

Thinking Theologically about Entrepreneurship: Why Does It Matter?

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Joe Gorra, VeritasLifeCenter.org

PART ONE: Understanding ‘Thinking Theologically’ & ‘Entrepreneurship’

A. ‘Thinking theologically’ as Public Theology

1. Involves *thinking with* theological [Christian or otherwise] *concepts* and *categories* about an object of understanding.
2. Resourced by theological *traditions* as stewarded traditions of knowledge, wisdom and insight into what is real.
3. Five Common Christian *Sources* of understanding (Bible; Common Grace; Jesus as Lord of Entrepreneurship; Interactive knowing by Holy Spirit; Tradition as knowledge, wisdom, insight for innovation).
4. **Takeaway:** Entrepreneurship is real. Theology deals with what is real, indeed, what is ultimately real. Therefore, to think theologically about entrepreneurship is to help steward how entrepreneurship can be truly understood.

Lesson #1: Theology is a vital stakeholder and steward of the story of entrepreneurship and its future.

B. ‘Entrepreneurship’ as Social-Cultural Phenomena

1. The meaning of entrepreneurship today is told to us by many different social-cultural story-tellers and scripts. We have to discern what is being ‘pushed’ to us.
2. Different ‘schools’ or traditions of thought shape our understanding of entrepreneurship.¹
3. **Popular Presuppositional Image:** Entrepreneurial activity primarily the result of a *unique quality* exercised by human agency (whether individually or teams) and less the result of institutional conditions, environments, and frameworks.

Sam Gregg on institutional dimensions of entrepreneurship:

“. . . in the midst of this enthusiasm about entrepreneurship, we risk forgetting that entrepreneurship’s capacity to create wealth is heavily determined by the environments in which we live.

¹ E-mail Joe Gorra (info@VeritasLifeCenter.org) for a free chart that overviews these ‘schools’, and then offers some examples for how to engage these schools, theologically.

In many business schools today, it's entirely possible to study entrepreneurship without any reference being made to the role played by factors such as rule of law, property rights, and low taxes in stimulating wealth-creating entrepreneurship.

. . . anyone serious about promoting wealth-creating entrepreneurship must at some point direct attention toward how the moral, legal, and political environment aligns incentives. This may indeed involve considering controversial subjects, ranging from the impact of tax rates on entrepreneurship to politically incorrect matters such as whether certain cultures are simply not amenable to wealth creation.

Entrepreneurship – like everything else – doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's long past the time we stopped pretending it does.”²

4. **Takeaway:** A theology of entrepreneurship can reflect on various phenomena of entrepreneurship, including its assumptions and about its different schools of thought. But it need not settle for mere cultural scripts about entrepreneurship as its sources of understanding.

Lesson #2: A theology of entrepreneurship can offer a complimentary and contrasting account of entrepreneurship and its implications. Pay attention to the inherited cultural scripts. One does not have to take them as ‘givens.’

C. Multiple Objects of Reflection for Thinking Theologically about Entrepreneurship and the Entrepreneurial

1. Individual and Institutional Object(s) of thinking theologically. Multiple objects
 - 1.1. Multiple objects of study (e.g., entrepreneurial . . . traits, experiences, habits/patterns, social-cultural scripts, schools of thought, structural conditions).
 - 1.2. Study from different perspectives: First-person perspective thinking vs. third-person perspective thinking.
2. ‘Thinking with’ theological resources (concepts, categories, traditions, sources) about an object of study. Examples:
 - 2.1. Entrepreneurial risk-taking. Theologically, risk-taking is part of the journey of faith.
 - 2.2. “Alertness to yet unperceived opportunities” (Israel Kirzner). Theologically, there are various examples/models where such ‘alertness’ is integral to faith and being human.

² Samuel Gregg, “Entrepreneurship isn’t enough,” Acton.org (May 13, 2009).

PART TWO: Why is a Theology of Entrepreneurship needed? What can be its Posture toward Entrepreneurship?

D. Why it Matters: *A theology of entrepreneurship . . .*

1. Offers a non-materialistic framework for understanding the human person with entrepreneurial capacity; thus, it creates the possibility for thinking differently about features and contours of entrepreneurial work.
2. Supplies different sources of knowing and nodes of authority for reflecting on the value of entrepreneurship.
3. Illuminates the interrelationship between value creation in a material sense and role of moral and spiritual capital as integral to human capital.
4. Integrates with other relevant theological reflection on issues of public life, including theologies of work, vocation, economics.
5. Envisions a basis for an enriching *pastoral* theology of entrepreneurship.
6. Models why there need not be a false dichotomy between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular.’

Without a theology of entrepreneurship . . .

7. ‘Entrepreneurship’ can get coopted by mainly a materialist perspective, or prevalent social-cultural scripts, or by other knowledge claims aimed at functionalist views of the human person, material value creation alone, etc.
8. ‘Entrepreneurship’ becomes understood in a ‘thin’ way, lacking conceptual thickness or fullness of value; disconnected from moral and spiritual value as integral to realizing human capital.
9. ‘Entrepreneurship’ could still get treated theologically; but that theological reflection would be more cosmetic, an add-on.
10. **Takeaway:** Theology is integral to thinking about entrepreneurship if entrepreneurship is to be understood in a fuller, thicker way.

Lesson #3: A theology of entrepreneurship can contribute value to the study of entrepreneurship by demonstrating that theological accounts should be dining ‘at the table’ with non-theological accounts, exercising its authority to bear witness to moral and spiritual reality.

E. Postures of a Theology of Entrepreneurship.

Any one of these postures would be worthwhile! A theology of entrepreneurship can act like a . . .

1. Explorer: It can journey with ‘received’ habits of thought, practices, overall mindset.
2. Illuminator: It can clarify, question, illuminate, reframe ideas and images of an entrepreneur(ship) from a particular advantage point.
3. Catalyzer: It can open up what is possible and plausible to believe and understand.
4. Reformer and Renewer: It can help transform disciplines of entrepreneurship.
5. Stakeholder and steward of a calling. It can create pathways for distinctly nurturing and cultivating entrepreneurial thought and activity.
6. **Takeaway**: There is not one way – and only one way - for how theological reflection can posture itself toward better understanding entrepreneurship.

Lesson #4: Theologies of Entrepreneurship can help rewrite or reimagine the good of entrepreneurship in the 21st century.

Recommended Resources

- Baker, Bruce, [“Entrepreneurship as a Sign of Common Grace.”](#) *Journal of Markets and Morality* 18:1 (2015): 81-98.
- Ballor Jordan and Victor Claar, [“The Soul of the Entrepreneur: A Christian Anthropology of Creativity, Innovation and Liberty.”](#) *Journal of Ethics and Entrepreneurship* (Spring 2016): 117-131.
- Clark, Catherine and Christian Harrison article, [“Entrepreneurship: an assimilated multi-perspective review.”](#) *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship* (2018), 6-29.
- Gregg, Sam, “Entrepreneurship isn’t enough,” [Acton.org](#) (May 13, 2009):
- Percy, Anthony, *Entrepreneurship in the Catholic Tradition* (Lexington Books, 2010).

Veritas Life Center (VLC) is a California-based 501(c)3 religious nonprofit aimed at advancing the Christian tradition as a knowledge and wisdom tradition integral for the flourishing of human life and society. VLC is currently engaged in a multi-year “theology of entrepreneurship” research project aimed at resourcing conversations with scholars, pastors, business and community leaders.