

Equip, Connect and Inspire:

Report on a Conference for Entrepreneurs

■ by Kina Robertshaw



Kina attended the Christian Entrepreneur Conference in Canada, and was inspired to challenge the division between churches and entrepreneurs. The living God is the greatest entrepreneur of the Universe. The creativity we appreciate in entrepreneurs comes from the Creator.

Entrepreneurial Leaders Organisation is a unique support organisation that truly equips, connects and inspires entrepreneurs to be fully devoted to a lifestyle of wholeheartedness before God in the marketplace.

The first time I browsed ELO's website these three words caught my attention: equip, connect and inspire. In large measure, these words stimulated my desire to travel from Cambridge to Vancouver to attend the 2012 ELO Conference.

Why these three words resonate so strongly for me is apparent as I reflect on my life growing up in Africa with 12 siblings, where I sense an echo of these elements of support. In this respect, I am grateful to my parents, especially my mother who taught us the word of God; sent all her children to school; and kept us strong and united as a family. I thank God for the privilege of having a mother who equipped, united and inspired her children.

Before studying at Ridley Hall Theological College, business was pretty much my life! For ten years I owned and ran a successful retail business operating in Lusaka and Johannesburg. I am currently writing a thesis on Christian Entrepreneurship, and my past experience in business provides a great motivation, driving my research on the topic and in particular prompting me to explore the relationship between the Church of England and entrepreneurs.

A chasm clearly continues to grow between the entrepreneurs and their Churches. It is not always a healthy relationship, one in which these same elements of equipping, connecting and inspiring are sadly lacking. The Church of England, on a broad level, fails to acknowledge the potential contribution entrepreneurs can and do make to the kingdom of Christ. The Church speaks rarely and inadequately about Christian entrepreneurship and, at times, can be seen to support flawed assumptions about entrepreneurship, questioning its potential to contribute to mission. The problems in the relationship are not just one-way traffic; business too and in particular secular businesses play their part in widening the gulf. For example, when attending a seminar at Judge Business School, University of Cambridge I was challenged with the strong statement: "business and Christianity are as incompatible as oil and water".

Darrell Johnson's opening words at the start of the conference were such a significant reminder and set a perfect introduction. Darrell argued how the local church ought to be the most entrepreneurial movement in the world, knowing that a living God, who chooses to dwell within the body of Jesus Christ, is the greatest entrepreneur of the Universe. The God who made the world, came into the world as one of us in Christ Jesus and dwells with us and in us in the Holy Spirit is the infinitely creative God. We were created to participate in the creativity of this infinitely creative Creator. ▶▶

Before coming to study theology at Ridley Hall Cambridge in 2010, Kina Robertshaw owned My Choice, a department store in Lusaka and was involved in a number of additional business ventures including a music production company and an events agency. She was successful not only in Zambia but competed effectively in the fashion industry in Johannesburg, South Africa as well.



* Bill Bolton, *The Entrepreneur and the Church*, Grove Books, 2006, p. 12).

▶▶ The first thing we learn about God in the Bible is that he is both creative and hard-working. He expressed his joy through the creation of the heavens and the earth and all of nature. 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good' (Genesis 1:31). The whole grand narrative of the Christian story begins from this point. Darrell remarked that before God gave His people the ability to preach, teach or heal he gave the gift of craftsmanship: 'See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts' (Exodus 31:2-3). Our God loves to be creative and he delights in sharing his creativity with his people. God, the creator, is the source of all creativity. Creativity is a trait that enables an entrepreneur to think differently, to come up with new ideas or to transform the things around them into products of great potential value. The gift of creativity is not restricted to a religious context. 'As image-bearer of God, man possesses the possibility both to create something beautiful and to delight in it. ... The world of sounds, the world of forms, the world of tints, and the world of poetic ideas, can have no other source than God; and it is our privilege as bearers of his image, to have a perception of this beautiful world, artistically to reproduce, and humanly to enjoy it.' (Abraham Kuyper; *Calvinism*, pp. 142,156-157). Without the factor of creativity there would be no opportunities to choose or ideas to focus upon. This is what entrepreneurs do: 'habitually create and innovate to build something of recognised value around perceived opportunities'*

As Graham Power, an entrepreneur and founder of the Global Day of Prayer, shared his rich experience in the marketplace and in ministry, he spelt out the principles of leadership and living as a disciple of Jesus Christ in the business world. He contends Christians in the marketplace have a mission to challenge a 'culture of corruption' in a programme he calls *Unashamedly Ethical*. A reminder to Christian entrepreneurs to be faithful stewards of resources entrusted to them by God, needing to live out and infuse their faith into their daily lives and workplaces.



'My Choice', the department store Kina set up in Lusaka

If I think about my own experience of being an entrepreneur in Zambia and those of the business community more generally, I am struck by the immense obstacles that prevent the generation of wealth which can benefit many, serve the unmet needs of the population or provide employment. The challenges in Africa are manifold and often magnified in relation to the experience of western entrepreneurs. Two obvious examples include the very limited opportunities to raise business finance and the absolute skills shortage that limits productivity, but there are many more. These are among the missing technical inputs, but aside from these there is a vital human element that is also too often lacking. I refer to the support, guidance and encouragement that is so important. Where there are few formal business support organisations, imagine the power of a local church that played its role in equipping, connecting and inspiring entrepreneurs.

So for me, as my mother taught me, life is about relationships, but on a deeper level, it's about connecting, and the two go hand in hand. In a dynamic way, the ELO conference provides an opportunity to interact with the speakers and other attendees, hence creating a web that equips, connects and inspires Christian entrepreneurs. I have benefited greatly from listening to the inspiring and informative speakers; their experiences and perspectives will be of great help to my research and my future ministry. What an exceptional conference! ■