

Fleecing the Sheep

Ever feel like this critter? Are we being fleeced by retailers and manufacturers in the Canadian marketplace?

Fleecing feels like a daily occurrence, given the prices we pay retailers, manufacturers, cell phone carriers, energy suppliers, gas stations, etc. What they charge is almost always higher than prices for similar goods and services in the U.S., regardless of the dollar exchange.



Following is a summary of recent reports on Canadian pricing. Pricing policies are then contrasted with Jesus' values. Finally, some ideas are offered about pricing and Jesus' values.

Are Canadians Being Fleeced?

Yes. Perceptions and experiences suggest it. Facts confirm it. The culprit is *country pricing*, used by Canadian manufacturers, so say the Retail Council of Canada's head, Diane Brisebois, and a CBC *Marketplace* report: *Country Pricing, a cause of Canada-U.S. price gaps*.

(Ref: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2013/02/07/marketplace>)

Manufacturers mark up their prices for Canadian consumption. "Multi-national brands have two different price lists...that are between 10 to 50 per cent higher than prices in the United States," says Ms. Brisebois. An example is Bayer Aspirin. It costs \$5.96 in an American Wal-Mart, and \$13.86 at a Canadian Wal-Mart. Car tires cost 32% more in Canada; ibuprofen, 70% more.

Retailers use *country pricing*. A few months ago, a multinational retailer invited marketing comments as it began opening stores in Canada. To my question about their proposed pricing, the spokesperson replied: *our merchandise will be priced 5% below the competition*.

Point: Canadians are now used to paying more for goods and services, accept it as a given, and meekly submit to being *fleeced*! Ms. Brisebois acknowledges that there may be some differences in the cost of doing business between Canada and the U.S. But, price markups of 30-50% and more are not justified.

Jesus' Values

Jesus never condemned business, making money, or wealth. The great religious, business and national leaders of the Old Testament, and many of the women who supported the Apostles' ministries, were wealthy people! So, it's not money that is a problem; it's the values people give it.



Note who is in the center of this picture.

Stockholders and managers in manufacturing and retailing should remember: this is Jesus' world, and his values must prevail. Jesus challenged greed and self-aggrandizement in all of its forms – social, religious and economic. To charge what the market will bear is a particularly egregious form of greed. It is what the infamous tax collectors did (eg., Mark 2: 15-16). Jesus and the public branded the tax collectors as sinners.

Jesus always advocated justice for everyone, grounded in loving God, neighbor, self. Justice, based in love, must extend to every person and area of life, which includes the market place.

Point: *Country pricing* is a form of charging what the market will bear. It is economic injustice. Individuals and organizations that practice it are challenging Jesus' values. We all need to remember that is Jesus' world and it is governed by his values. Those who challenge Jesus' values and commands do so at their peril.

Conclusion

Country pricing is an affront to Christ's values for life and the marketplace, and to the pocketbooks of Canadian consumers. Stockholders and managers, who control and practice this pricing, need to remember whose world this is. It is Christ's and his values govern it. *Country pricing* is indefensible, and a challenge to Christ and consumers. It must stop!

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