

THE CENTRE FOR ENTERPRISE, MARKETS AND ETHICS

ENTERPRISE AND FAITH SERIES

ENTERPRISE AND  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP:  
DOING GOOD THROUGH  
THE LOCAL CHURCH

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## THE CENTRE FOR ENTERPRISE, MARKETS AND ETHICS

We are a think tank based in Oxford that seeks to promote an enterprise, market economy built on ethical foundations.

We undertake research on the interface of Christian theology, economics and business.

Our aim is to argue the case for an economy that generates wealth, employment, innovation and enterprise within a framework of calling, integrity, values and ethical behaviour leading to the transformation of the business enterprise and contributing to the relief of poverty.

We publish a range of material, hold events and conferences, undertake research projects and speak and teach in the areas with which we are concerned.

We are independent and a registered charity entirely dependent upon donations for our work.

Our website is [www.theceme.org](http://www.theceme.org).

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One can tell the story of missionaries who have set out with the firm determination to do nothing except preach the gospel, to be pure evangelists uninvolved in all the business of 'social service'. But the logic of the gospel has always been too strong for them. A hungry man comes asking for food; shall he be refused in the name of the gospel? A sick child is brought for help. There are children all around with no opportunity for schooling. And so the missionary has been drawn, in spite of pure theology, into the work of education, healing, social service ... and a host of similar activities.

Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (London: SPCK, 1978, rev. 1995), p. 91.

CHAPTER 1  

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ENTERPRISE AND THE  
CHURCH

For me, thinking about enterprise and entrepreneurship is natural. I grew up in a family that ran a business and I worked behind the counter for many years with my mother and father and brother. I learned a great deal about business from my parents. They believed in enterprise – that we should work hard, make the most of our talents, be productive members of society and that we should do good. They never set foot inside a church.

My father's journey took him from the bombed-out slums of the East End of London, via National Service, to being a company director, acquiring his own home and finally running a shop. Perhaps there has never again been a period of such social mobility. My mother's family were entrepreneurs from the start, owning and managing a cab company.

I learned that running a business is tremendously hard work and takes commitment and love. I discovered the importance of understanding customers and never judging them. And a little bit of buttering-up does no harm either. Today that is called customer service. I learned that even in a small business, outside forces and trends can have a huge impact – our shop was eventually put out of business by a huge DIY superstore opening up within walking distance.

Although we did not use the word then, my parents were entrepreneurs. They shared the classic features we see in such people: they were alive to opportunities, took some risks, were highly creative and invested much of themselves in a business that was beautiful – perhaps a strange word to use but it reflects how we felt. Like many entrepreneurs, for us making money was not the only focus.

Being enterprising is not for the faint-hearted, but I wondered then if it does not make the world go around, and I know now that it does. And so why is it that the Church seems so uninterested in the world of commerce, enterprise and the dreams and aspirations of entrepreneurs? Or perhaps it might be fairer to say that the Church has demonstrated a mixed response



to entrepreneurship and enterprise. On the one hand there is a suspicion that enterprise and business are somehow fatally aligned with greed. Yet alongside that there are some signs of greater sympathy and an embracing of what the enterprise mindset has to offer. It would be hard to argue with John Spence, a member of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England and formerly a prominent banker, as he highlights the sheer power of recent entrepreneurial activity as embraced and adopted by the Church itself:

The Church of England got five million people using its website on the day of the Royal Wedding. We have to take Jesus to where the people are and how they communicate and not just expect them to come and sit in pews on a Sunday.<sup>1</sup>

I have begun to wonder if valuing enterprise may be the last link in the chain of how the Church can be both faithful and relevant, and whether we may be on the cusp of something very exciting. If the Church can bring the hope we have in God alongside an outlook that values enterprise and entrepreneurialism, what doors may open? We might transform the social claims of the gospel and help people to understand the good news that is at the heart of our faith.

Perhaps there is, or could be, a bold link between doing good (the social implications of the gospel), building community and an enterprise mindset. Rather than seeing this impulse to do good in isolation, combining this with entrepreneurship could lead to a new flourishing and sense of community in the places where we live.

Edward Carter, formerly Canon Theologian of Chelmsford Cathedral, makes a bold claim – one that I echo throughout this booklet:

Enterprise and entrepreneurship are not a set of techniques simply to be applied to the Church's problems. They are not simply a tool. Instead they are part of the bridge that connects God with the world and his people. Enterprise and ingenuity are part of our Christian longing.<sup>2</sup>

To put the matter another way: the attributes of enterprise are part of being a joyous, fully functioning child of God.

John Spence has a very powerful take on just why good entrepreneurialism is intrinsically godly:

The best entrepreneurs use people's skills to their best effect. They reward people for their labours. They help people to know that they have more skills than they thought they had. They are intrinsically humble, because their focus is on others and developing others ... helping them to achieve. Of course, the worst sort of entrepreneurs just want to grind people and milk them for all the money they can make.<sup>3</sup>

The Church, however, has been cautious about entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. A collection of essays was published before the 2015 general election, edited by Archbishop John Sentamu: *On Rock or Sand? Firm Foundations for Britain's Future*.<sup>4</sup> The book covered a wide range of issues, from welfare to economy, poverty to young people and the welfare state. But the chapter on the way ahead for the British economy fails to mention entrepreneurs at all.<sup>5</sup>

## THE WORLD NEEDS US

A few months ago I was at Farringdon in London – the heart of so many creative industries. As I left the station there were simply thousands of people, young and old, streaming into work. Many would be using their talents in small agencies and start-ups, others in more established businesses. But I was struck by how absent the Church seemed in this place. What have we got to say? How are we to connect with all that is good in this enterprising place? If we accept that the Holy Spirit is already at work in enterprise, how do we join in? How can we affirm what is joyous, exciting and fulfilling in enterprise? I will come back to this conundrum later.

Perhaps the problem comes from a deep dualism. It has often been pointed out that evangelicals have retreated from certain areas and industries that

seem hostile and unholy – notably entertainment and the arts. Historically that is only partly true, but perhaps more marked is the wider attitude towards business and enterprise, especially in the UK. There is a squeamishness about making money, or the way money is made. We find it difficult to acknowledge that it is the creating of wealth that allows us to have doctors, nurses and teachers paid for out of the public purse.

There can be a division between what happens in Sunday in church and the rest of the week. In conversation, the Director of the Centre for Enterprise, Markets and Ethics, Revd Dr Richard Turnbull, noted that he had known several business people who became priests but then seemed to be captured by the minutiae of church life and positively failed to make any links to enterprise, almost emphasising the gap. So what is our theology of enterprise? And how might we engage and re-engage with the thrilling world of business and creativity? I wonder if we can do good *and* do enterprise and commerce?

**‘Can the Church  
be a place where  
enterprise and  
entrepreneurs are  
encouraged?’**

## CHURCH LEADERS AS ENTREPRENEURS

In the Church of England, all candidates for ordination go through a long period of discernment, which finishes with a selection board. When I got the report back on my selection conference for becoming a priest, I remember a number of sniffy comments about my ‘business background’. The selectors were not sure an entrepreneur and businessman was of the right kidney for priesthood.

Thankfully I had a very supportive bishop and college principal. But now, thinking about it, I wonder if all those years of running a business, handling change, inventing new things and building people up might not be just as holy as a more traditional route. The Church may be, in some respects, becoming more open-minded about the entrepreneurial mindset, but there remain substantial negativity and important questions about how