

Professionalism and the Church

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The following paper seeks to demonstrate and explore a range of perspectives, ideas and materials that might encourage discussion around the interaction of 'secular' business models, processes and practices, which might be defined as the modern professional approach to work, with the life and work of the Church (and churches). It looks at some scholarly trends, theories and opinions, historical developments and modern practical examples from Church and secular business contexts to demonstrate some of the breadth of thought and experience in this area and to propose some helpful approaches to the issue. It ends by posing questions and areas for further conversation that might emerge from the material contained in the preceding pages.

A Tradition of Suspicion

In the year of the Great Exhibition, a lady in sympathy with the efforts of the Young Men's Christian Association placed the sum of one hundred guineas at the disposal of the Committee of the Association, with the view to the encouragement of young men to write on the practical impediments which the business world presented to the godliness of those inhabiting it. It was determined by the Committee to offer prizes of 50, 30 and 20 guineas for the three best essays under the subject:

On the Evils of the Present System of Business and the Difficulties they present to the Attainment and Development of Personal Piety, with Suggestions for their Removal.¹

The enthusiasm for and results of this commission provide the clearest of examples of the belief amongst well-meaning Christians of this period that the life of the then-modern professional represented and encouraged morality and modus operandi that were at odds with the those of the Church. Signing up to a life in business presented the Christian with significant challenges to his religious life, since embracing fully the methods and processes of the professional secular business world was an active bar to living as God intended.

This perspective, echoed in a wealth of literature from that time, was not just, or even primarily, the result of the assessment that the *purposes* of business were divergent from the purposes of Christianity. The evils of the secular business world did not end at the ultimate aim of making profit. They were permeated

¹ J. Lyndall, *Business: As it is, and as it might be* (1854)

throughout the whole of the life of the secular professional: the lifestyle, language and working systems and practices were thought ungodly. These ranged from personal habits such as late hours, lack of exercise and over-application to methods of interacting with people and the world at large.

Engaging in secular business encouraged, amongst other things, disengagement from sacred thoughts, concern with personal advancement, and a way of thinking and doing that, in the language of the essay which won this prize, commonly led to such traits as “habitual tampering with the truth”.

In 1870 Joseph Jackson Goadby expressed concern that an introspective, un-Christian emphasis on power, worldly position and status was dominating the lives of the middle classes as a result of their working environments:²

*That there is no necessary religious influence in business is too obvious to need remark.*³

Goadby thus sought to provide tools for the elevation of the business professional out of this lifestyle, allowing him to seek a more Christian way of being. For Goadby, this required a marked shift away from the prevailing culture. Similar literature of the period supports his notion that hope for the Christian man engaged in secular business processes, personal and professional, was found only in his battling to be counter-cultural within that world.

Thus, Martin Sutton’s *Practical Hints to young Men Engaged in Business* demonstrated that being engaged in the secular business world can develop one’s Christian life only because secular systems and models of working provided an exact model of what and how *not* to be and do:

*Business life involves a perpetual trial of one’s principle. It furnishes incessant openings for the suggestions of avarice, untruthfulness, extortion and jealousy. It daily invites to indolence or to rashness, and no man can, year after year, repel the temptations to wrong-doing, which make their way into every house of business, without becoming both a wiser and a better man. His virtue will grow apace, his probity will strike its roots deeper and deeper into the foundations of his Christian character, and he will be garnering up strength to resist future assaults of a similar kind.*⁴

What, then, can the Christian learn from the secular business world? What can the Church learn? What can both use or take away from secular places and ways of working for Christian or ecclesial advancement? In large part, the answers to this are simply ‘lessons on what not to be’ and ‘where the enemy lies’. Engaging in the natural and common processes, working methods and lifestyle of the business world should not be encouraged.

² J. Jackson Goadby, *The Influence of Business on the Christian Life* (1870)

³ *Ibid.*, p.5

⁴ M. H. Sutton, *Practical Hints to young Men Engaged in Business* (1858) p.7

A Continuing Divide

Based on the above analysis of the plight of the Christian businessman, one might well see the modern world as demonstrating the ultimate defeat of the voices of warning. One finds a large array of material produced in recent years which, albeit in a more glossed and reader-friendly tone, appears to echo precisely the same thoughts as those of Goadby and others, suggesting that over a century later little has improved for the Christian involved in secular professional activity.

The November 2006 seminar of the Ely Business Ethics Forum invited Dr Peter Heslam, who has advised the Archbishop of Canterbury in such areas, to address this theme. He duly spoke of a majority view that the business world was at complete odds with the Church – “Christ against business” – and reported that ‘few periods have witnessed as much opprobrium towards business as the current one’.⁵ Heslam’s position might well be seen as embodied in modern pressure and support movements that have emerged in recent decades. These exist because of the hostility of contemporary business culture to Christian values and the huge difficulty faced by Christians when working according to secular ideals or in secular contexts. One such group, *Models for Christ*, set up in the 1980s, also goes by the name *Paradox*, expressing with clarity the apparently bizarre contradiction that people in the international industry of fashion might choose to live their lives guided by anything other than the latest trends – that which is new and exciting – playing to the very secular, physical concerns of the industry, and look for guidance and value in the teachings of Christ.



A campaign in association with Models for Christ

Understandably then, books continue to be published in great quantities which propose the need for Christians to fight against the current trends of corporate life and the secular business lifestyle by consciously imposing Christian values and models of behaving and working upon a world which is naturally and instinctively hostile to them and to the Church’s teachings more generally.⁶ Literature continues to be produced which still seeks to answer the same sorts of questions for the modern day as were being asked by Jackson Goadby 150 years ago. The businessperson of the twenty-first century is therefore asked, “Can a Christian Work for a Corporation?” and, “Is it possible to be a success in the business world

⁵ Report issued in *The Church Times*, issue 7499 (1st December, 2006)

⁶ See, for example, K. Costa, *God and Work: living every day with purpose* (2007)

and still remain a Christian?”⁷ The dilemma of those engaged in the business world wishing to live lives according to a set of values and using a set of models for interaction which do not in the first instance present as being easily, or at all, compatible with their daily working life, still remains.

Bureaucracy vs Mission

Christian criticism of the business world and its systems and processes are not limited to comments on the difficulties they pose to the living out of a Christian expression of working life in secular employment. The concept of two opposing outlooks and approaches enters, in varied contexts, regular discussion about the more business-like side of the Church itself. The desire to promote an ideal, missionary Church exempt from the practical concerns and methods of the secular business world has led to some severe criticism of the more bureaucratic strands of Church institutions from both within Church bodies and amongst people engaged with them.

For some, administrative ecclesiastical practices are in the same category as secular corporate ones and are easily condemned as being as harmful to the life of Christians and the Church as those of any secular corporation. In fact, the situation is for some far worse, since the methods and practices of those in central Church administration impact directly on the life of the Church and its leaders. Note, for example, this interview from the *Church Times*:⁸

What makes me angry? How long have we got? The way clergy are treated - including bishops - not by the churches, but by the bureaucrats who build badly designed Heath-Robinson vicarages, and decide our holidays and pay and pensions. Where has the money gone from, selling the old vicarages? There's no money for the repairs that the new vicarages now need. And I see so many friends living in genteel poverty in retirement. We feel valued so little, and, though there are great privileges, we sacrifice an enormous amount. Churches can give a wonderful welcome, and bishops can be incredibly caring and supportive, but the bureaucrats make us feel incredibly uncared for. They are the people I'd like to be locked in a church with.

The implication here is that power in the hands of ‘bureaucrats’ – the ‘businesspeople of Church’ - leads to a lack of concern for the *people* of the Church, for the *purposes* of the Church, and even to immoral or negligent practices that have squandered resources which the real work and the real champions of the Church could have used to better value – for *real* Christian work.

⁷ M. Novak, “Can a Christian Work for a Corporation? The Theology of the Corporation”, in O. F. Williams and J. Houck (eds), *The Judeo-Christian Vision and the Modern Corporation* (1982) 170-202; O. F. Williams and J. Houck, *Full Value: Cases in Christian Business Ethics* (1978) p.2

⁸ *Church Times* issue 7652 (13th November, 2009)

Kenneth Leech sets out his own similar concerns, locating his thoughts in a strong tradition within the Church. For Leech a focus on institutional bureaucracy is a distraction from theology and from the proper concerns of the Church:

Beware the Bureaucrats

NEARLY ten years ago, an article by the then Bishop of Chichester, Dr Eric Kemp, "Following the example of Mammon", appeared in the Church Times (17 November 1995). It warned about the centralisation of power in the Church of England, and the danger that archbishops would come to be seen as managing directors.

The following day, Professor Richard Roberts, writing in The Independent, described Archbishop Carey as "the John Birt of the Church of England", and the Church as a managed, product-driven organisation.

These words still haunt me. They seem to confirm my worst fears about the Church. I am not attacking central institutions, or even bureaucrats as such, but questioning where our priorities should lie.

The retirement of the Ven. Dr Gordon Kuhrt as head of the Ministry Division (previously ABM, previously ACCM, previously CACTM), and the advertisement for this highly paid post must bring up the question what Anglicans think ministry, and the Church, is about. Bureaucratic centralisation has increased my worries about the Church's ideology – and its lack of theology.

*Do I want to encourage yet more highly paid officials, some of whom may be priests, but who are basically managers, based in Westminster? Do I want to encourage the view of ministry expressed in Dr Kuhrt's book *An Introduction to Christian Ministry* (Church House Publishing, 2000) – a kind of 1950s managerial Evangelicalism, with little attention to priesthood, diaconate, sacraments, or the world? Of course not. I want to begin with the theology of Church and ministry.*

⁹ Church Times

Looking at the Church within the current political context, Damian Thompson finds further ways by which bureaucracy is stifling of the mission of the Church. Writing in the *Spectator*, Thompson is clear that the increased bureaucracy of the Church at its centre has impacted on its local structures and led to the weakening of its evangelical vigour and missionary zeal, caught up instead with weak, leftist ideas about social justice that are a drain on the true message of the Gospel. Mimicking a governmental model in its structures, formation and approach, the Church is becoming also in essence like that which it models:

committed Christians increasingly behave as if they worked for the public sector or a politicised charity. The typical Anglican and Catholic parish is dominated by clergy and lay assistants or volunteers configured into 'teams'. These teams, like those in Whitehall, local government, charities and the human resources departments of the private sector, are non-judgmental about issues of personal morality but quick to hand out judgments regarding, say, Fairtrade coffee.

⁹ Church Times, Issue 7430 (5th August, 2005)

Thompson sees bureaucracy as having “seized control of the mainstream denominations today” and the direct result of this as being a failure of the Church to be true to itself. Churches have instead become concerned with their own resources and with treading an inoffensive line fitting to governmental ideals of multiculturalism and providing clear moral messages only within that framework.

If centralised bureaucracy, emulating governmental models and using powerful leadership, oppose Christian theology, ministry and mission, what can organised Church do and be? Should it seek to extract itself completely from a bureaucratic or centralised way of being and find new ways of functioning that are revolutionary and distinctively Christian in ways totally counter-cultural to secular organisations? Has the Church borrowed from the secular world an approach that neglects, overshadows and hinders the work of those on the front line of Christian mission?



Rules vs Mission

Bureaucracy and business are recognised by some as limiting: systems, rules and restrictions that limit the mission abilities and energy of the Church. Within a specifically Methodist context, a closely-related debate can be seen around the appropriateness of the use and implementation of regulations and systems in the form of ecclesiastical rules. This largely appears in relation to the championing of CPD, the *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, by the Connexional Team and governance bodies of the Church. CPD sets out the official regulations and processes of the Methodist Church, containing instructions about the proper approved procedures by which all members and ministers should be guided in their conduct. For some, it is the antithesis of missional documents such as *Priorities for the Methodist Church* and movements like Fresh Expressions. The use of CPD relating to processes regulating sacramental ministry therefore led to the so-called *Plythgate* episode, during which a probationer minister was stopped from celebrating the Holy Sacrament in Trafalgar Square. The headlines followed:

Rules versus mission?

Angry comments ensued, criticising a Church administration with too much centralised power and with too much concern for systems and regulations. The central mechanisms of the Church were described as defined by bureaucracy, procedure and processes at the expense of what the Church is really meant to do: mission.

“In the face of this wonderful initiative by a keen and creative new minister, owing to the complaints of a handful of individuals, the great clunking fist of the Methodism establishment has crashed down to establish propriety and order!
“What sort of a world do those people who raised objections live in? What

sort of a future does a Church that is more concerned for CPD and for good order – than for offering Christ – have? It makes me angry, it makes me worried, it makes me fearful as to whether or not we will ever deliver that flexibility which will allow the creative act of worship or witness to be set free and fly.”

(Source: *Methodist Recorder*, issue 7911: 6th August 2009)

Administrative functions and bureaucratic structures do not exist within the Church to assist a mechanism for making profit as they do for secular businesses. However, parts of the Church institution are by necessity designed to be financially minded, concerned with regulations and process, and with material things – authorisations, payments, salaries, tied housing, pensions and other seemingly secular functions. They conduct work in the language of business and policy, talking of regulations, due processes, proper procedures, best practice, efficiency, budgeting, and even marketing. With regard to ‘bigger questions’ of regulation – those governing ministerial conduct, authorisation and sacramental conduct – Church law is theologically concerned, yet the style of approach in CPD to these areas maintains a lot in common with more basic administrative and procedural areas and, indeed, with secular administrative practices. The impact of such documents as CPD on the debate around the business-like bureaucracy of the Church is therefore clear. There is a legalism and a business to the Church, to which some are clearly opposed for great fear of its threat to God’s divine purposes and our missionary call.

Mission in Bureaucracy

Attacks such as that of Guinness on Church ‘bureaucrats’ lead to inevitable questions about what should be done differently. Should the conclusion be that the functions of the bureaucrats should cease? At the other end of the spectrum, trends of thought would answer firmly in the negative:

From Mrs Pat King

Sir, - The last paragraph from the back-page interview (13 November) with Michele Guinness made me angry.
I can speak only for the diocese of Hereford, where my husband has ministered for the past 15 years. We are very well served by ‘the bureaucrats’ in the diocesan office, who work tirelessly to look after our vicarages. I am also on our Benefice Buildings Committee, and great care is taken to maintain and improve houses within a budget.

For Mrs King, systems, budgeting and committees allow for her to live comfortably and for her husband, simply put, to *be* a minister.

Notable as a pioneering nonconformist voice with similar opinions was W.F. Wrigley. Chairman of the Derbyshire Congregational Union in the decades leading up to 1931, Wrigley expressed exasperation at the Church and churches with which he was associated: a voice crying out for change in their practices. Wrigley published a tract calling for sense to prevail, dealing with a subject which appears markedly modern. The logical arguments of his *A Reasoned Plea for Efficient Church Finance* could easily have been written by a twenty-first century Church Steward or Connexional Treasurer:

This pamphlet is issued in the hope that it may be read by those who have not given much thought to the subject, that having been read it may set them thinking, and that the result of thought may be an increased practical interest in the subject and as a consequence a more business-like financial administration in our churches.¹⁰

Wrigley's is the call of an intelligent, devoutly Christian man who sees disaster for churches in the future unless they think more sensibly about their finances and their systems for maintaining proper income. The models he uses for this look outside of the Church. His pamphlet describes eloquently how the principles of efficiency and best practice in secular systems would be of benefit to Church life:

The spirit of God works though human agency, and if the organization created by us for the diffusion of that spirit is sound, efficient, up-to-date, furnished with all the latest appliances, then may we not expect a greater outpouring of the Spirit? Well-oiled machinery avoids damage caused by friction. Well-conditioned piping avoids waste of steam, and conserves energy. The more perfect the organization, the better the potential product. I believe, therefore, that in dealing with this matter, I may be serving a very spiritual purpose.¹¹

Beyond just serving practical church needs more effectively, ensuring efficiency and best practice in financial systems is, for Wrigley, a sacred task:

If I stress the importance of efficient Church finance, I am not unmindful of the real work of the Church which is to spread the religion of Jesus Christ and so extend the Kingdom of God. But it is because this real work is so often crippled by lack of resources adequate for its purposes, and by consequent depression of spirit, that the whole subject of Church finance and administration becomes important in the same way as it is important to have a machine to turn out good work.¹²

Wrigley argues that the Church and Christians within it should not fear or demonise secular models and professional standards. Rather, these principles are to be taken, learned from and used to the benefit of the Church.

Modern progress in best practice can free the Church to be the best missionary organisation it can be. In this sense, proper bureaucracy (defined as organisational administrative systems based on models of recognised best practice) is a tool for the *Misero Dei*.

¹⁰ W. F. Wrigley, *A Reasoned Plea for Efficient Church Finance* (1931) p.3

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Quite so, reiterates Mrs King in her continued response to the Guinness interview:

As for the “bureaucrats”, my husband and I felt they were the uncared-for ones...we should be very grateful...Their work frees the clergy to minister without the worry of buying and maintaining a property, and enables them to live within the community they serve.

Quite so, reiterates also Giles Fraser, Canon of St Paul’s Cathedral, who argues that the nature of secular businesses can inform the Church to great reward. A business-style approach to „users“ of the Church, Fraser argues, is part of the Church’s mission. If the Church were to become more like its secular counterparts, it might do such radical things as grow and improve, since business models and practices and the ultimate aim of business are wholly dedicated to growth through learning and providing what is wanted and needed. This is achieved by providing a service and demonstrating its worth to the world.

What I like best about the commercial instinct is that it maintains a clear focus on what it is that people actually want.¹³

Successful modern secular companies learn about and utilise the best, most up-to-date practice, tailoring and evolving systems and processes for the best delivery of their services. They structure organisations around these and exert appropriate levels of control and power to maintain the highest level of delivery and achieve the greatest levels of stakeholder or customer satisfaction. Best practice and professionalism change, in a successful company, when change can deliver a better, more efficient service. To ignore what the commercial world can teach the Church is, says Fraser, irresponsible:

[the Church is] often insufficiently commercially savvy and, worse still, proud of it...The commercial instinct is a potential ally to the mission-shaped Church, a Church that is looking outward and seeking to attract new people

A Tradition of Learning and Adapting

The use of professional standards, processes and models to improve the Church’s missionary abilities (and using, at times, the language that conforms to these) has its roots from the very earliest ecclesiastical tradition. Such an approach in the twenty-first century Church would, in fact, be an historically standard one, in light of how sacred and secular have interacted in the past.

It takes only the briefest of considerations to note that the Church has, since its inception, borrowed from ‘professional’, non-Christian world systems and models for achieving its own distinctive purposes. The Church, the body of Christ in the world, is by definition a part of the material world and the Early Church, as it developed and grew recognised and exploited to its advantage the practical ramifications of this realisation. From its earliest organisation, the Church borrowed systems from secular models and processes for the sake of efficiency and maintaining proper order and authority.

¹³ *Church Times*, issue 7515 (23 March, 2007)

Throughout the period of New Testament literature, the need for efficient regulation and the creation of order in the Church, including the forming of power-bases, is acknowledged. The practical means for achieving this were not new creations based on other-worldly principles and systems – but assimilated from the existing culture and modelled primarily on secular, imperial structures and methods, taken particularly from legal and political spheres of life. An early example is in Acts 15.1-29, which is widely recognised by historians as an example of the Early Church borrowing the manner and processes of deliberation and the exercise of authority as seen traditionally in these secular (or pagan) spheres. Likewise, 1 Tim. 5.19 suggests that the earliest Christian communities held some form of court process when accusations were made against somebody in front of community elders, with the support of witnesses, just as in Roman courts of law:

Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

By the fourth century, this principle of designing ecclesiology and ecclesial ordering on secular exemplars came into its fore. Canon law entered the realm of Church concern and the ecclesiastical council developed, under Constantine, along the lines of parliamentary meetings, particularly the Roman governmental models, locally and of the Senate. By this period, to be a bishop meant to be a lawyer. Secular ways of working and the training and educations for them helped define ecclesiastical development to some great extent. Legal models of rhetoric and debate and political models of governance formed the context and backbone for the development of doctrine which still defines Christian belief. The highest standards and models of legal and political efficiency and order in secular society thus provided the models for processes which defined even the Nicene Creed.

This interaction was responsive and organic, and it worked both ways. Thus, for example, Constantine, the politically-Christian emperor, allowed his Christian subjects to be judged according to secular laws in courts presided over by bishops. The laws and the model of court proceedings used were long-established secular (or pagan) ones, but the tone of proceedings, the standards of judgement and the subsequent punishments were adapted for a Christian community. In the Early Church, a relationship of secular and sacred that was interactive, enquiring and responsive was a natural development from the earliest Christian communities. The Church was other than the world, but still within it and grew both by learning from it and by remodelling it.

This rich history of borrowing from and exerting influence on the secular can in fact be underpinned with rationale beyond the practical and necessary, with a distinctively Christian theological backing. Understanding the Church as an institution requires understanding it as an institution that exists in the context of the 'secular world'. As Brian Beck puts it, the Church must become, as Christ did, fully incarnate in the material world as part of an incarnational theology:

Churches are subject to the laws relating to charities and trusteeship, their accounting procedures must conform to official standards, their employment practices...must accord with employment law, they must regulate their administration of property... The Church is obliged to adopt secular practice in its administration.¹⁴

¹⁴ B. Beck, „A Methodist Reflection on Structural Change“, in G. R. Evans and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Managing the Church: Order and Organization in a Secular Age* (2000) 108-125 (p.111)

Yet this is not a restriction. So long as the adaptation of worldly systems and methods into the Church is reflective and intelligent (in Beck's reckoning, limited by principles of appropriateness and necessity), it is in fact a divine imperative that the Church do this, that it keep up with, learn from, and live as part of the world in which it lives.

If the Incarnation is the adoption by the divine of all the limitations, weaknesses and ambiguities of the human condition; if the glory of the Word is seen only because the Word was made flesh; and if, further, the Church is in any sense a witness to, or even 'continuation' of, the Incarnation, then any view of the Church that seeks to make it immune from contemporary culture (of which business practice is a part) is ultimately docetist.¹⁵

For Beck, then, the Incarnation (and thus by implication soteriology and missiology) demands a Church which learns how to function within the structures and practices of that which is not Church. Thus, what the Church is and what it is called to be means that the question for us is not *whether* we should be learning lessons from modern business practice, but only *how* and *to what extent*.

The Application of Business Practices

In line with the thinking of Wrigley, Fraser and others, there are increasing examples in the modern charitable sector of organisations following in the ancient tradition and accepting wholeheartedly that lessons can be learned from the attitudes and practices of corporations and businesses which, at first sight, might appear to be at polar opposites from, or even at odds with the aims of the third sector.


At a particularly advanced stage of living out this belief are some very obviously commercial endeavours from within the Christian world. *Christian Retailing* provides a key example. www.christianretailing.com looks like any other American online retail portal, filled with links to the companies they promote and awash with flashing adverts and brightly-lit slogans. Its content is highly financially-oriented. It provides market analysis and projections, talks of commercial trends and provides media roundup reports. *Christian Retailing* has their own awards ceremony, in the style of secular outward-facing industrial trends, focused on products, production, marketing and sales.



¹⁵ Ibid., p.115

Christian Retailing is ahead even of many secular equivalents with using and advocating use of the most advanced technology for its purposes. The following appeared before the iPad had been released into US stores:

NEW IPAD WILL DELIVER CHRISTIAN TITLES



Releases from Christian publishers will be among the many books available for Apple's new iPad digital media device, which was unveiled yesterday.

Apple's entry into the book reader market, which is expected to release in March, will work in conjunction with a digital book store-iBooks. Additionally, Apple already has agreements with Hachette Book G...

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These elements of its work are all the currency of modern secular business and marketing. *Christian Retailing* serves an industry and is prepared to take up a vast array of 'secular' commercial tools to promote the business they represent. However, their market is the Gospel, the Church and God's mission. Their business approaches may seem brash and unappealingly secularised to British Christians' sensibilities, yet they are a fundamental focus point for a thriving multi-billion dollar industry that promotes the dissemination of bibles, theology and new mission technology, as well as supporting key charity campaigns.



A more moderate approach to learning lessons from secular business examples is seen in the increasing energy and better resources that are being directed towards a growing industry that teaches third sector organisations to learn skills from their private-sector counterparts. A number of organisations now exist with the specific purpose of enabling charitable organisations to engage with best practice in evaluation, quality control, strategic financial planning and other areas of work that replicate the training of skills for efficiency and productivity that would traditionally be associated with secular, corporate organisations.

While most Church denominations would employ specialists trained in finances or tax law and other core legal functions required of any large organisation, wider business skills such as these have not traditionally been associated with in-house functions of ecclesiastical bodies. New training and consultancy organisations are, however, seeking to buck this trend and demonstrate that proper training and proper investment in developing and delivering models of best practice can be of enormous benefit to the purposes of any cause or organisation, even those which would traditionally shy away from talking in such terms.

These consulting, teaching and training organisations are proving increasingly popular because of the potential benefit they have for improving charitable organisations' abilities to deliver on their mission aims. Note, for example, the Charities Evaluation Service (CES). The CES defines itself thus:



What we do

We offer **training, consultancy, external evaluations and publications** to help you strengthen the quality of your work and achieve better outcomes for your service users.

We work in partnership with other organisations to deliver **key programmes** supporting voluntary and community organisations.

We provide **free information on evaluation and quality.**

Charities Evaluation Services is the UK's leading provider of support and advice on quality and evaluation systems for the voluntary sector.

Source: <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/>

This is not language with which the Church would instinctively associate itself. However, shifting the generic language to a more ecclesial form, describing mission and disciples rather than outcomes and service users, allows the advert above to demonstrate a service from which the Church could benefit.

Similarly to the CES, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) provides a consultancy service for the charitable sector:

Consultancy services

Our Consultancy team consists of skilled and experienced staff from across NCVO's teams, bringing integrity, independence, and energy to help change your organisation. We will draw upon NCVO's full breadth of knowledge, experience, and sector understanding to help you develop practical ideas and create the best solution.

(Source: <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/products-services>)

Again, lists of the functions of the NCVO might not sit easily with traditional discourse about the functions of the Church:

Advice and support

NCVO has many specialist teams who provide information, advice and support to others working in, or with, the voluntary sector. These teams produce publications, briefing papers and guidance notes; run training, conferences and seminars; and offer a range of networks and practitioner forums.

- [Advice, support and consultancy](#)
- [Campaigning](#)
- [Climate change](#)
- [Collaborative working](#)
- [Compact Advocacy](#)
- [Discounted services](#)
- [European and international](#)
- [Facilities management](#)
- [Governance and leadership](#)
- [Information and communication technology \(ICT\)](#)
- [Insurance for the Voluntary Sector](#)
- [Marketing, fundraising, communications](#)
- [Parliamentary](#)
- [People, HR and Employment](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Public Service Delivery Network](#)
- [Publishing](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Strategy and impact](#)
- [Sustainable Funding](#)
- [Third Sector Foresight](#)

Although the Church might be unused to dealing with such language in self-reference, the tailored functions of the NCVO in effecting a business-like approach for the charitable sector are designed solely to help organisations such as the Church to achieve better their own sets of purposes, whatever the mission of the organisation, whatever the culture and whatever the traditional language of that culture. The NCVO recognises that holding up a mirror to any organisation from an independent perspective can be a useful and creative tool for the development and success of that body:

We will act as your critical friend

Critical friends are not just critical. They're not just friends either. We will listen as much, if not more, than we speak.

We will ask searching questions, help clarify ideas, encourage focus and clarity of meaning and act with integrity. We value simple, clear and honest communication and want to help you achieve your mission.

We won't assume we know more than you about running your organisation, but neither will we always say what you want to hear just because you are paying us.

We will develop a detailed scope with you

Dedicating time to a thorough scoping of your project is absolutely essential to its success.

We will take time to fully understand the work you want done, the reasons why you want it done, and the outcomes you want to achieve.

The Methodist Church has not ignored opportunities for evaluation and development. The launch of the post-Team Focus Connexional Team saw the commitment to becoming 'Highly Professional - Distinctively Christian', suggesting that there need be no destructive conflict between these two concepts, and instead seeking to learn from the energy released by their tension. Team Focus represented a large-scale commitment on the part of the Conference to nurturing this type of culture, emphasising professional efficiency and quality control. Goals decided on by the Conference therefore included:

- Developing standards, competencies, accreditation and quality control for work in the Church
- Demonstrating a clear flow of money
- Prioritising accountability
- rigorous evaluation of work
- The Team will account for its use of financial resources in line with best professional practice and legal requirements¹⁶

The purpose of these was, however, fully focused on achieving the aims of the Church in mission terms:

in the period 2005/2008 the Connexional Team will develop and refashion its work so that it makes its most effective contribution to realising the Church's Priorities.¹⁷

In short, business-like efficiency, streamlining and models of best practice were designed for the purpose of making the Team and the Church more focused in its delivery of key mission priorities. Being mission focused in the rationale of Team Focus meant being efficient and up-to-date:

The outcome will be a more flexible and focused Team dedicated to modelling and advocating allegiance to the Priorities, to innovation and good practice.¹⁸

The Methodist Church, having taken this step in changing itself, is continuing to make use of the emerging industry of consulting and training in professional processes and models for non-profit organisations. A significant aspect of this is the Team's continuing commitment to the evaluation of its work and processes. MacWilliam Consulting, a company used by the Strategy and Resources Committee to perform an evaluation of Team Focus, made clear their own belief that there is a strong need for professional standards and monitoring to be applied to the voluntary sector, which includes the Church, in order to deliver their aims most effectively.

Although the language of the organisations may differ from profit-making companies and their styles of working use different principles, rigorous, professional evaluation and monitoring in line with recognised universal models of best practice in effectiveness and efficiency can still take place, to significant advantage.

¹⁶ See, Agenda 2005, pp. 364-6; Agenda 2007, pp.269-70

¹⁷ Agenda 2005, p.362


¹⁸ Ibid., p.361

Learning from professional, non-Church based evaluation consultations can therefore provide for the Church guidance on how better to be Church. So says MacWilliam Consulting:

We are pleased to have been invited to put in a proposal to evaluate Team Focus, the recent restructuring of the central offices of the Methodist Church. We welcome the opportunity to support, albeit in a small way, the Methodist Church's aim to create a more just and equal society, and the challenge of balancing business needs with spiritual calling within the organisation... the process of evaluation will demonstrate the Church's commitment to valuing people by learning from their experiences and making reasonable changes to future processes...handled sensitively and skilfully, the evaluation itself can be a process that enables positive change.¹⁹

The evaluation methods used by such agencies as MacWilliam are modelled on those pioneered by and used in the secular business world. They are not a new way of thinking unique to the Church, or even the voluntary sector, and indeed they can appear at first sight alien to those worlds. However, an intelligent use of them can serve the Church's aims to fulfil its spiritual calling and honour its commitments of responsibility to others. The review of Team Focus therefore looked at efficiency alongside personal experience during the reconfiguration, asking questions relating to the appropriateness of restructuring and design processes compared to professional standards set out by such organisations as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. The work of this institute might appear to have no instinctive relevance to the mission of the Church, yet the use of its models and guidelines within a Methodist context will provide for us lessons about how best to approach future projects in ways which live up to the commitments of such documents as the *Priorities* and *Ways of Working*.

The Church and Christians are, across the globe, learning from corporate models to fulfil their mission aims more effectively. This includes direct use of business models, media and marketing – all apparently secular constructs, but with the Gospel and the task of making disciples as their ultimate purpose. Note, for example, Christian Research's 'Church Check' :



CHURCHCHECK

A service provided by Christian Research

"When I was a stranger, you welcomed me*."
... or did you?

* Matthew 25:35

Church check is a method of performing market research and gaining customer feedback, fully based on corporate models of doing the same, using a secular market research company, which *Christian Research* freely acknowledges:

This research service has been modelled on the Mystery Shopping programmes commonly used to assess shops, hotels, pubs and other branches of the service industry. Churchcheck visitors are trained mystery shoppers, generally from a non-church background. They are based all over the country and will visit churches of any denomination and in any region.

¹⁹ Excerpts from *Evaluating the process of Team Focus: Proposal by MacWilliam Consulting* (Appendix to SRC paper SRC/09/72)

The methods are those of modern retail companies, but this does not make them unsuitable for Church purposes. Indeed, the sole purpose of this exercise is to allow churches to learn the sorts of lessons which they otherwise could not so that their welcome and approach might be changed or tailored to allow them better to spread the Word of God. As Christian Research puts it, “The service, designed to help churches improve, puts the biblical principle of welcoming strangers to the test.”²⁰

The Methodist Church has not failed to notice and take account of modern developments also in the more proactive market research and marketing areas. The Connexional Team now employs a Methodist Publishing Marketing Officer, whose role is to bring to the Church benefits of these ‘secular’ professional approaches. The present Officer sees this as a fully Christian exercise:

‘I would want to emphasise the ‘philosophy’ of marketing as advocated by the Chartered Institute of Marketing. The CIM states that if an organisation adopts the marketing concept it puts the customer at the centre of all business decision-making and planning. *‘Quality in a service or product is not what you put into it. It is what the customer gets out of it.’* (Peter F. Drucker)

“Whilst marketing emerged from the private sector it is being increasingly adopted by the public and third sectors. Their ‘customers’ (financial supporters, voters, constituents, visitors, members etc) might be slightly different from the private sector’s, and profit isn’t their primary motivation, but many are recognising the benefit of being an organisation that provides value-driven products and services.

“In a nutshell, an organisation that adopts the philosophy of marketing is an outward looking organisation that values its customers and other stakeholders. For me, that feels like quite a Christian thing to do!”

Suzanne Johnson, Methodist Publishing Marketing Officer (Jan 2010)

With this in mind, market research and marketing work are taking place around central publications in the Church, such as the new Methodist music resource.

Power, Management, Leadership

For the Christian, the Church or any faith organisation, reluctance to learn from secular systems and business models can emerge specifically around aspects of leadership and power, which come alongside those more worldly institutions. As we have already seen, centralised bureaucracies can cause suspicion in the Church as they suggest a level of control and a leadership with too much power, comparable to a managing directorship and CEO of a secular business.

When the Church of England commissioned its equivalent of Team Focus, leading to proposals in the Turnbull Report²¹ for the creation of a far more streamlined,

²⁰ Church Check publicity leaflet, available at <http://www.retail-maxim.co.uk/churchcheck/>

²¹ *Working as One Body. The Report of the Archbishops’ Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England* (1995) – commonly referred to as the Turnbull Report.

efficient and business-like central bureaucracy, it set out to address the issue of ecclesiology alongside practical reform:

*The report posed a challenge because, with a new starkness, it presented the Church with questions about whether it ought to bring into its governance the assumptions and practices of modern management theory.*²²

Responses to the report included several essays collected by G.R. Evans and Martyn Percy. Evans and Percy recognised clearly that resistance from within the Church would be largely focused on the roles of bishops and those of senior central bureaucratic bodies since the Church was and is so resistant to talking about power in a positive way:

*There is a healthy culture of suspicion among many clergy and laity, that when it comes to talk of management in the Church one is dealing with a Trojan horse. Beware of Greeks (or bishops) bearing gifts! A discussion about managing or rationalizing the Church is inevitably a discussion about power and its distribution.*²³

Derek Burke explains this as primarily a result of misunderstanding: fear that power will mean simply telling people what to do, which disenfranchises those being told and seeks to take the place of God, the only source of true authority for the Church.²⁴

The appropriate use of power can, however, maybe seen very differently. Burke reflects that modern management practice in secular organisations could be hugely liberating for churches, since it is designed to motivate and release energy for achieving the organisation's aims, supporting and serving those 'managed' in ways that allow others to be effective and efficient, as well as satisfied and empowered. The tools and processes of secular management are all tools for enabling this liberation and empowerment, and thus, if used appropriately, support leaders to have the power to serve others in bringing valuable, transformative change.

The key to getting it right for a Church, continues Burke, is not to translate the *morals* of the secular business world into the sacred. Processes, models, techniques, language and ideas can all be taken up, so long as the expression of them within a church environment is shaped by Christian values.

The desire to promote this way of thinking has led to the creation of specific organisations for the development of leadership within Christian contexts and the promotion of the idea of an appropriately Christian form of leadership and use of the power that comes with leadership.

One example is MODEM, the name of which is specifically intended to illustrate a two-way relationship of learning between those advocating and applying best practice in managerial and leadership practices and the mission and ministry of

²² G. R. Evans and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Managing the Church: Order and Organization in a Secular Age* (2000) p.9

²³ *Ibid.*, p.75

²⁴ D. Burke, 'A Strategy for Pastoral Care in a Diocese', in *ibid.*, 11-22 (p.17)

the Church. The name is therefore used as a dual acronym, indicating both 'Managerial and Organisational Disciplines for the Enhancement of Ministry' and also 'Ministerial and Ontological Disciplines for the Enhancement of Management':

A Hub for Leadership, Management and Ministry

MODEM's Mission Statement



A national and ecumenical Christian network which seeks to initiate authentic dialogue between exponents of leadership, organisation, spirituality and ministry in order to aid the development of better disciples, communities, society and world.

MODEM seeks to identify the practical means by which common learning and influence can benefit the leadership and management of Church and secular society. Positive and creative interaction can, in this organisation's way of thinking, lead to benefits for Christians both for Church structures and leadership (ministerial leadership being included in this, not simply administrative Church functions) and also for Christians working in secular contexts:

Purpose



Create, maintain and share a relevant body of knowledge on Christian Leadership

- find or develop a 'common language'
- help people find out what is happening
- where to find help
- how to learn, develop and grow.

Support and promote understanding of 'good practice' and 'know how' in Christian Leadership



- tools
- assessment
- skills
- mentoring, coaching and counselling.

Be an open channel of communication for:

- people wanting to help the Church and all Church organisations to be more effective
- people wanting to express their Christian faith at work, home, and in the world at large
- people wanting to understand how God relates to and in the world
- people seeking 'meaning and purpose'
- interfaith understanding and action.

Build and strengthen communities in Society.

Ian Cundy and Justin Welby express similar beliefs. They note that a servant leadership of the type seen in Jesus' own is actually the model most respected in modern management approaches, which leads to a proper and legitimate power in leadership. Servant leadership means holding power to create order and efficiency that allows those led (and therefore served) to reap the greatest rewards for their organisation. Cundy and Welby therefore look to Trinitarian models or the biblical metaphor of the human body as the Body of Christ to express that hierarchy or precedence does not need to mean domination, dominion, repression or differing levels of importance. Each level of an organisation relies on the others and frees up the whole to achieve the overall purposes of the Church. The Turnbull Report saw this as a model of leadership reflective of Christ's own. Learning from modern secular adaptations of that very ancient Christian model therefore appears perfectly natural for the Church:

*In Jesus' own exercise of his authority and power we see certain crucial features. He uses his power to confront evil and to challenge untruth: he acts not as a domineering force, but in service to his brothers and sisters; he goes out of his way to include those whom society casts out into the margins...*²⁵

Power held by Church leaders and church bodies, when exercised in a Christ-like way, can serve the Church in its purpose. The Church can in fact learn to be more Christ-like through learning to see what is of value in modern secular notions of effective leadership.

Intentional Overlapping

Increasing recognition of the usefulness of secular business models for Christian institutions should perhaps not be regarded as a surprising thing. It is developing alongside increasing attempts at the proactive merging of the secular and sacred worlds in other ways. Serious efforts are being made from within the private sector to bridge the gap so that the secular professional world and the personal and religious lives of employees are not seen as two separate territories. This context is important for establishing confidence in using secular professional working processes in the Church.²⁶

Areas where approaches to work and communications are shared by Church and secular business practice can also be seen within a context of broader deliberate engagement of the Church with secular businesses and industrial bodies. This engagement suggests that learning from the business world to be a better Church in fact forms a natural part of the Church's increasing efforts to understand the secular workplace, to become part of it, and to help to develop and shape it according to Christian values.

The Church has engaged with increasing vigour in a discussion of how it can, institutionally, inhabit the same space as that of secular business and support its members in that context. Borrowing practices from the corporate world can in fact be a small part of a wider movement from the Church to narrow the gap between the secular and sacred, recognising that, for most Christians, both worlds

²⁵ *Working as One Body. The Report of the Archbishops. Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England* (1995) section 1.22

²⁶ On this area, see L. Nash and S. McLennan, *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday. The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life* (2001); A. Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Market Place* (1998)

exist simply as the one context within which they live, work and worship are two elements of one Christian life.

The Methodist Church has been a significant contributor in this area. Business Sunday was launched on 3rd May 2009, which sought to promote the linking of the faith of Methodists with the business world and their individual working lives:

"In all the discussions I have been having with people all over the country, there has been a significant concern that we are not spending enough time making the link between our faith and our working lives. We often include doctors and teachers in our prayers, but we don't pray for the entrepreneurs, estate agents, accountants or people working in industry and commerce generally.

"Business Sunday is part of an initiative to support and encourage those people. The emphasis is not on creating yet another special Sunday in the calendar every year, but on having worship and study material available to help leaders support and value those in their congregations who are often facing tough decisions and ethical dilemmas in their working lives."

*David Walton, former Vice President of the Methodist Conference,
October 2008*

Methodist involvement in this area is not limited to one Sunday per year. The Church supports work-based chaplaincy in a variety of areas and the Methodist Diaconal Order has run a Faith and Work group since 2003, which provides support and resources for deacons, with the specific aim of enabling and educating lay people for ministry and mission in the world of work.

Through the Joint Public Issues Team, the Methodist Church engages with business ethics, with the trade union movement, provides targeted materials and resources for engaging with the connection between work and Church, and supports campaigns for Christian approaches to finances, financial need and charitable giving.²⁷

Interacting with and ministering to the secular working world inevitably means engagement with it. As these Methodist forms of engagement demonstrate, this does not involve a hostile approach which seeks to undermine that world, but a desire to inhabit it, to provide it with spiritual support.

Efforts of the Church to bring itself into the business world are reflected in a considerable history of those working and living within the business world finding clear ways to inhabit that secular environment but still remain distinctively Christian. *Models for Christ* may call itself *Paradox*, yet the setting up of Christian groups, resources and support mechanisms within or for secular industries and their employees is not particularly rare. Although the fashion industry may be an unusual example, the principle, at least, is long-standing enough no longer to seem paradoxical in other areas.

²⁷ See <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentoworld.content&cmid=1740>

The Christian Association of Business Executives (CABE - <http://www.cabe-online.org>) has as its tagline “*Affirming Christians in Business*”. It exists specifically to support Christians in leadership positions throughout the working world so to enable and encourage them to exercise influence founded on their own Christian values:

Leading and influencing organisational culture through Christian Values

Individual Christians frequently believe that they can do little to enhance the decision-making in their own organisations, yet time and again it is observed that it is committed individuals who can make a significant impact on those around them. Organisational culture develops ultimately from people employed within the organisation, and individual leaders have the opportunity to shape policies and decisions in which they participate during their normal operations. CABE's Principles are an attempt to help individual Christians identify areas for attention in action and prayer. Corporately CABE provides many forums to assist with the support and encouragement of individual leaders in this context.

Source: <http://www.cabe-online.org/howweare.php>

To assist in this task, CABE sets out 31 principles for those in leadership roles in the business world, “embracing corporate responsibility and personal values, drawn from a Christian perspective”. These include priority aims, corporate values and personal qualities, seeking to offer a vision for creating a business culture based on Christian values, encouraged by and embodied in the influence and actions of CABE members within the business world.

A similar organisation is found in the Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF - <http://www.icf-online.org>), which issued the following press statement as a clear message of the potential unity of Christian values and the processes and practices of secular business life:

People can express their faith at work in a number of ways, from the simple way of how they behave to basing strategic business initiatives on Christian values of truth, integrity and stewardship²⁸

The ICF was founded in 1919 through the bringing together of the Navy Mission and the Christian Social Union, adopting the tagline, “*Christ the Lord in All life*”. The ICF provides publications,²⁹ arranges events, conducts research and supports networks that seek to bring together the worlds of faith and business and support Christians working in industry to live out their faith at work, exercise a ministry within their workplace, and deepen their understanding of God’s purpose in the world of work.

The ICF in fact goes so far as to create and support the creation of worship materials specifically tailored for working contexts and arrange such programmes as ‘Take Your Minister to Work Day’. The ICF promotes ‘Marketplace Christianity’ and sees no bar to worshipping God and living according to God’s Word in the modern business world. Indeed, the priority should be for a working life lived out in a Christian way beyond a more limited form of ‘Sunday Christianity’ :

²⁸ *When did you last pray for your stockbroker?* – ICF press release 26 September, 2003

²⁹ See <http://www.icf-online.org/page4.htm>

“If finding God in our churches leads to us losing Him in our factories, then better we tear down those churches for God must hate the sight of them.”

(Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, early ICF Missioner)

These movements from within the Church and from those engaged in secular employment demonstrate a clear desire to bring the two contexts together in a way that no longer encourages the view that there are two separate worlds from which one moves depending on the time of day or the day of the week. The world in which business and industry exist, for these movements, is the same as that in which the Church exists. The two cannot ignore one another - instead there is great value in bringing them as close as they possibly can be. The potential impact of this on the Church's own use of business practices is clear. Rather than sacrificing the integrity of the Church, becoming part of the business world, learning from it, and helping to find a mutually-supportive and productive way forward is increasingly seen, by a growing number of organisations, as of great benefit to both.