

Sharing hope by sharing opportunity

Gavin Oldham starts by recounting a story he read in his 20s which changed his life. On a 1930s train journey with poverty-stricken Polish migrants returning home from France, the author comes across a beautiful child whose life and talents will never be fulfilled. This inspired Gavin to found three linked organisations, The Share Centre, Share Radio and Share Foundation, which make direct participation in share ownership easier for ordinary people, including young people.

Many people will have read *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry to their children: it is one of the best introductions to philosophy for both the young and not so young. Not so many will be familiar with his book *Wind, Sand and Stars* (*Terre des Hommes* in the French) and its extraordinary epilogue.

It is from those closing pages of *Wind, Sand and Stars* that I have drawn one of the strongest motivations for my working life, ever since my early 20s. They describe Saint-Exupéry's thoughts while travelling across Europe between the two world wars on a night train, filled with Polish migrants returning home after working in the French mines.

“A few years ago, in the course of a long railway journey, I was suddenly seized by a desire to make a tour of the little country in which I was locked up for three days, cradled in that rattle that is like the sound of pebbles rolled over and over by the waves; and I got up out of my berth.

At one in the morning I went through the train in all its length. The sleeping cars were empty. The first-class carriages were empty. They put me in mind of the luxurious hotels on the Riviera that open in winter for a single guest, the last representative of an extinct fauna.

A sign of bitter times.

But the third-class carriages were crowded with hundreds of Polish

workmen sent home from France. I made my way along those passages, stepping over sprawling bodies and peering into the carriages. In the dim glow cast by the night-lamps into these barren and comfortless compartments I saw a confused mass of people churned about by the swaying of the train, the whole thing looking and smelling like a barrack-room. A whole nation returning to its native poverty seemed to sprawl there in a sea of bad dreams. Great shaven heads rolled on the cushionless benches.

Men, women, and children were stirring in their sleep, tossing from left to right and back again as if attacked by all the noises and



jerkings that threatened them in their oblivion. They had not found the hospitality of a sweet slumber.

Looking at them I said to myself that they had lost half their human quality. These people had been knocked about from one end of Europe to the other by the economic currents; they had been torn from their little houses in the north of France, from their tiny garden-plots, their three pots of geranium that always stood in the windows of the Polish miners' families.

I saw lying beside them pots and pans, blankets, curtains, bound into bundles badly tied and swollen with hernias. Out of all that they had caressed or loved in France, out of everything they had succeeded in taming in their four or five years in my country – the cat, the dog, the geranium – they had been able to bring away with them only a few kitchen utensils, two or three blankets, a curtain or so.

A baby lay at the breast of a mother so weary that she seemed asleep. Life was being transmitted in the shabbiness and the disorder of this journey. I looked at the father. A powerful skull as naked as a stone. A body hunched over in uncomfortable sleep, imprisoned in working clothes, all humps and hollows. The man looked like a lump of clay, like one of those sluggish and shapeless derelicts that crumple into sleep in our public markets.

And I thought: The problem does not reside in this poverty, in this filth, in this ugliness.

But this same man and this same woman met one day. This man must have smiled at this woman. He may, after his work was done, have brought her flowers. Timid and awkward, perhaps he trembled lest

she disdain him. And this woman, out of natural coquetry, this woman sure of her charms, perhaps took pleasure in teasing him. And this man, this man who is now no more than a machine for swinging a pick or a sledge-hammer, must have felt in his heart a delicious anguish.

The mystery is that they should have become these lumps of clay. Into what terrible mould were they forced? What was it that marked them like this as if they had been put

'I saw lying beside them pots and pans, blankets, curtains, bound into bundles badly tied and swollen with hernias.'

through a monstrous stamping machine? A deer, a gazelle, any animal grown old, preserves its grace. What is it that corrupts this wonderful clay of which humans are kneaded?

I went on through these people whose slumber was as sinister as a den of evil. A vague noise floated in the air made up of raucous snores, obscure moanings, and the scraping of clogs as their wearers, broken on one side, sought comfort on the other. And always the muted accompaniment of those pebbles rolled over and over by the waves.

I sat down face to face with one couple. Between the man and the woman a child had hollowed himself out a place and fallen asleep. He turned in his slumber, and in the dim lamplight I saw his face.

What an adorable face! A golden fruit had been born of these two peasants. Forth from these lumps of clay had sprung this miracle of delight and grace. I bent over the smooth brow, and I said to myself: This is a musician's face. This is the child Mozart. This is a life full of beautiful promise. Little princes in legends are not different from this. Protected, sheltered, cultivated, what could not this child become?

When by mutation a new rose is born in a garden, all the gardeners rejoice. They isolate the rose, tend it, foster it. But there is no gardener for men. This little Mozart will be shaped like the rest by the common stamping machine. This little Mozart will love shoddy music in the stench of night dives. This little Mozart is condemned.

I went back to my sleeping car. I said to myself: Their fate may not cause these people suffering. It is not an impulse to charity that has upset me like this. I am not weeping over an eternally open wound. Those who carry the wound may not feel it. It is the human race and not the individual that is wounded here, is outraged here.

What torments me tonight is the gardener's point of view. What torments me is not this poverty to which, after all, a man may be able to accustom himself as easily as to sloth. What torments me is not the humps nor hollows nor the ugliness. It is the sight, a little bit in all these people, of Mozart murdered.

Only the Spirit, if it breathe upon the clay, can create Man."

New solutions to an old challenge, that is still with us today

This piece speaks incredibly strongly to me of the potential of our human condition, and particularly the young. It continuously challenges me to work for a better world where there is a more egalitarian form of enterprise, where – as Theresa May puts it – people from all walks of life can go as far as their talents and hard work will allow.

Each young person from whatever background does indeed start life with the same potential, but Saint-Exupéry is right is describing how their circumstances quickly take over: whether poverty, lack of security, lack of a stable education, etc.. Capitalism should give the opportunity for individual enterprise



Mass migration: posters to counter anti-immigrant feeling

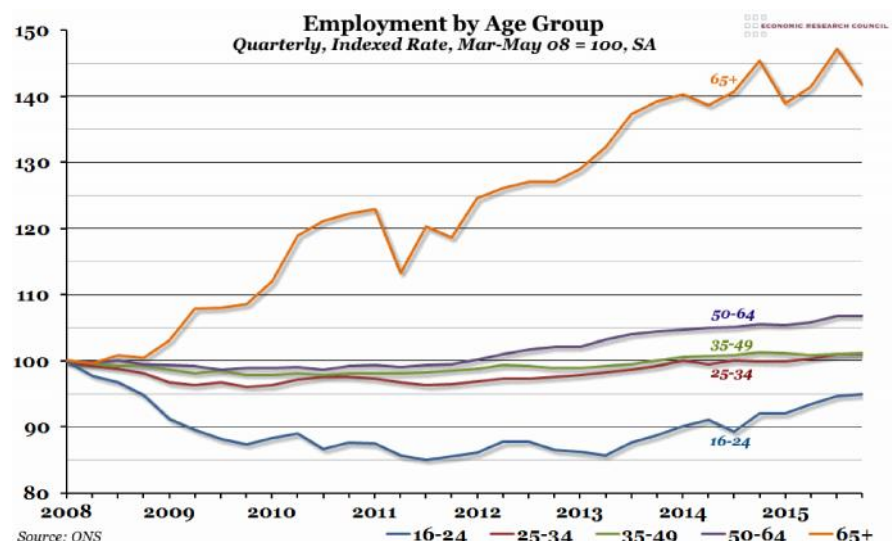
to flourish: but so often it concentrates wealth and appears to perpetuate disadvantage.

So I would like to see a more egalitarian form of capitalism, where people have control over their own lives, increased confidence in financial matters and opportunity to achieve their potential, not only through making direct share ownership more widely available to the ordinary public but also using inter-generational inheritance to fuel distribution of wealth, perhaps by incentivising the attainment of life skills and initiative to give hope.

The world we live in is every bit as beset by inequality of opportunity and dysfunctional economics as it was in the 1930s. Mass migration has again been left to take the strain for a European common currency area without strong political leadership: for example, over the past 20 years over three million non-UK EU citizens have come to find work in the United Kingdom, and tensions are again rising with 'guestworkers'

being made to feel unwelcome. Meanwhile ultra-low interest rates, resulting from the failure of people at the top who should have known better than to engender a financial crash such as 2008, have boosted asset values for the very rich (asset prices rise as their yields fall to reflect falling interest rates) leaving the poor struggling to make ends meet. Technology may have given third world access to developed countries

and has given us a huge boost in longevity, but it has also concentrated wealth on the super-rich of Silicon Valley and boosted employment prospects for old baby boomers at the expense of the young. This is shown in the huge polarisation of wealth in the United Kingdom, and in the way in which the over 60s have benefited at the expense of 16-24 year olds in the labour market.



So in my working life I have sought to address these imbalances, and give people the opportunity to achieve their potential. *The Share Centre* (parent company: Share plc) and *Share Radio* approach these aims in different ways, but at their heart are strong values of respect for others from all walks of life, empowering people by giving them the tools and knowledge to take control of their own future, and encouraging a spirit of enterprise to help them build on their talents (both material and capability).

The Share Centre (share.com) enables people from all walks of life to enjoy straightforward investing, with dealing, account administration and advice for those who need it: low cost investment for self-select investors, and with first-class customer service. We deliberately reach out to those with more modest resources, but who have the initiative to take control for themselves and a desire to learn. It is about helping people to explore the best way forward, and encouraging aspiration. We particularly help young people with Child Trust Funds and Junior ISAs, and provide a real investment competition for Year 12 students called 'Shares4Schools'.

Share Radio (shareradio.co.uk) broadcasts nationally 'sharing ideas about money' and helps people from all walks of life to become more confident in money matters. Radio is a great way to connect with people: it is complementary to all sorts of everyday activity such as travel, homework and sport, and good speech radio builds images and ideas: we call it 'theatre of the mind'. It is also very flexible: you can download programmes easily for listening later and access it through internet streaming and smartphones at very low cost.

The Share Foundation (sharefound.org) is a registered charity which I set up in 2005 to give opportunity to young people in care, and it operates the Junior ISA scheme

for Looked After children throughout the United Kingdom on behalf of the Department for Education. We are now introducing a new programme called the 'Stepladder of Achievement' for 15-17 year olds, which provides incentive awards of up to £1,500 in total as young people achieve steps of literacy, numeracy, financial capability and a sense of purpose for the future. We'd like to see this programme in operation for all children in families in receipt of Child Tax Credit: that's about 15% of the UK population.

In June, just before the referendum, we published this poster as a joint initiative between The Share Centre,

Share Radio and The Share Foundation (sharefound.org). It was the first time all three separate organisations had co-operated in such an initiative, and the message proved to be somewhat prophetic.

Now, in vote after vote such as Brexit and the victory of Donald Trump, the well-heeled elite are learning that millions of people feel excluded, and we should give thanks that we can learn this message through democracy rather than by revolution.

As the Governor of the Bank of England has said recently, the perception is that capitalism and globalisation have favoured the rich and accentuated disadvantage. We

beyond the referendum

The real problem is chronic wealth disparity.
The solution is to democratise wealth creation.
We can make it happen.

WEALTHIEST 10%
£5.0tn

POOREST 10%
£5.7bn

HOUSEHOLD WEALTH DISTRIBUTION IN GREAT BRITAIN 2012/14
Sources: Economic Research Council, DNS Wealth & Assets Survey

On average, the wealthiest 10% of people in the UK have £770,000 each, whereas the poorest have just £877 (including pensions).
However much money you have, there's help at hand...

shareradio Financial ideas and discussion | thesharecentre: Simply easier stock market investing | sharefound Inheritance for young people in care

shareradio.co.uk | share.com | sharefound.org

You could lose money if your investments fall in value.
The Share Centre Limited has approved this financial promotion and is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority under reference 146768. Share Radio is separately incorporated & regulated by Ofcom. The Share Foundation is a registered charity no. 1108068.

Rembrandt: *The Parable of the Talents*, c. 1652, Louvre, Paris



need a new approach in which all can share in the benefits of wealth creation, and it can be done.

Solutions driven by faith

Now you may ask where does my Christian faith come in all this? Well, my faith is very simple, being founded on the understanding that God, our conscious creator, is Love – unconditional love. That’s the conclusion St John reached at the end of his long life, and it underpins all Jesus’s teaching: to love your neighbour as yourself, to love your enemy.


Love is like water: keep it flowing and it remains fresh and vibrant. Hold it back and it becomes stagnant. So when thousands of Tesco employees voted for the value ‘Treat others as you wish to be treated yourself’ they were responding to that same

abundance of love which floods creation and which looks for us to open the sluice-gates of our hearts to allow us to share it. Unfortunately Tesco directors have not always bought into that value themselves as recent history has shown, including sometimes in the treatment of their suppliers. Values are not worth the paper they’re written on unless they are lived out in behaviours.

So I have deliberately used the brand ‘Share’ throughout my various enterprises because it conveys that generosity of spirit, and our values of respect for others and empowerment encourage us to be channels for that love. If you love others you want the best for them, and that is all about helping others to achieve their potential. That potential is greatest for young people, and this is an

inter-generational process – hence our focus on young people in care with The Share Foundation.

But in order for people to achieve their potential, enterprise must be included in the mix. It is the virtue which enables people to rise to the challenge, go the extra mile, to be a risk taker. When I read the parable of the talents I do not see a passive tale about stewardship: rather I see active encouragement of enterprise.

When Saint-Exupéry says ‘Only the Spirit, if it breathe upon the clay, can create Man’ I see a direct bridge between faith and human endeavour. We are all made in the image of God, to become the love that God is for us. When we share the life skills, the resources and the attitude which can enable all to achieve their potential, we are also sharing that love. 



*In an entrepreneurial career built on a clear sense of purpose and a strong Christian faith, **Gavin Oldham** has established two retail stockbrokers (Barclayshare, now Barclays Stockbrokers, and The Share Centre), a radio station (Share Radio) and a charity (The Share Foundation) which runs a major programme for young people in care for the Department for Education. Since 1995 he has been an elected lay member of General Synod for Oxford Diocese, and has been a Church Commissioner and a member of its Assets Committee for more than 15 years. He was also a member of the Church's Ethical Investment Advisory Group from 1998 to 2013.*