

The Acceptable Face of Capitalism: High Morals for the High Street

*In an official report, Members of Parliament in the UK have described the former owner of British Home Stores (BHS) as ‘the unacceptable face of capitalism’. In this article, **Peter Heslam** responds by considering what it means for God to have a human face and reflects on the John Lewis Partnership (JLP), one of BHS’s key competitors on the British high street..*

British high streets and out-of-town shopping centres have reached the end of an era. All 164 stores of the retail giant BHS, founded in 1928 by US entrepreneurs, have closed their doors for the last time, leaving its pensioners and around 11,000 employees with an uncertain future.

Two official reports lay the blame squarely at the feet of the business’ former owner, Sir Philip Green, the most recent of which labels him ‘the unacceptable face of capitalism’.

Such a stinging indictment raises a pertinent question: what is

capitalism’s *acceptable* face? Ever since Karl Marx made ‘capital’ central to his economic critique, many have argued that there is nothing acceptable about capitalism because it is a system based on exploitation and avarice. For them, business leaders like Sir Philip represent not



Sir Philip Green before a parliamentary select committee

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