

## **Business that seeks the wellbeing of society**

Business has the potential to bring social reform, model justice and equality, and reduce poverty. The Church has a responsibility to support, envision and engage the business community. It means encouraging entrepreneurial activity with support and training to inspire new and faithful expressions of entrepreneurship.

## **Historical vignettes**

In the 18th century the Quakers became involved in politics and social reform. The Society of Friends became the first religious group to denounce slavery and would not permit any of their members to own slaves. In 1783 the Quakers presented the first substantial anti-slavery petition to Parliament and played a prominent role in the Anti-Slavery Society. Others joined the prison reform movement and worked for an improvement in education. Quakers also established the Peace Society that campaigned for an end to war and were also active in famine relief organisations.

In his paper "Transforming Capitalism. Entrepreneurship and the Renewal of Thrift", Peter Heslam writes that the Quaker community has more examples of successful business ventures that combine thrift and entrepreneurship than any other in the UK.<sup>1</sup> Though the Quaker community only made up 0.2% of the population, their contribution to the transformation of Britain into an industrial nation is substantial, particularly through their business ventures in the 18th and 19th centuries, such as chocolate companies (Cadbury, Fry, Rowntree and Terry), steel industry (railways) banking (Lloyds, Barclays), as well as shoes, pharmacy, chemicals and engineering. Sir Adrian Cadbury considers that the Quaker business ethic and innovative character was derived from their Christian faith. God inspired them to imagine the world anew rather than accept the status quo as they followed "the Divine Light within themselves".<sup>2</sup>

George Cadbury (1839-1922) was committed to spending time helping the less privileged: "We can do nothing of any value to God, except in acts of genuine

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<sup>1</sup> Heslam, P.S., "Transforming Capitalism. Entrepreneurship and the Renewal of Thrift", Ethics Series E156 (Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd, 2010),

<sup>2</sup> "Beliefs and Business: the experience of Quaker Companies" - a talk in the Faith Seeking Understanding series - May 2003  
<http://www.leveson.org.uk/stmarys/resources/cadbury0503.htm>, accessed 18 May 2010.

helpfulness done to our fellow men". It shaped the working conditions in the Cadbury factories and housing development for their employees, such as the Bournville Village where medical and dental care were provided by the company, as was a pension fund. Every summer, Cadbury provided food and entertainment for 25,000 children from the deprived areas of Birmingham. "I have for many years given practically the whole of my income for charitable purposes, except what is spent upon my family. Nearly all my money is invested in businesses in which I believe I can truly say the first thought of the welfare of the work people employed."<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Rowntree (1836 –1925)<sup>4</sup> was a Quaker philanthropist and businessman, perhaps best known for being a champion of social reform and the chocolate business. He was deeply interested in improving the quality of life of his employees, providing them with a library, free education, a social welfare officer, a doctor, a dentist and a pension fund. In 1904, he gave half of his money to the Rowntree trusts dedicated to social reform, which continue his philanthropic work today:

- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation funds research that seeks to understand the causes of social problems (poverty, poor housing, and other forms of social exclusion).
- Its Housing Trust manages affordable housing and care homes for the elderly and disabled.
- Its Charitable Trust works for Quaker ideals including international peace and justice.

Others followed a similar path. Jesse Boot's concern for the poor extended to selling "honest medicines" at cut prices that could be afforded by those that needed them; a concept he called "philanthropic retailing". The Dutch and English Protestant entrepreneurs lived modest lives, spearheaded trustworthy businesses and practiced philanthropy. This was rooted in their Calvinistic faith that understood the whole of life as a vocation and their work as part of the sacred space for worshipping God through deeds of love, righteous service and commercial practices. "What mattered was not worldly riches but a richness towards God expressed in gratitude, generosity and a life of virtue".<sup>5</sup> For these and many other Christian entrepreneurs it was natural that business would have a transformational effect.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/REcadbury.htm> accessed 20/5/2010.

<sup>4</sup> [www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Joseph\\_Rowntree\\_\(philanthropist\)](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Joseph_Rowntree_(philanthropist)) accessed 20/5/2010.

<sup>5</sup> Heslam, 23.

## **Enterprise for the common good**

James Featherby writes in 'The White Swan Formula: Rebuilding business and finance for the common good', "Good business will not answer the world's problems, but we will struggle to solve the problems of the world without it".<sup>6</sup> The entrepreneurial gift can be employed to create opportunities for jobs and prosperity. As the Pope said. "The creation of wealth is an inescapable moral duty". Creative contemporary examples are numerous:

### **Contemporary vignettes**

- 'Base of the Pyramid' enterprise: An understanding of enterprise that serves the 'base of the pyramid' rather than the top, pursuing the *shalom* God intended for the wider community rather than personal enrichment. A BoP enterprise aims to work with the very poorest of people, understanding their needs and aspirations in order to provide good quality, socially valuable products or services that are affordable to them. A true social enterprise will also develop products that have a social and environmental benefit and ideally create new enterprise in the developing world. For example, Toughstuff developed an affordable, lightweight, pocket-sized solar panel. The light makes reading, education and commercial productivity possible during darkness and the connecting cables enable the vital improvements in information, communications and secure banking that radios and mobile phones provide. Such enterprise also stimulates local entrepreneurship.<sup>7</sup>

- Fashion designer who use 'socially responsible' materials to hold high street companies to account on exploitation of their suppliers.

- Microcredit: Banking that is changing the world; Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank, pioneer of microcredit and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2006.

- The computer geeks whose company's profit established a film and culture renewal fund in order to invest in projects that foster human flourishing.

- A business that was restructured around the concept of mentoring; focusing equally on professional formation and production.

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<sup>6</sup> Featherby, J., 'The White Swan Formula. Rebuilding business and finance for the common good' (London: London Institute of Contemporary Society, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Culture Footprint: <http://www.eauk.org/forumforchange/culture-footprint-andrew-tanswell.cfm>

### **Seeking the *shalom***

Jeremiah instructs the people of God to seek the welfare of the society in which they live whilst in exile: to seek its wellbeing, peace and prosperity, and to pray to the Lord on its behalf (Jer. 29:7). In 588 B.C. the armies of Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and deported the majority of the Jewish population back to Babylon. While some prophets promise a speedy return, Jeremiah's letter to the exiles gives the Israelites a theological and historical framework for their experience. They would be there for generations. His counsel is to settle in for the long term: to build, plant, marry, and have children. Exile was the place where God was at work. He calls them to maintain their distinctiveness and serve the common good. The welfare of their conquerors was linked with their own.

In sketching this alternative social reality and a new imagination, Jeremiah uses the word '*shalom*'. The Jewish idea of *shalom* implies restored human relationships as well as reconciliation between God and us. Its concept is wellbeing in its entirety: social, spiritual, emotional, physical, cognitive and material. It recognises not just the person, but the whole community. Prophets inspire us to live and shape things differently and thus subvert the dominant social reality.

### **The clash of two scripts**

Christians have been given a script by God to seek *shalom*, the wellbeing, of the wider society. On the other hand, we have also been given a script by contemporary culture. The two scripts may overlap. After all, God's creation initiative is filled with affirmation ("it was good"). Our creative mandate is to be involved in the development of God's creation. In this 'world-making', people of all faiths and none hold standards of goodness, truth, justice and beauty.<sup>8</sup>

However, the two scripts also clash. We may work in a culture that prefers profit over welfare; success at the cost of integrity; or considers long working hours a sign of commitment to the job. And while business has the capacity to serve the common good, it equally holds the capacity to oppress, increase injustice and harm people and the environment.

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<sup>8</sup> Hunter, J.D., *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 231.

In his book *To Change the World*, James Davison Hunter states that the Christian community has uncritically assimilated itself to the dominant culture and way of life and has failed to give a rigorous critique. Furthermore, he considers the Christian culture itself to be too weak and to have failed to offer an alternative. He calls for a faithful presence in which Christians enact the *shalom* of God in the circumstances in which God has placed them and to actively seek it on behalf of others.

So, while Christians live in, what Brueggemann calls, ‘the dominant script of the world’, we must embrace the alternative script given by God. In Jesus’ incarnation word and world came together “through the word’s enactments – both *the fact* that God’s word is always enacted but also in *the way* his word is enacted”.<sup>9</sup>

The church needs to develop a critical theology of culture and subvert the nation’s narrative by offering an alternative: a pursuit of business that has its home in faith and virtue and is concerned with the wellbeing God intended for the wider community. David Muskett, head of undergraduate programmes at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, believes that business education should be based on the Christian principles of stewardship and a sense of vocation of business in terms of stewardship.<sup>10</sup>

### **Creative subversion**

The Church is a community of resistance, which implies a challenge to think through a constructive subversion of the frameworks of social life in every sphere. So we challenge selfish business ethics and structures that dishonour God, dehumanise people and neglect or harm creation. Subversion is creative and constructive, writes Hunter, for it is based on a “commitment to the modern world in that it envisions it differently”. “The objective is to retrieve the good to which modern institutions and ideas implicitly or explicitly aspire; to oppose those ideals and structures that undermine human flourishing, and to offer constructive alternatives for the realisation of a better way”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Brueggemann, W., *Hopeful Imagination. Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 95-96.

<sup>10</sup> Article in Time Higher Education, accessed on 18 May 2010.

[www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=411412&sectioncode=26](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=411412&sectioncode=26)

<sup>11</sup> Hunter, 234-5.

In his paper “Transforming Capitalism: Entrepreneurship and the Renewal of Thrift”, Peter Heslam states that the question of poverty alleviation needs to address the issue of wealth creation. Small and medium-sized enterprises are key creators of jobs, wealth and opportunity. Hence, he advocates “the integration of entrepreneurship, including the mindset and habits it requires, in education and in (domestic and international) economic development policy”. Entrepreneurs can create alternative businesses that subvert the dominant reality and disrupt established business models and monopolies. Joseph Schumpeter first coined the term ‘creative destruction’, as Peter Heslam recounts. “The Holy Spirit can work in and through the spirit of enterprise, helping businesses to contribute to human and environmental well-being”.

In a culture that puts self first and captures imaginations, a Christian imagination in enterprise and banking will energise the alternative economics of the kingdom. The Parable of the Talents concerns stewardship that serves God's purposes. Heslam writes, “The fearless words and actions of the first two servants, who ‘put the money to work’, reflect a God who inspires the kind of imagination, productivity and responsible risk-taking that characterise the thrift needed to convert the bareness of money into the fruitfulness of capital. Having made this conversion, which underlies all investment and entrepreneurial activity, these two servants are welcomed into God’s *shalom* economy: ‘I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness’.”

Those who are "rich in good deeds, generous and willing to share" (1Tit. 6:18) and who use their talents to develop God's creation and reflect His image in the world share their Master's happiness (Mt. 25:14-30). Once the focus is on the wellbeing of the place to which God has called us, the evaluative questions concerning ‘success’, focus upon the creation of opportunities for the hopeless; the increase of wellbeing to the lowly, the valuing of each individual in the creative process, etc. The discernment of God’s good, pleasing and perfect will for His world (Rom. 12:1f) requires a whole-life stewardship. Our corporate and individual ‘spiritual act of worship’ takes place in the everyday-ness of business life in the sanctuary that is this world.

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