

21st Century Pioneers: Faith, Enterprise and Social Purpose

By The Jubilee Centre

Free online resource, 2022, <https://www.jubilee-centre.org/blog/21st-century-pioneers>

For nearly 40 years, since its inception in 1983, the Cambridge-based Jubilee Centre has brought biblical insight to bear on public life. Part think tank and part campaigning group, it developed a distinctive Christian approach to a wide range of social issues with its emphasis on quality relationships. Along the way, it collaborated from time to time with Faith in Business over shared conferences, research and publications. A year ago, the Jubilee Centre decided to sharpen its focus in terms of building a movement for good business, a fair economy and dignified work. Sadly, it was not itself in sound financial shape, and the change in focus failed to reverse the decline of its support basis. In September 2022 the Trustees decided that the Centre couldn't continue in its current form and that its day-to-day operations should cease, all its employees being made redundant. It survives only as an online presence – continuing to apply relational thinking and biblical insight to public life – under the guidance of its distinguished founder, Michael Schluter.

Nevertheless, within that last troubled year the Jubilee Centre was far from inactive, and in June produced an attractive 74-page research report, *21st Century Pioneers: Faith, Enterprise and Social Purpose*. This can be downloaded free online from their website, <https://www.jubilee-centre.org/new-resources>. The report explores and celebrates the way that purpose-driven businesses and social enterprises in the UK are making this country a better place by pioneering new and better approaches to business. It is based on interviews with a sample of 42 Christian business owners and leaders. The interviewees were a

diverse mix of men and women, varying ages and ethnicities; their companies comprised 74% commercial businesses and 26% social enterprises; and the company size varied from less than 10 employees (18 of the 42) to over 250 (4 of the 42).

Many readers will be aware that a few years ago I was involved, with my co-author Kina Robertshaw, in a similar piece of research involving 50 Christian entrepreneurs. This culminated in our book *A Voice to Be Heard: Christian entrepreneurs living out their faith*. Like the Jubilee Centre authors, we concluded that it is time for the Church to recognise that enterprise can be a force for good, to celebrate and encourage Christian businesspeople working in their midst. So I was interested and heartened to hear of this initiative and read this report. There are three businesspeople interviewed for both pieces of research, but most of the people included in *21st Century Pioneers* were new to me, some only having started their business in the last five years.

The report is structured round seven key principles which the Jubilee Centre had already developed in a companion publication which can also be downloaded from their website, *Beautiful Enterprise*. The authors found good examples of pioneering business approaches in each of these seven areas:

1. Purposeful enterprise
2. Dignified work
3. Fair pay
4. Relational capital¹
5. Rooted communities
6. Fair taxation
7. Environmental stewardship

Alongside text exploring each of these areas, the report features a series of case studies, companies that exemplify these concerns. A little surprisingly, they are not evenly distributed; no case studies are featured in relation to areas 3 and 6, whereas the second area, Dignified work, features no less than four.

In my view it is the case studies that form the most interesting part of the report, because here one can see fine principles to which many businesses would pay lip service fleshed out in action. They include:

- Just-Ice, an ice cream enterprise that provides 'supported employment' to survivors of human trafficking and modern-day slavery; it purchases Fairtrade ingredients and pioneers new plastic-free ice cream packaging.
- Just Helpers, a London-based cleaning company that pays its cleaners the real Living Wage or higher, emphasises that all administrative and senior staff exist to serve the cleaners, have decided on kindness as the top corporate value, and keep Sundays as rest days.
- Jericho Foundation, a conglomeration of seven social enterprises in inner city Birmingham with 150 employees, many from backgrounds of homelessness, addiction or mental ill health. The enterprises cover areas as diverse as construction, waste recycling, wood recycling, cleaning and a vegetarian food business.
- COOK, the producer of frozen ready meals 'made like you would at home' from kitchens in Somerset and Kent; it has a RAW (Ready and Working) Talent programme which

Esther Knight, founder of Fanfare Label

Photo: Drapers



supports employment for people who have spent time in prison or without secure housing. Its social purpose is defined as ‘nourishing people’s relationships with food and each other’.

- Ethical Addictions, a coffee roasting company which applies strict criteria in selecting investors, seeking those who support its concern to reinvest profits in the community infrastructures of coffee farmers in Brazil and Tanzania.
- Grace Network, whose vision is a reworked version of Luke 4:18 (liberation from systems of oppression), and comprises a social enterprise hub that incubates and owns a portfolio of community interest companies in the Gloucestershire town of Stroud.
- Fanfare Label, an innovative fashion label that models the ‘circular


economy’. Clothes are made from repurposed clothing or accredited sustainable fabrics. They offer a lifetime guarantee on all their clothing and a take-back scheme where customers can return items.

This is just a selection of many stirring examples which will intrigue and inspire the reader.

In a final section, the report explores the impact of the entrepreneurs’ faith on how these companies run. I had hoped for a deeper treatment here, but some familiar themes come to the fore, such as: servant leadership; relational working (with all stakeholders); prioritising telling the truth; perseverance; compassion for the marginalised; and wanting to make a difference. Some businesses were closely involved with a church, Radiant Cleaners and Grace Church in Nottingham² being a notable example of this, but the majority not. All were

united by a view of Christianity as embracing the whole of life.

The report is marked by a certain amount of padding: there is quite a lot of white space (one page, no.28, has literally nothing on it!) and the summary, the introduction and conclusion all say much the same thing, encapsulated in this passage: ‘It is time to stop the nostalgia for the reformers of the past, and instead recognise the work being done by the reformers of our own generation. There is more to celebrate today than many perhaps realise. These reformers also need support – and there are surely more who should be joining them. We want to see a sense of cultural renewal in the marketplace which will reshape the UK for good’ (p.68).

Amen to that, and sincere thanks to Anita Bennett, the chief researcher, and Tim Thorlby, the Jubilee Centre’s most recent director, for making us more aware of the Good Business that is going on. 

1. This means structuring of finance and distribution of profits in a way that prioritises good relationships.

2. I interviewed Matt Parfitt, CEO of Grace Enterprises, in FiBQ 21:4, pp.17-20.



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