MISSIONAL ENTERPRISE

BY DESIGN

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THE ACHIEVEMENT OF CAPITALISM AND THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

At the end of the cold war with the fall of the Soviet Union many declared that free-market capitalism was the only viable future economic system. At the heart of the capitalist system lay the “for profit”, publicly quoted enterprise whose purpose was to make a return on capital. The threat of takeover concentrated minds on continually increasing this return. The elegant theorems of neoclassical welfare economics provided a rationale for the system. Higher returns would lead to the most efficient use of scarce resources and the economy would produce the greatest possible value of consumption. The job of government economists was to provide the means for this to happen with the lightest touch regulation.

Yet the success of capitalism has not stopped the rise of alternative forms of business. Over many years, economists had laid bare the theoretical reasons why profit-maximising firms operating in a market economy might not produce the most efficient outcomes. As countries grew the theoretical costs of capitalism became evident in practice. With rising affluence came rising levels of pollution and greater concern for the quality of the environment. Income inequality increased, and while many people prospered many others remained poor. Some enterprises responded with new programmes of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR). However, many entrepreneurs started up new forms of enterprise with different objectives. In the UK there are more than 70,000 social enterprises according to the 2012 Small Business Survey.

Those enterprises with social objectives not unreasonably became known as ‘social enterprises.’ In essence a social enterprise was a business with a social objective that sold a product or service to generate the funds to sustain the enterprise and achieve its intended impact. Argument about the definition centred on the extent to which the enterprise could also earn a profit for investors and the permissible extent of grant and donor funding. The most celebrated example of a social enterprise is the Grameen Bank. The bank and its founder Mohammed Yunus won the 2006 Nobel peace prize for their pioneering work in microfinance.

The reaction of would-be entrepreneurs and charities was favourable. The number of social enterprises grew quickly. Charities and mission agencies saw social enterprises as a way of raising funds for their cause without asking for donations. Establishing a social enterprise was also a way of establishing a presence in a new country that might be more sympathetic to business than to the charity or mission agencies.

In its most integrated, coherent form a social enterprise is not simply a source of funds or a footprint on the ground. Ideally the products and services of a social enterprise, together with its way of working, are the means of reaching its social objective. A good environmental social enterprise would help clean the environment or prevent pollutions, for example by making products that were recyclable. This consistency and wholeness are a matter of conscious enterprise design.

IS THE DESIGN OF MISSIONAL ENTERPRISE DIFFERENT?

Given that social entrepreneurs are seeking to achieve some social good, this raised the question whether an explicitly ‘Christian’ missional enterprise would be any different? Should it in theory be different; and can it be different in practice? To put the question another way, if we were to design an enterprise from a Christian perspective would it necessarily do anything different, look any different or function any differently?

Yet we should expect a difference

However, the same question could be asked about individual Christians. Would we expect their motivation, values and practice to be different from those around them with different beliefs? The Apostle Paul certainly thought so. He expected them to think differently (“be transformed by the renewing of your minds”), to act differently (“do not be conformed to this world”) and to direct their affections differently (‘you must get rid of all such things – anger, wrath, malice’). Should we not expect that believers who can and should be different might also be able to design enterprises that would also be different?

Perhaps this suggests that the methods of designing might themselves point to those differences and show

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1 See the early work in the genre J. de V. Graaff Theoretical Welfare Economics (Cambridge: CUP, 1957)
4 “Reuse, Reduce, Recycle: Designing Products and Processes for Sustainability”, accessed 3 March 2017
http://www.hermanmiller.com/research/topics/all-topics/reuse_reduce_recycle_designing_products_and_processes_for_sustainability.html
5 Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:8.
us how to achieve them? If the approach to designing a missional enterprise is different might we not expect the end design to be different?

DIFFERENT APPROACH, DIFFERENT DESIGN

Designing is the way people think about shaping new things. Design has a long pedigree and has the characteristics of what Aristotle called ‘art’, though today we arguably would distinguish the two. It has three characteristics. First, it relates to conceptualising new forms that do not yet exist. It is not about the past but about the shape of the future. Second, it’s concerned exclusively with what human beings are capable of changing. For example, designing is not concerned about the ‘laws’ of statics; but it is concerned with engineering a bridge. Third, design has purpose. Designing has an end and requires thought.

Scope

This definition of design is broad and its scope is consequently large. This means that design includes much more than those areas commonly associated with it. Design is related to more than house interiors, furniture and mobile phones. Today, design relates not only to products but to services and formulating government policy among other activities. In particular, designing is the way in which entrepreneurs consciously shape a new enterprise or reshape existing ones.

The elements of the design process are generally accepted. While different designers might give different names to the stages of the design process, the main elements have generally been agreed since at least the time of the ‘design methods movement’ in the late 1950s to early 1960s. They are purpose, context and the form of the design.

Purpose

Design begins with purpose. It is what the design is intended to achieve. In commercial life, this usually takes the form of the client’s brief. However, the designer often has their own reasons for designing in a particular way as a result of their experience and aesthetic or other values.

Context

What a newly designed enterprise will achieve will depend on its ‘context’. The design of the enterprise must take account of existing consumer tastes, prices, competitors and the skill of the workforce for example. The static context will determine whether an enterprise might be able to sell enough of its product above cost to keep people employed. Context is also dynamic; for example, the designer-entrepreneur needs to anticipate that competitors might lower their prices. Some static and dynamic aspects of context will help realise the purposes of the enterprise; others will inhibit their realisation. Some aspects will work toward some purposes but work against others.

Design form

The form of the design is the representation of what the object of the design will be composed of, what it will look like. It is ‘the shape of things to come’. In the case of an enterprise it would include its structure, often shown by an organogram, its procedures, including physical layout, its cultural values, that is “the way we do business around here,” as well as its products and services. It is what the designer controls; and it is “the ultimate objective of design”.

Interdependence

The designer sets the form in conformity with the context so as to achieve the purpose of the design problem. (This is not to say that the design process is linear – see below) A well designed missional enterprise would suit its purpose and context. Change either purpose or context and the best-suited design would change.

Consider changes to the purpose of the enterprise. Purpose shapes vision, the picture of what success looks like. This vision is the basis for business metrics against which to measure success and on which to base decision making. So purpose is crucial.

Consider next how the analysis of context affects the design of management structures in the example above. If managers consider people to be lazy then the entrepreneur would design a tight, hierarchical managerial structure. Conversely if managers consider

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8 Nigel Cross, *Designerly ways of Knowing* (Boston: Birkhauser Verlag AG, 2007), 96
10 Alexander, Notes, 15
people to be well motivated then they would make supervision less close and the management structure flatter. This illustrates how the analysis of context as well as the actual context is important in design.

The argument
This gives rise to the expectation that a well-suited missionial enterprise would be distinct from other types of designs. The reasons are that a missional enterprise would have:

- a different perspective, and hence a different set of purposes;
- a different analysis of the context that prevents the achievement of those purposes and what is required to redeem enterprise;
- a different set of means, chiefly the scriptures, by which to design the structures, procedures and products of the enterprise to realise its purposes in agreement with the analysis.

The following three sections take up these reasons in turn.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE
As discussed above the design of an enterprise is dependent on its purpose, and hence on the vision for the enterprise. If the Christian entrepreneur is faithful to the biblical story he or she should have a radically different perspective on the purpose of the enterprise from secular business.

Contrast with secular business
Consider first the perspective of secular business. For profit companies and social enterprises each have their own perspective and focus. For profit companies focus on earning a return on investment. Social enterprises focus on rectifying a social problem. There are also other types of enterprises with their own perspectives. Consumer co-operatives focus on providing low cost goods for their members. Producer co-operatives focus on providing employment and good pay for their members. Each type of enterprise is concerned with achieving their purpose and pleasing a particular constituency. Each type has little incentive to think more widely about objectives. The result is that each tends to adopt the business culture around them, usually that of the profit seeking company.

The missional enterprise also has its perspective and focus. The question is whether this is very different from these other types of enterprise.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MISSIONAL ENTERPRISE
The biblical narrative tells us that missional enterprises have a radically different perspective and purpose. We are called to look at enterprise from God’s perspective. Our purpose is to carry out God’s purpose. We are to extend God’s glory into the world, and then to offer back to God this glory in the world. The revelation of our purpose begins in the first chapters of Genesis and extends through the call and mission of Israel until Christ submits the kingdom to God, God is “all in all” and humans reign under God and The Lamb.¹¹

Rulers as God’s image
The first chapters of Genesis set out first the structures of the universe and their functions; these bring order to the world. Then they describe what God populates the world with and their functions.¹² God creates human beings and gives them the function of being his image.¹³ What this means depends on an understanding of the role played by images of the god and sometimes the king placed in temples of the Ancient Near East (ANE).

It was thought that a god of the ANE ruled through their image and that of the king, who both carried out the work of the god. The image of the god and the king were the representative of the god with the character of the god and the function of exercising the god’s rule. Yet while Genesis used the concept of a pagan temple, Genesis subverted the common understanding of it. All human beings, not just the king, were to take on the role and functions of the image placed in the temple. So humans were to ‘subdue’ (heb. havash) and to “rule” (in context ‘domesticating’, heb. radah.) Just as the god and through him the king kept order, avoided chaos, and looked after the well-being of their subjects, so humans were to keep order and to maintain the welfare of others.¹⁴ These kingly duties were comprehensive including the four types of animals on the earth and

¹¹ 1 Cor. 15:24,27,28; Rev. 22:3-5.
¹² See John Walton, Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan, 2001), 110, 126
¹³ Gen. 1:26,27.
also the resources of the earth and its vegetation.\textsuperscript{15} Human beings were created to be ‘earth carers’.\textsuperscript{16} In common with all human beings, therefore, the missional-entrepreneur should have the purpose of bringing order and purpose to the world and in particular to their enterprise. This order should be such that it fulfils the purpose of God.\textsuperscript{17} The result should be an enterprise that reflects and embodies the character and glory of God. The vision of the missional entrepreneur should be to see the glory of God in their enterprise. This focus in itself should mark the missional enterprise as distinct.

Priests in a temple

Genesis also describes the functions of human beings as to “work” (literally “serve”, heb. ‘avad) and “take care” (literally “keep” and “guard,” heb. shamar).\textsuperscript{18} These describe priestly tasks. The Hebrew words for “work” and “keep” are those used to refer to the functions of the Levites in the Tabernacle.\textsuperscript{19} Priests take care of the Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple for God. This points to the Earth as God’s Temple, as does the use of “image” and a number of similarities between the Creation and the Tabernacle.\textsuperscript{20} The Earth is the place where God comes to rest and walks with the people he has created.\textsuperscript{21} The purpose of human being is in large measure to care for the earth as God’s temple. People are to ‘multiply’ and ‘fill’ the earth in a way that makes it a fit place for God to be present.\textsuperscript{22} The Earth is sacred space. The function of people is therefore to extend God’s sacred space.\textsuperscript{23}

The missional entrepreneur should therefore approach their enterprise from the perspective that they are designing a place fit for God. They are designing an enterprise where the glory of God in their work might fill the world “as the waters cover the sea.”.\textsuperscript{24} Like the Temple priests, through their work the entrepreneur is reflecting God’s glory back to God.\textsuperscript{25}

Example

What might this vision for the enterprise look like in practice? There are of course many functions within an enterprise; and the entrepreneur would need to consider each one. For the sake of illustration let us suppose that the entrepreneur is concerned about the allocation of decision making. There are also a number of aspects to a design such as: What does the designed object do; how does it function; and how is it operated? Suppose furthermore that the entrepreneur is concerned with what people do. Reading Genesis 1,\textsuperscript{28} the entrepreneur might interpret God’s purpose as giving each human being, men and women, the tasks of exercising rule over creation. They could apply this purpose to the men and women in their enterprise. Their vision might then extend to the various parts of the enterprise; and they might ‘see’ each worker having a perceptible control at each stage in the production of each product the enterprise makes.

Change of purpose, change of vision

As discussed above, a change in perspective leads to a change in purpose and vision for the enterprise in its diverse parts. The missional enterprise becomes the means of trying to fulfil the purposes of God. What these purposes are depends on the means used to determine them.

For example, if the entrepreneur uses biblical theology then the perceived purposes will depend on the choice of text and the exegesis of those texts. How the entrepreneur bridges from the purpose of the text to the purpose of the enterprise will depend on the method of hermeneutics they use. For example, the discussion of the ‘image of God’ above relies on an understanding of culture in the ANE and the historical-critical method. The vision of what the enterprise might achieve depends as well on the type of enterprise and the circumstances in which it operates and the guidance of the Holy spirit. In the example above, the stages of production in a soap factory will differ from

\begin{itemize}
\item Walton, \textit{Genesis}, 132.
\item Provan, \textit{Dangerous Religion}, 224-5.
\item Wright, Tom. \textit{The Day the Revolution Began}. (London: SPCK, 2016), 79.
\item Gen. 2:15.
\item Num. 3:7,8,10.
\item Gen. 3:8.
\item Gen. 1:28.
\item Provan, \textit{Dangerous Religion}, 36,37.
\item Isa. 11:9.
\item Kallestos Ware, \textit{The Orthodox Way}, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 54,55; Tom Wright, \textit{The Day the Revolution Began}, (London: SPCK, 2016), 79.
\end{itemize}
those in an aircraft plant. There is no uniform vision for every enterprise.

A particular vision of the enterprise determines what factors lead to achieving that vision or impeding it. How the entrepreneur identifies these factors and determines how they affect the vision depends in turn on their analysis of how the world works. This raises the question of whether a Christian understanding is fundamentally different, thereby suggesting new and different connections between purpose and design form.

**A DIFFERENT ANALYSIS OF CONTEXT**

If not before, then certainly since the day when Philemon received his letter from Paul, Christians have had to rethink their business in the light of Christ’s incarnation, teaching, death and resurrection. Christian theologians and practitioners have been in dialogue with those of other philosophies and beliefs since the time of Christ. Today there is growing interest in Paul as a philosopher. This dialogue has identified many areas of disagreement as well as common ground. There are therefore aspects of a Christian analysis that one would expect to be distinctive; or at least shared with few except those with a similar set of assumptions.

It’s not possible to discuss the many ways in which the Christian mind might analyse the world and its effect on enterprise differently. However, consideration of one topic may be enough to illustrate how the analysis might differ radically.

One of the most commonly accepted definitions of economics over the last eighty years has been that given by Lord Robins. He wrote, “Economics is the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses.”

The essence of this definition is scarcity. Using this perspective of the world emphasises what the enterprise doesn’t have. The entrepreneur is prompted to frame their problems in terms of how to obtain the scarce resources necessary to carry out their business. A biblical perspective might arguably frame the ‘problem’ of the enterprise differently. God has created a world in which resources are abundant. Contrary to the beliefs of the ANE Genesis teaches that procreation is good and doesn’t need to be limited. “Be fruitful and increase in number” There is enough to go around. Human disobedience may have reduced human productivity but the land is still a place of abundance. The land to which the descendants of Abraham return “flows with milk and honey.” God has given good gifts to his people and stands ready to favour the work of their hands. Jesus feeds the five thousand by first using the resources the disciples already have.

If resources are not scarce the ‘problem’ of the missional enterprise might be framed differently. Why are resources being withheld? Where are we wasting the resources God has given us? What skills has God given to us already? How might we seek God’s favour on our work for him?

Scarcity is a relative term; it depends on the relation between supply and demand. It’s a function of what is wanted as well as what is available. Theology tells us both what we want and what we can get. We desire what is not good for us; hence idolatry. Moreover we desire the things that do not satisfy; and our pleasures come pursuing the acquisition of goods rather than consuming them. Furthermore we desire goods in order to have what others have so that we can be equal or better than they are. This leads to mimetic violence.

The result is that we consume more than we need and what is good for us. If we didn’t consume as much then scarcity would be greatly reduced or eliminated.

This analysis would also lead the missional entrepreneur to design the enterprise differently. We will understand better why people buy some goods rather than others; and why competitors therefore may take a larger market share. We may therefore search for alternative ways to appeal to customers. This analysis might also guide the design of rewards within the enterprise so that they don’t arouse envy.

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29 Num. 14:8.
30 Matt. 7:7-11.
Inconsistencies usually arise
An analysis of context will usually show that there are various inconsistent aspects of the vision. The factors that achieve some desirable outcomes may adversely affect others. Such inconsistencies create design problems. An analysis of the most important inconsistencies is instrumental in framing the design problem. This becomes the focus of the designer’s attention. The designer-entrepreneur then shapes the enterprise first of all to solve this problem. The solution is the form of the design itself.

A DIFFERENT DESIGN
The form of the design is the object of designing. By the time the designer-entrepreneur reaches the design stage they have some vision of what they want the enterprise to achieve.

They also have some understanding of the factors that lead toward realising that vision or away from it. They are then interested in the specific form of the organisation, the shape and functioning of the products and services they produce as well as the form of a number of other things and relationships. The scriptures and church history may help them to imagine these design forms.

Academics have studied how good designers go about designing, particularly products but also artefacts such as racing cars. These academics have discovered various methods that good designers use. Moreover they have discovered that these methods can be taught. Entrepreneurs too can learn from these studies how to design their enterprise. Some methods may lead to designs that are more unusual than others.

Use first principles
The most logical approach is to start from first principles. The entrepreneur may use a chain of logic to achieve what they set out to do using their analysis. Problems arise when there are logical inconsistencies. The entrepreneur may then resort to weighting or prioritising different parts of their vision. However, research indicates that designers often use a ‘constructive’ method, sometimes called ‘abduction.’

Designers often construct, they “take a guess,” at a way of reconciling different objectives and then evaluate them against their vision. This may in turn lead to a reformulation of the requirements of the vision and a new ‘constructive’ design. The influence of Christian thinking then depends on the distinctiveness of the vision and the analysis. Designing from first principles is often the most successful way of designing; however it may not be good enough. A different method of thinking may be necessary to “think outside the box.” There are several ways of doing this. Moreover, designers often switch between these methods.

Start from existing solution
The most often used but least radical of these constructive methods is to start from an existing product or structure and then to modify it. Makers of carbonated soft drinks use this method. To appeal to weight-conscious consumers the manufacturer substitutes artificial sweeteners for sugar in their existing products. The question is, what example should the designer start from?

The designer-entrepreneur might start from a biblical example of something or someone who realised the same purpose, and then adapt that example. Consider for example a café. The entrepreneur will need to design the way in which the food and drink is served to their customers. They might consider the example of Jesus as “slave”, who “made himself nothing” and “humbled himself and became obedient”. The entrepreneur might also consider the example of how the apostles delegated others to serve on tables. These texts will not supply the specific form the entrepreneur needs. However, they may prompt the ‘creative leap’ necessary to do so. They might for example lead the café owner to dress like their customers or to let the kitchen staff present the food to their customers.

Combining
Another way to experience a “creative leap” is to merge two existing designs. The two examples need to have the same purpose or function but to have different forms. The example the academic Nigel Cross uses is the design of a bicycle rack by combining the design

34 Cross, Designerly Ways, 49,50.
35 Cross, Designerly Ways, 27.
36 Cross, Designerly Ways, 76.
37 Cross, Designerly Ways, 97.
38 Cross, Designerly Ways, 73-75.
39 Phil. 2:7,8.
of a tray and a bag. Paul urges the Phillippians to combine their minds with that of Christ. ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.’ The missional entrepreneur might combine a meal with a celebration; or a meal with a visionary experience. The example of the Lord’s supper comes to mind. This might lead to the form of a product that decreases mimetic violence. The Lord’s supper might suggest how the product of the enterprise or its service might do this by “decentring” consumption. The example of the angel of the Lord feeding Elijah and sending him to Horeb also comes to mind. In the Food*Fun pilot project, the cooking class was combined with a celebration in which the student cooks shared their meal in a party and the teacher shared the vision of how they might share their experience and teach others.

**Analogy**

A potentially more creative method still is to use analogy. An analogy is a way of transferring similarities between two different things. The properties of the ‘source’ are used to suggest the attributes of the ‘target’. In the case of the designer the ‘target’ is the form of the design. There are any number of possible ‘sources’ of analogy. In the 1930s, for example, designers adopted the streamlined look of aerodynamic efficiency for a range of products, starting with small products such as a clock, then larger refrigerators and cars. Personal computing is full of analogies; for example “desktop,” “folders,” “files,” “mouse.”

The missional entrepreneur could choose to use the scriptures as their source of analogy. They might take the crucifixion and resurrection, for example. New missional enterprises present additional competition to for profit companies. These companies may lower prices temporarily below sustainable high profit levels in order to reduce competition. The missional enterprise might respond by using a strategy of flexibility inspired by Jesus’ death and resurrection. They might close down in periods of low prices and come back into business when competitive prices are high again.

There is no definitive design

All four of these methods of creating the form of the design have this in common; namely that there is no definitive, right design. It is always possible that a better design might emerge. Using first principles, the most logical and tightly bound approach, it is possible that the entrepreneurs might learn more accurately how a design suits the fulfilment of their vision. The designer-entrepreneur might discover a better example to copy, two or more better cases to merge or a more suggestive and fruitful analogy. Indeed, it is in the nature of design that this will often be the case.

**THE PROCESS OF DESIGN IS ITERATIVE**

This means that the process of finding the shape of the missional enterprise tends to be iterative. As the entrepreneur works through their design they will most likely learn to question their vision and the factors that determine its realisation. The entrepreneur may shift between design methods. Each time they do so the design will develop in a new and different way. As a consequence, the process of designing the enterprise will seldom be linear.

Provided the vision remains faithful to God’s purpose, and the design works according to the Creator’s logic, this doesn’t matter. There is nothing sacred about the design form.

**Conclusion**

It is purpose and vision which propel the design process. It is the choice of purpose that most affects whether the design of the missional enterprise is faithful. It is therefore in the derivation of purpose and the translation into vision that the entrepreneurs needs to be most careful. Vision determines analysis. Through analysis the missional entrepreneur segments the design problem and frames it. Good analysis should enable the designer to predict accurately how the design will affect attaining the vision. As the analysis of scarcity has illustrated there is a scriptural way of knowing that is distinct. Analysis then informs the design form itself. There is no need to use scripture

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41 Cross, *Designerly Ways*, 73.
42 Phil. 2:5.
43 1 Cor. 11:23-26.
45 1 Kings 19:5-18.
at this stage in the design process. Nevertheless, the use of scripture to inspire fresh designs may capture the aroma of divine wisdom. Differences above all in perspective and purpose, but also differences in context analysis and a difference inspiration in design form can and should combine to produce a different and distinctive missional enterprise.

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