

THE CENTRE FOR ENTERPRISE, MARKETS AND ETHICS

ENTERPRISE AND FAITH SERIES

GOD AND ENTERPRISE
TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF THE
ENTREPRENEUR

EDWARD CARTER

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First edition, 2016
ISBN 978-1-910666-02-9

Published by:
Centre for Enterprise, Markets and Ethics
31 Beaumont Street
Oxford OX1 2NP

Printed in the United Kingdom by Foremost Print Ltd., Unit 9a,
Vantage Business Park, Bloxham Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16
9UX

Cover photo by Adam Smok

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a young adult leaving the world of education in the summer of 1988, I was unusual. Many of my peers were going to start careers with large financial companies, and almost all of them had been accepted onto the graduate trainee programmes of publically listed corporations. In contrast, I decided to set up my own business, fired by some deep entrepreneurial instinct within me. I learnt a huge amount very quickly, had some successes, but by 1990 realised that I needed to learn from other entrepreneurs before I could do it myself. I spent the following few years working for two small businesses, each run by their founder, both in their different ways an entrepreneur. Life then took what seemed to be a rather different direction as I responded to the call to full-time ministry in the Church of England. However, finding myself immersed in the study of theology, the lingering question kept reappearing in my mind: could human enterprise properly be described as contributing to God's purposes? Furthermore, could God therefore in some sense be described as an entrepreneur?

On the morning of 8 March 2015, I had been invited to preach at the church of St Mary-at-Latton in Harlow, Essex. In my sermon I used for the first time the expression 'God the entrepreneur'. I attempted to make a connection between two different partnerships: on the one hand, the partnerships that operate on a human level; on the other, the partnership that operates between God and humanity, made real in Jesus Christ. I touched also on the theme of 'attentiveness'. I suggested that entrepreneurs are instinctively attentive people and that they therefore might have a distinctive role in helping to bring together the two great theological themes of creation and fellowship. The response afterwards from the congregation was very striking in its warmth and enthusiasm, and it set me thinking again about enterprise as something at the heart of the Christian gospel.

This publication is aimed at setting out those thoughts in a structured way. My argument has two main preparatory stages, presented in sections 2 and 3,

followed by a concluding section that looks at what a Christian voice for enterprise in the world might be like. Section 2 looks at two significant reasons why there might be a gulf between matters of faith and questions

of economics: the first is to do with the nature of money; the second is connected with questions of scarcity and abundance. For some theologians this gulf is so wide that there can in practice be little or no engagement with capitalism and market economics. However, my own suggestion, arising out of my experience that Sunday in Harlow, is that enterprise can play an important role in bridging this gulf.

"Could God therefore in some sense be described as an entrepreneur?"

Having suggested such a role for enterprise, section 3 looks at the very nature of enterprise itself. This examination comes in two stages: first, I look at the positive ways the phenomenon of enterprise is incorporated into economic theory and how it can be taken as a key foundation stone of economics; second, I build on these insights to construct the beginnings of a theology of enterprise, using a number of core biblical themes. Having thoroughly examined enterprise from the points of view of both secular economics and of faith, the way is clear to test whether my suggested 'bridging' role for enterprise is in fact sustainable. My argument arrives at the view that enterprise is indeed a remarkably solid bridge, uniquely placed to establish the points of contact between faith and free-market economics.

The concluding section takes up this standpoint and applies it in a number of more practical ways. My hope in this is to encourage a Christian voice for enterprise in the world, rooted in theology but realistic about how the world of business and economics actually works. Of course, not everyone is instinctively entrepreneurial, but no one can deny the power of enterprise in shaping society. The argument in this publication aims to shed light on how such a powerful influence should be understood in the light of the Christian faith. My intention is that it should be a help to entrepreneurs as they reflect on their role within society, and that it may also help the Church re-imagine both its place within the world and some of the ways it organises its own

patterns of behaviour.

At times my discussion becomes quite technical and complex, although my intention is for it always to remain focused on my overall argument. However, it is possible to follow the main thrust of what I am saying by looking at the summaries at the end of each main section.

CHAPTER 2

THE GULF BETWEEN FAITH AND ECONOMICS

Many attempts have been made to apply faith to economics. This is, however, a challenging task to undertake, because of the dislocation between the world as God intends it to be and the world as it actually is. A preliminary step is to accept that faith is real and has something to offer in this sphere. Some would not agree, but for the purposes of this publication I will take this as a given and foundational assumption.¹ Even when this assumption is made, the gulf between faith and economics is significant. Any simplistic attempt to bring the two together will be insufficient, although this has not prevented people from proclaiming idealistic solutions. There are also many examples of serious attempts to bridge this gulf, which look to a variety of ideas right across the political spectrum, from socialism to free-market capitalism.² In making a fresh attempt, I wish first to examine in detail two reasons why the gulf exists. My intention is that such an examination will open the way to a re-imagined bridge, one that uses the theme of enterprise in a distinctive way.

2.1 RIVAL PROMISES: GOD AND MONEY

The first aspect of the gulf between faith and economics is to do with money. This springs out of the biblical injunction that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6.10). The close examination of the nature of money that follows will show why this is so, but will also reveal a possible point of contact.

2.1.1 THE HISTORY AND NATURE OF MONEY ³

Room 68 at the British Museum traces the history of money. It begins with exchange tokens, usually metal coins, and then gradually moves on to paper money, starting with a Chinese banknote from 1375. The earliest English banknotes carry messages such as ‘The Carlisle City & District Banking Company promise to pay to the bearer on demand at their office here . . .’, and then the sum in pounds is written in. Sometimes instead of ‘the bearer’