentive for managers could have an impact on sustainability reporting, such that responsible disclosure needs to be both truthful and linked with actual conduct.

5.3 Corporate Responsibility and Sustainable Civilizational Development

Corporate responsibility is a part of Sustainable Civilizational Development. Exploitation, environmental abuse, inequality, and distrust will not ensure the preservation of society if it accompanies economic growth. A responsible company is a company that not only produces and profits, but also ensures stability of the society, protection of the environment, fair relations and the dignity of future generations. Sustainability is taken up not just as a managerial approach but a moral and civilizational obligation.

It is an understanding that links Christian engagement with the common good with humanist engagement with civil society. Businesses are important to upholding public confidence, law, labour, infrastructure and natural resources and therefore they must contribute to sustaining the conditions on which business is possible. According to Ahn (2024), the 2023 OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises focus on responsible business conduct and sustainable development, due diligence and respect for stakeholders. Thus, a Christian-humanist approach to CSR is not an anti-profit or anti-freedom stance, but one that holds them to account to work within the framework of human dignity, transparency, accountability and public welfare.

6. Conclusion

Christian ethics and Renaissance humanism offer a view of corporate social responsibility based in humanism, putting human dignity, conscience, justice and the public good ahead of narrow ends. Christian ethics reveals that economics is not an

end in itself, but can only be an acceptable and acceptable means to the end of the human person. Not workers, consumers, communities and society should be dominated by wealth, capital and business freedom, but rather they should be served. According to this perspective, CSR is not just about charity, reputation management, or giving in goodwill, it is about responsibility that is inherent in the manner of companies earning, governing, employing, disclosing, producing and interacting with society. Renaissance humanism builds on this foundation, with a focus on reason, conscience, responsible freedom, civil order, and cooperation. Freedom of the corporation is not unlimited private power. It is only just when used within the laws, with morality, responsibility towards stakeholders and public welfare. The existence of a company is based on social

resources, labour, markets, public trust and natural resources, and these should not be weakened. The moral constraint on economic power and the practical road to sustainable civilizational development are thus the two sides of CSR in the Christian-humanist model created in this article. A responsible company respects human dignity, cares for vulnerable groups, is transparent, respects stakeholders and contributes to social and environmental stability. So, corporate responsibility is more than just doing what is required. It is an ethical process of participation with the society, in which success in business promotes human welfare, trust and the continuity of social life.

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