

EA Hope for London Leaders Prayer Meeting

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Keynote address by Mark Greene,

Executive Director, London Institute of Contemporary Christianity www.licc.org.uk

Make a difference where they are

The Lord be with you.

Just trying to flush out the Anglicans that might have snuck in.

It's great to be in the land of Joel where, as I am wont to say, young men see visions and old men dream dreams... Sadly I suspect that puts me in the category of dreamer – though looking out today it's clear that I am not alone.

Joel has asked me to speak about Confidence in the Church:

Confidence in the Church?

but uncharacteristically he has forsaken his Caribbean cricketing heritage that favours the fast, direct, honest approach to issues and has bowled me a Doosra of bug-eyed Muralitharan guile, asking me to look at the issue from a rather unusual angle...

That is not to talk about confidence in the church from a theological, missiological or eschatological perspective but to ask:

How might **business** become more confident in the purpose and mission of the church?

Of course you might ask does it matter? And you might also ask why might it matter to you in your role in pastoral leadership living in the world's financial centre?

Now, as some of you know I have some background in advertising, something I always like to tell people since I find it builds a bond of trust very quickly... so I have some experience, even if somewhat musty with age...

Still, let me begin with a story of a business that has acquired some confidence in at least some aspects of the mission of the church...

Three weeks ago I was up in a place called Whitworth, which is near a place called Rochdale which is near a place called Manchester which is North of Watford... visiting a company called Anglo-Felt, a small manufacturing business that unsurprisingly makes felt. I'd met their MD several times – he's a Christian and he'd brought his entire management team to a seminar I was doing called Getting Values to Work. Afterwards, his production manager, not a Christian, said to me, "You know all that stuff you were talking about in the seminar, we do all that."

And indeed they do. On the visit I discovered that this little company of 47 people had had a chaplain, a Baptist minister for five years. The MD had suggested it but the rest of the

management team and the employees had been very sceptical in that refreshingly direct and rugged way Northerners have of telling you what they think.

“We didn’t want him. We thought he’d go around trying to convert everyone.”

But he came and spent two hours a fortnight every fortnight for five years walking round the factory talking to people who wanted to talk to him. After 5 years Phillips retired from Baptist Ministry and moved to Leeds. And the employees told management “You’ll have to bring him back.” And he’d not only won over the employees, he’d won over the managers: As the thirty something factory manager put it, “He’s helped other people. And he’s helped me.”

Yes, there were other Christians there but the neutrality of a chaplain rapidly opens doors that can take much longer for a Christian colleague, a boss or a subordinate to go through.

That business has confidence in the church, or at least in Philips to make a significant contribution to the people and performance of the business.

I thought chaplaincy was a bygone solution to a bygone problem for a bygone age but it’s a contemporary solution to a contemporary problem. And it’s something that you could all do.

Of course, that just one small aspect of what our response might be. So lets first, why should we care if business has confidence in the church.

How might business become more confident in the purpose and mission of the church?

Business is one of the primary drivers of our globalising world... As Anita Roddick, founder of the Bodyshop put it:

“I don’t think that anyone would argue that business now dominates the world’s centre stage. It is faster, more creative, adaptable, efficient and wealthier than many governments ... So in terms of power and influence you can forget the Church and forget politics, too. There is no more powerful institution in society than business. It is more important than ever before for business to assume a moral leadership in society.”

She perhaps overstates her case but in the West business interests have a huge impact on every aspect of society determining to a large extent the direction of much scientific research, the shape of our national curricula, our immigration policy, our transport policy and much of the content of our media, since media may be caricatured to primarily exist to deliver audiences to advertisers... in sum to business interests.

Exists to deliver audiences to advertisers...

In terms of Calvin’s sphere theology, business has not only usurped Christ’s place, it has set itself above all the other spheres.

This apparent dominance of business is one of the factors, though not the main one, that

have led to business being broadly demonised by the church... Profit is seen an inherent evil and capitalism as a malicious force that exploits the poor, ravages the environment, destroys the relational dynamics of our society, corrodes our characters and hollows our souls.

What better place to be salt and light?

After all, if Christianity cannot demonstrate its relevance to the dominant institution of our time, will not Christianity be seen as irrelevant?

Furthermore business matters to people's well being. It certainly matters if you want to see people fed, people housed, people educated... it certainly matters if you want to see a better world... and it matters hugely if we take God's injunction through Jeremiah to pray for the prosperity of the city, to want the best for people...

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Jeremiah 29:7

Surely, business can be redeemed. But to have any chance of redeeming and channeling all that can be good in business perhaps we will need to see how we might convince business that the church has something positive to offer.

What good news might we have? What models can we offer that might serve business not merely excoriate it?

Clearly, whilst we could speak at a theoretical level, business will be reached through people involved in business and most of you have people in your congregations who work in the private sector.

What would inspire your people's colleagues to have any confidence in the communities of Christ to be good news?

And besides do the people in our churches actually believe that business might be a truly worthwhile pursuit? Is it up there with teaching and social work and medicine and all the other kosher jobs that the Christian subculture affirms... jobs that are conveniently untainted by the need to produce profit – though they are jobs that are only made possible by the profits and taxes generated by business. As one businessman put it:

“The church appreciates my tithe but not the enterprise that gives rise to it.”

Christians in our churches don't on the whole think positively of business so why would business people who are not Christians have any confidence that the church is 'for' them. Indeed, often we simply ignore it.

If you want to build business confidence in the capacity of the church to be good news, you could do worse than start by visiting one or two of your people in business.

Still, if we want an answer to the question

How might business become more confident in the purpose and mission of the church?

We might begin by asking:

How might the church become more clear about the purpose and mission of business?

Well, I want to just open up a few avenues for your thinking and for your own disciple-making by laying some theological foundations, by highlighting some business research that suggests a remarkable compatibility between Christian values and highly profitable companies, by offering just a few examples of how people involved in business are applying Christian principles to their contexts... and giving you a snapshot of a biblical business hero...

Business is a branch of work and therefore shares its overall goals...so to begin at the beginning with the worker God? Why doesn't God create Adam on Day 1? Why does God create Adam on Day 6?

Because if he had created him on Day 1 it would have been dark and there would have been nowhere for him to stand. By the time God creates Adam everything is ready for him... there's ground to stand on, air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, there's productive work and it's beautiful... What has God done? He has created a context for human flourishing. That's the big project.

Create a context for human flourishing

That's what a parent or a single person does in their home – tries to create context for the flourishing of those who live and visit that place... that's what a good manager does in a company tries to create a context in which people can flourish. As one senior Halifax manager put it; "My job is to roll the rocks off the runway so other people can soar." That's what a pastor is trying to do in a church trying to create a context in which people can flourish in Christ...

Creator of a Context for Human Flourishing

Certainly the fall has made that more difficult but God's primary purpose has not changed... Christ, after all is not only described as co-creator of all things...

"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible

and invisible,

Electromagnetism, subatomic particles...

whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." Colossians 1:16

Christ is not only the one by whom all things are created but the one through whom “all things” are reconciled,

“and through him to reconcile all things to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Colossians 1:20

All things, not some things.

This is the wonder and glory of God’s plan in Christ – not a partial salvation, not an interim solution, but a definitive, once and for all, all sufficient, redemptive sacrifice that promises the utter renewal of all things.

Indeed, in Revelation 21:5 the plan is once again clarified. The one who sits on the throne announces: “I am making everything new.”

The consummation is the creation of the ultimate context for human flourishing with God.

At root, business is intended to contribute to the creation of a context for human flourishing to provide goods and services that should enhance human life in a way that is consistent with God’s plans for all...

And indeed in many instances business has done a wonderful job.

There is, after all, no poverty alleviation without wealth generation. The poor do not primarily need handouts they need better jobs and whilst, globally NGOs and churches and state aid have made some contribution to the alleviation of poverty, the most effective poverty alleviation has been effected by business... Globally, more people have been lifted out of a dollar a day poverty in China in the last twenty years by the growth of business than by all the aid sent into Africa over the last 50.

Indeed, whilst big business is not immune from critique for abuse and exploitation in sub-Saharan Africa, the primary causes of poverty have not been exploitation by multi-nationals but the failure to create conditions in which business can flourish ... war, government corruption and an AIDs epidemic are arid soil for the kind of large scale investment that creates jobs.

Indeed, the private sector is increasingly seen by world leaders as the key to solving issues of underdevelopment. And if this is the case on the macro level it is also the case on a smaller scale as you can see in the work of the transformational business network:

Similarly, my prayer partner runs an IT company called Endava that has created some 300 jobs in Moldova the poorest country in Europe, bringing hope to a country that most people want to leave.

But not all business is good business. What kind of business will not only generate jobs but create a better context for human beings to flourish in...?

Answer: businesses with certain kinds of values...

How might the church become more clear about the purpose and mission of business.

Paul Valler, the former Finance Director of Hewlett Packard and one of LICC's workplace speakers, puts it

the Gospel offers the best values for human flourishing,
the best values for the appropriate generation of wealth and
the best values for the appropriate distribution of wealth...

And this assertion is increasingly born out by business research which increasingly confirms the relevance of Christian values to profitability and employee satisfaction:

So for example Gallup looked at employee satisfaction and developed twelve questions which if answered with a 'yea' would be indicators of high levels of employee satisfaction

And the three most important are:

Do I know what is expected of me? Clarity of vision.

Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?

Does my supervisor or someone at work seem to care about me as a person?

When your job allows you to do those things which you have been created to do you feel an extraordinary level of satisfaction.

As Psalm 139

When someone cares about you as a person, when in short you are 'loved' your level of job satisfaction soars.

Love your neighbour

Similarly, Collins book Good to Great,

Good to Great

probably the most influential general business book of the last decade looked at over 1400 companies to identify 11 that had gone from good to great in terms of profitability and maintained that performance over at least 15 years. Then they looked at the factors that helped make them great. SO for example, what two qualities distinguished the business leaders of these companies from the leaders of less successful companies?

Intense humility

Iron Focus

Sound familiar.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than ourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but to the interests of others.”

Philippians 2: 3-4

Is the Gospel good news for business?

One of the threats to business is the breakdown in trust between people at every level. Gallup research has shown how in Holiday Inn hotels there is a direct correlation between profitability and the level of trust between staff and management.

Business excellence is best served by relational excellence and relational excellence is at the heart of the Gospel...

One of the threats to business is lost hours through stress.

One of the primary causes of stress is not long hours but lack of forgiveness and anger. Isn't the Gospel of Jesus Christ good news for the angry and the unforgiving and the unforgiven?

One of the reasons businesses don't do as well as they might is because they become obsessed with profit over against purpose. Indeed, as

In Search of Excellence

showed 30 years ago, the most profitable businesses are not the ones that focus on making a profit but on some higher purpose...

We have good news for business that will help them to see a purpose beyond profit. After all profit to a business is like oxygen to the body. You need oxygen to live but the inhalation of oxygen is not a purpose worth living for.

So one of the opportunities the church has is not only to point out when business exploits but to show business the kinds of values that will both generate profit and serve to help human beings become more fully alive...

Surely as we offer such wisdom and clarify some of the shared purposes of business and church it will build bridges and confidence.

But we also need to be good news... equipping the people of the church to understand that wealth generation is not inherently evil...

* praying for the prosperity of the businesses they work in by name...

* Helping them to see that they have at least four roles in their workplaces in lifting Jesus' name high:

Ethos

Christos

Demonstrated that profit is not a God...

We need to help our people to see that whilst in the short term they may not be able to change IBM they can change their bit of it:

Anita Kapila cake story...

Cake

And we can pray for the businesses in our area... Methodist minister went round local businesses in her high street, introduced herself and asked them how they might pray... and then did so...

High Street

Business will have confidence in the mission and purpose of the church when it sees that we have something positive to offer that helps them fulfill their goals, when it sees that we offer

And business will have confidence in the mission and purpose of the church when they see successful businessmen who have been impacted by the Gospel and have confidence in the church to make a difference to their daily lives...

Ultimately, in the context of the local church this boils down to an issue of disciple-making... are we determined to disciple people for all of life, or only bits of it?

Look at Boaz, one of my heroes, a man who, like Denis Thatcher and Guy Ritchie, is usually overshadowed by his more famous wife,

Boaz is the first believer in the one true God that the Bible records using the phrase "the Lord be with you." Today the phrase is most associated with Church of England priests who say it to their congregation inside a church at the beginning of a service, usually on a Sunday, wearing robes:

Priest
Congregation
In church
Sunday
Robes

But Boaz is not a priest he's a farmer. He says it outside to his foreman and his team of labourers, at work, on a working weekday, in his work clothes, to the men harvesting his fields...

Priest	Worker
Congregation	Team
In church	At work

Sunday	Weekday
Robes	Workwear

“The Lord be with you.” It’s a prayer that in this ordinary labour under the hot Bethlehem sun, God might show them favour... the Lord be with you in your accounting, the Lord be with you as you cut someone’s hair, the Lord be with you as you fit an exhaust, the Lord be with you as you Chair the Board meeting, the Lord be with you as serve someone coffee ...

It’s a greeting that reveals a concern for his employees.

Of course, it might just have been a conversational convention, just a way that people greeted one another but Boaz is a man of renown in the community and there are clues elsewhere that suggest that Boaz might have really meant it. The poor are gleaning in his fields – as God had ordained it should be in Leviticus.

Gleaning verse from Leviticus

So Boaz was a businessman who wasn’t trying to gather every last grain, screw down every last penny of profit for himself without any concern for the wider community. No, built into the very fabric of his business was a concern for the poor –even though he hadn’t heard terms like “corporate social responsibility” or “business in the community”.

Soc Responsibility

Similarly, Boaz maintains a certain set of values that his men, he knows, will abide by – even though he doesn’t have an investor in people kite mark. His corporate ethos works its way into his employees’ behaviour:

Ethos

Ruth is told not to go a gleaning in other people’s fields because in those she might be sexually harassed... but not in Boaz’s... she’ll be safe there. “I have told the young men to leave you alone.” He says. In Boaz’s workplace, Biblical truth is obeyed and the way walked.

Is he perhaps a business model for our time?

- Dependent on God
- Caring for employees
- Concerned for the poor
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Generous
- Sexually pure

Christianity in business is about more than being a good egg, more than showing integrity, more than speaking out the Gospel as the Spirit leads, it is about concern for the poor, about changing the structures, about demonstrating that putting Christos values at the heart of a workplace might actually be good news...

Confident in the church's ability to speak to business? I am. And we and others have produced some resources that might help you...

Work resources

Still, whilst I would love to end this talk on a high note... I want to say to you that if you are not a church that supports people in business or indeed in their work... and you may not be... most churches in the UK aren't ... if you aren't and you want to create a church culture that actually supports people in business, that actually prays and resources and commissions and values them, if you want to create a community that is concerned for its local businesses, you are choosing a right and enriching path... but a difficult path that has not been much trod before...

I plead with you to consider it... I plead with you to set your faces like flint to reverse 2000 years of Christian disdain for business, I plead with you not to leave this vital arena bereft of salt and starved of light... I plead with you not to let your business people perish for want of a vision for the place God has put them...

Make a Difference where they are