

Faith and Business – Do they mix?

All four speakers came from a broadly Christian background, however whilst they agreed that faith and business did mix some of their views differed radically!

Randall Roberts, Senior Pastor of the Loma Linda University Church of Seventh-day Adventists, California presented two aspects of the theology of faith and work:

1. Work as a calling, something we are given to do to productively enrich the lives of others, a meaningful and important way of spending time in the marketplace.
2. Faith is to do with character and living up to certain standards in our life (as *James* stresses in his letter). We can't escape faith it is about who we are.

Randy therefore concluded that faith and work are inextricably intertwined and we need to live out our faith in all aspects of our lives, fulfilling Jesus' words in *Matthew 5* about being a positive influence (light) in the world.

Philip Richards, Chief Executive of RAB Capital listed 6 key reasons why faith and business do mix before suggesting how we might put our faith into practice at work.

- God really is interested in us, in the whole of our lives. Our faith is not a detached intellectual faith. God has a plan for our lives and our role is to be obedient and follow his leading in whatever situation (and workplace) he placed us.
- Christians can be in a wealth creation environment like business. In *Psalms 112:3, 5, 9* and in *1 Timothy 6:17-19* we read about people with wealth and riches as well as how they are to use them. What is important is how we lead our lives and what we do with our money. Christians should at least tithe and those who are wealthy do even more to build God's kingdom. There are many needs in our world and as Christian business people we can help provide finance.
- Christianity has a low public esteem. Christian business people need to be seen, as role models they can be inspirational/aspirational for others.
- We need Christians in senior positions in business and impacting politics (George Hargreaves from the Christian Party was in the audience). If we don't the environment will be increasingly hostile for Christians.
- Need to be wise about what we invest in, avoiding areas which are socially destructive (e.g. gambling), providing both a return for investors as well as making the world a better place.
- Being partisan leads to a negative reaction. The angels announced "peace and goodwill to all men" and we should be sowers of peace and goodwill, encouraging others to do good.

In terms of how Philip tries to put his faith into practice by his behaviour and actions: tithing, saying grace before business meals, letting people see he is a Christian, by doing well and making money for his business/shareholders and through prayer being rooted in the Father's will.

Douglas Murray, Director of the Centre for Social Cohesion and best-selling author and commentator reluctantly agreed that faith and business did mix because people found a way of making them mix, but suggested that when they did it was not in the best interests of the workplace/business.

He raised concerns about different faiths needing special dispensation at work, certain holidays and could only perform certain jobs at work due to the constraints/ rules of their faith. It is the state of Islam and their incursions into the workplace that has brought about the need for other faiths to speak up.

In the UK we are in a halfway house being neither a secular nor religious state and this creates schizophrenia in our society. Douglas advocates imposing tough secularist principles, shedding our historical baggage (Christian heritage) and keeping religion a private matter between us and our God.

He asked whether we should indeed allow an increase in religious demonstration of all faiths – scientologists, cults... because it will be hard to say yes to some and no to others.

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One of the arguments he hears about encouraging Christians to practice their faith at work Christians is the values and behaviours they can bring into the workplace. But Christians don't have a monopoly on doing good, making the right choices, being kind and generous. People of other faiths and none display these values too.

Herta von Stiegel, Executive Chairman, Stargate Capital Investment Group introduced herself as someone who came from a communist country where believers were treated as the scum of the earth and people were not free to live their dreams. She admires 3 of the men in the Old Testament who practiced their faith in a secular environment – Joseph, Daniel and Nehemiah.

The question she asks herself is "Is God sovereign over all realms of my life?" Servant leadership is an important quality for Christian leaders and Herta suggested that business is like a game of tennis – those who don't serve well end up losing!

Business reveals our character – how we react under pressure, and it tests our effectiveness. Christian values permeate with whom she does business (helps her to choose her partners) and how she does business (acting with integrity, not abuse power, have a can do attitude, use her talents wisely...). Whilst she does not feel called to prosthetise at work, when asked what has helped get her through some of the challenges she says it is because God gave her the strength.

The question time was lively and challenging covering topics such as

- Does business positively impact our faith?
- Does faith provide a moral compass?
- Is the image of God stamped on us all?
- Is being a Christian a good or a bad thing and does it ever help in business/ motivate us to do good in the world (e.g. William Wilberforce)?
- Where does concern for the environment come into all this?

...with answers liberally scattered with bible verses and personal experiences...

So where do you stand on this issue? How do you live out your faith and what positive impact are you bringing to bear in your workplace? Is it really "none of God's business?" Read Mark Greene's (Executive Director of LICC) article: <http://www.licc.org.uk:80/node/476>.

To find out how to join Level Seven email: info@levelseven.org.uk or register online: <http://www.levelseven.org.uk/register.asp>

The next Level Seven event will be on the subject of 'Faith and Philanthropy – Can you have one without the other?' in September. More details to follow...