

Còmhradh: Argyll Faith and Culture Conversation
Glencruitten House, Oban, 24-25 April 2015

Believing in Business

Summary of Discussions

Introduction: Kenneth Ross

To talk of faith and business might seem strange to some. In our Western compartmentalized view of the world, the economy is often seen as something that runs according to its own dynamics while faith, if it is given a place at all, is concerned with a totally different aspect of life. If you are in business you run the business on business principles and if in your down time you choose to go the opera or the football or the church, that is fine but it is not expected to have any direct bearing on the way you do business.

This weekend we hope to probe this assumption under our cryptic heading “Believing in Business”. Can, should, faith have a place in inspiring and operating business? Should the economic sphere be an active concern of people of faith? Should business be open to what might be offered by the practice of faith?

Our discussion will respond to three specific questions:

1. What is the role of faith in creating livelihoods and sustaining business in Argyll?
2. How does faith find expression in business?
3. What difference does faith make to the operation of business?

Faith and Business in Argyll: the Big Picture – Robert Pollock

Far from being irrelevant, faith is the beating heart of the economy. Adam Smith’s work on the market economy indicated that all was predicated on human virtue. If there are no sound values, no good person, at the heart of it then the market system will become rapacious and therefore unable to fulfill the ennobling and enriching role which Smith envisaged.

Macro Issues

There are a number of macro-economic issues which have a bearing on the economy of Argyll.

- Energy – oil supply is beset by periodic crises but at the end of the day it is a finite resource. Yet the economy, particularly in rural areas, is driven by oil. Currently the Government has moved away from the off-shore wind farms which would have been significant for Argyll in favour of nuclear power and fracking. However, there is likely to be a return, sooner or later, to renewable forms of energy.
- Demography – people are the barometer that indicates the strength of the economy (Rousseau). The population of Argyll (2% of Scottish population) is ageing. It is expected that by 2035 there will be a 20%

growth in retired people, with a 14% decline in the working population. Who will pay for the welfare state?

- Information Technology – this is a wonderful resource for tourism, for education, for retail. Yet it brings change to the economy – it is expected that 40% of current jobs will disappear.
- Climate Change – as this poses challenges world-wide, Argyll remains a beautiful environment, a prized environment.

Micro Issues

There are a number of micro perspectives which may help Argyll to navigate the macro issues:

- Argyll is close to major centres of population but feels very remote.
- Argyll is perfectly placed to be a centre of renewable energy and projects like the Argyll array and the Islay array may well be revived.
- The tourism product is fantastic – 25 inhabited islands. Food and drink are world-class.
- The history and heritage of Argyll, built on Christianity, is a significant asset.

These local assets can be applied to the global context. Faith has an important role to play in the economy of the future. We have uncoupled morality from the economy and there is need to re-couple them. Faith is key to this.

Experiences of Faith and Business

Four people shared their own experience of working at the intersection of faith and business.

Liz Gibson

Based at the Mo Dhachaigh croft at Lochdon on the Isle of Mull, Liz aims to reclaim Christianity as an alternative to the establishment rather than part of it. She believes that we need to do things differently and, for her, integrity required that she pull out of the establishment and begin to work in a different way, though she remains committed to the Church of Scotland as a minister.

She and her husband Martin aim to live a simple life, running their croft, growing as much of their own food as possible and developing arts and crafts. They run an open house with many people coming to stay for short periods, including “woofers” who work on the croft in return for bed and board. Faith is demonstrated by the fruit of the Spirit – “they will know we are Christians by our love”.

Wordsworth’s poem is pertinent to our time:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.--Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

We need to hear again the teaching of Jesus about seeking first the kingdom of God, about where your treasure is your heart will be also, about if you have two coats, give away one.

Neil Matheson

A song that strikes many chords for our time is "Thrive" by Casting Crowns:

Here in this worn and weary land
Where many a dream has died

Like a tree planted by the water
We never will run dry

So living water flowing through
God we thirst for more of You
Fill our hearts and flood our souls
With one desire

Just to know You and
To make You known
We lift Your name on High
Shine like the sun make darkness run and hide
We know we were made for so much more
Than ordinary lives
It's time for us to more than just survive
We were made to thrive

Into Your word we're digging deep
To know our Father's heart

Into the world we're reaching out
To show them who You are

So living water flowing through
God we thirst for more of You
Fill our hearts and flood our souls
With one desire

Just to know You and
To make You known
We lift Your name on High
Shine like the sun make darkness run and hide
We know we were made for so much more
Than ordinary lives
It's time for us to more than just survive
We were made to thrive

Joy Unspeakable, Faith Unsinkable, Love Unstoppable, Anything is possible
Joy Unspeakable, Faith Unsinkable, Love Unstoppable, Anything is possible
Joy Unspeakable, Faith Unsinkable, Love Unstoppable, Anything is possible
Joy Unspeakable, Faith Unsinkable, Love Unstoppable, Anything is possible

Just to know You and
To make You known
We lift Your name on High
Shine like the sun make darkness run and hide
We know we were made for so much more
Than ordinary lives
It's time for us to more than just survive
We were made to thrive

Hey!

We were made to Thrive

In a situation where many are hopeless, it is essential to rebuild confidence – we were made to thrive.

It is important not to become hostage to low expectations. Keep raising the bar. “If you want to walk on the water, you have to get out of the boat.” Neil has seen this philosophy working in his retail business, in the social enterprise Atlantis Leisure, in the Christian charity H2O (Hope to Oban), and its new project at the Glencruitten Walled Garden.

Faith and good business practice are much closer than is often imagined. This is illustrated in Solomon’s request to God as recorded in I Chronicles 1:10-12...“Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people, for who can rule this great people of Yours?” God said to Solomon, “Because you had this in mind, and did not ask for riches, wealth or honor, or the life of those who hate you, nor have you even asked for long life, but you have asked for yourself wisdom and knowledge that you may rule My people over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge have been granted to you. And I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings who were before you has possessed nor those who will come after you.” Faith guides business decisions, often tacitly, simply by underlying the decision to do something or not to do something.

Richard Hess

After losing his job in Zimbabwe, Richard took the decision to set up his own consultancy business in economic development – Imani (the Swahili word for faith or confidence). It was a step of faith and hand-to-mouth financially in the early days. Slowly the business grew. From a base within the developing world it offered a service that was ethical and trustworthy. It hired staff who shared its ethics. Some were Christians; others were not Christians but shared the ethic. Over time more people became convinced that “trade not aid” is the best way to eliminate poverty (though in Richard’s view an element of aid is still needed).

Imani is active today helping large companies to source materials from small-holders in Africa, e.g. pods from baobab trees provide the main ingredient for cream of tartar. This is a model which can be very relevant to Argyll’s economy, e.g. biscuits baked on Mull are served on British Airways. Big businesses today are interested not only in their profits but also in contributing to the community. The model of the social enterprise has much to commend it both in the developing world and in Argyll.

Calum Macfarlane-Barrow

Calum and Mary-Ann bought Craig Lodge in 1977, initially running it as a sporting lodge. In 1983 their children travelled to Medjugorje where appearances of the Mother of God were having a transforming effect in terms of healing and holiness. The children returned as different people and persuaded their parents that they must visit Medjugorje. They too received many graces through their visit and found that their prayer life was greatly strengthened.

They became convinced that people were suffering through being hooked on materialism and that there was a widely felt need to return to God and discover the power of prayer. In 1989 Craig Lodge came to a turning point on the expiry of their sporting lease. They could sell up, become a licensed hotel, or become a house of prayer. They took the third option, opening as a house of prayer in 1990.

A community of young people began to form and over the years 130 young people have spent a year at Craig Lodge. There is no advertising. People “just come”. They spend three hours in prayer each day and carry out missions. Mary’s Meals has been a fruit of this work. Others will follow.

Summary of Discussions

It was felt that human beings are reaching out for more than the material. Business has lost its way by becoming exclusively concerned with maximization of profits. Going back to Adam Smith reminds us that ethics lies at the heart of the running of the economy and faith has a pivotal role to play. Many thinkers in China are paying careful attention to this as China has moved from a Communist economy to adopt the market system.

It was observed that all four presenters had gone “off the grid”, taking risks and being prepared for adventure. “You can do it!” – confidence is key to success. There is nothing like the sense of being God’s special child to instill confidence. In this way faith makes for an entrepreneurial approach and good business. Enterprise needs faith and faith needs enterprise.

Worship

Terry Harley from Craig Lodge led times of praise and worship which framed the discussions with a sense of the presence of God.