

Compelling...The fight for a faith school

Book Reviews

The guiding hand of God shines through this book. *Compelling* charts the challenging birth pains of this Christian business school in the heart of the second largest city in the UK. Cheron's story is that of courageous advocacy for social justice, be it in her ministry in the Black Boys Can projects, Excell3 or in King Solomon International Business School. The school's continued and mounting challenges came fast and furious: heads upon heads, portacabins and building works, letters of betrayal, false allegations and heavy scrutiny by Ofsted. Having the support of the Prime Minister and his ministers of state could not prevent the level of opposition Cheron and the project faced from civil servants. I highly recommend reading this account of unquenchable faith, hope and courage if you are looking for inspiration, a radically new way of bringing God into the heart of a Christian school, as well as preparing students to succeed in an increasingly competitive and global marketplace. If you want to be inspired, touch the flame of hope or receive courage, then I highly recommend reading *Compelling*.

Chris Wright, Director of Education, Woodard Schools

Compelling is the manual for anyone with a God-sized dream and a passion for changing lives. Through the raw emotions of frustration, disappointment and tear-jerking moments of triumph, Cheron demonstrates what it means to live by faith and model Christ, even through adversity and fierce opposition. Through her inspiring leadership, Cheron and her team have transformed the lives of children and communities for the better, forever, while proving the merits of combining academics, business acumen, strong moral character and, most importantly, unconditional love in the approach to education. A fantastic read of courage from start to finish.

Dr Andrea Taylor-Cummings, TEDx speaker, Author and Co-Founder, The4Habits.com

This compelling book provides insight into the journey and operations of this unique and much-needed school. It captures the long and enormously challenging journey of establishing mainstream academy schools that so many members of the Windrush generation and their descendants have experienced. Its accuracy exposes the stereotypical views of those in positions of political power and gives weight to the conspiracy theorists that there is an agenda to keep marginalised communities in their place, and that place excludes them from being mainstream providers. It is important that we give due credit to Dr Cheron Byfield and the team for their resilience and for the great legacy of King Solomon International Business School. As God is on the side of justice, we must continue to fight for justice.

Bishop Dr Desmond Jadoo, Chair, Windrush National Organisation

This riveting book offers an absorbing insight into the struggle for acceptance by the authorities of an innovative new Christian school. The international business and enterprise specialism at the heart of the vision of this school is an inspiringly positive approach. Although initially decried as a bit 'revolutionary' by traditional educationalists, post-Brexit/post-Covid career opportunities demand new approaches from schools. This school is ahead of the game. It is stretching our youngsters to embrace international business and entrepreneurship, underpinned by Christian business principles, and to develop the skills that will enable them to work, trade and thrive in a worldwide free-market economy. The creativity that is being nurtured is evident, even in the primary school, and will pay dividends to our society.

Peter Le Brocq, Secretary of the Christian Business Men's Fellowship International and Professional Mechanical Engineer (Retired)

Cheron's God-endowed vision and giftedness is clearly identified, nurtured, honed, and then set on a trajectory and orbit that would encounter and break through barriers. How then does she collaborate, to navigate systemic principalities, hegemonic structures, and negative predispositions, to actualise the 'promised land of educational excellence' for children, in particular black and marginalised young people? Will she maintain her God-given vision, values and virtues? Will the seeds of God-given principles, overarching wit and wisdom be sowed in the soil of the intellects and souls? *Compelling: The Fight for a Faith School* is a 'must read' for academics and non-academics, people of faith and none, alike. It is transcultural in its background, geopolitical in its scope, spiritually and ethically balanced and focused. I wholeheartedly commend this book.

Bishop Tedroy M. Powell, President of Pentecostal and Charismatic Forum for Churches Together in England and Chair of West Midlands Faith in Action

The development of King Solomon International Business School should be read and understood from a number of perspectives. It is a story of resilience, forbearance, growth, triumph and disappointment. It should be used as a reference by other marginalised communities wishing to become mainstream providers. Although the progenitors of this school come from a committed Christian background, that should not be used to cloud the essential lessons of this book. At its core are issues of race, gender, religious discrimination and low expectations. It is a clear example of the intersectional relationship between different aspects of societal oppression. But perhaps the most troubling part is the illusion of entry and acceptance at the point of increased curtailment and control.

Chester Morris, Former Local Authority Principal Education Officer and Additional Ofsted Inspector

As a member of Generation Z, I can categorically say this story needed to be told. It's phenomenal. Amidst all of the challenges the school faced, it has transformed and impacted on so many lives. The testimonies and poems from students, staff and others are amazing. Without this book my generation would never know or understand the depth of the struggles Dr Byfield, the team and other black pioneers who have dared to enter the unwelcoming and hostile mainstream education sector as providers, had to endure. It's shocking to discover the racism and religious discrimination that still exists behind the scenes in the education establishment. Thanks for sharing your story. My generation of young people need to know your experiences. It's empowering. It's our legacy.

Nicole Taylor BEM, one of the youngest recipients listed in the 2022 Queen's Honours list

This book is a living testimony of all that exceptional educational and entrepreneurial women leaders such as Dr Cheron Byfield have had to endure, fight against and overcome. There has been endless barriers, setbacks and unfair decisions to deal with in order to take up a rightful place as a mainstream educational provider. A lesser woman, a lesser team of supporters, a lesser people without faith in a power greater than themselves, would have given up a long time ago. But that is not our story. The ongoing struggle for better learning and enterprise outcomes for inner-city children from disadvantaged communities, especially black children, in line with a Christian faith, is truly a compelling story that should challenge the educational institution to change its race equality policy and practice as well as touch and uplift those on the side of equality and justice.

Patricia Lamour MBE, CEO, Aspire Education Group Ltd

Faith has long played a role in the inception and development of educational policies and practices within the UK. The fact that its place has increasingly been lost does not mean it is no longer relevant. The story of King Solomon International Business School is a testament to the vision,

wisdom, courage and indefatigability of the passion of a woman and her team to see the Christian faith embedded and outworked in the culture of a contemporary school environment. The twists and turns of a story that reminds the reader of David's battle with Goliath, is filled with suspense. The challenges remind us that there is much work to do when it comes to faith in education.

Revd David Shosanya, Principal of Paideia Training & Consultancy and Founder of The Ministers' Appreciation Ball

I remember well my visit to King Solomon International Business School for their 2019 Matriculation Service. The school was amazing and the pupils were happy. I also noticed a strong, unapologetic Christian ethos in the school which is also reflected in this book. It is quite unusual and remarkable that a school's values and ethos should be informed by the Fruit of the Spirit. Dr Cheron Byfield is a Christian educationalist with a strong faith and determination to build something of worth and value that would benefit the whole community. Her faith in God and her professionalism has enabled the school to provide a training ground for the next generation of ethical and socially responsible business women and men. This book tells the story of this school's journey with honesty and integrity. I highly commend the book, and pay tribute to Cheron's extraordinary work, vision and leadership, and for delivering an educational legacy.

Dr R. David Muir, Head of Whitelands College, University of Roehampton

The establishment of King Solomon International Business School was not just a miracle but a spiritual revolution. The very heart of the gospel of our Christ (Matthew 19:14) expresses the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ that little children are at the very centre of the kingdom of God. The establishment of King Solomon was fulfilling this great commission. A place of light in a world that is getting darker and darker for children. As a doctor and a physician psychiatrist I and my colleagues have had to treat many children and teenagers confused and traumatised by the ever-intrusive social media. King Solomon is a refuge, where academic excellence is pursued and children are nurtured to develop exemplary character based on the virtues associated with the Fruit of the Spirit.

Dr Christopher Oyede MBBS, MD, Chief of Psychiatry

This is indeed a very captivating, inspirational, and thought-provoking book. We thank God for giving the authors the wisdom and guidance to tell this powerful story, which demonstrates that Christianity is a living faith that brings hope, salvation and restoration, even in the education marketplace. Despite its many challenges, King Solomon has been blessed by the Christian ethos that continues to shape, encourage and empower young minds to develop and be better citizens now and in the future. These students will go on to have a positive impact on others in their communities. There is undoubtedly a need for more schools like King Solomon International Business School throughout this country. Its journey so far is indeed compelling. God's purposes are unstoppable. We wait in great anticipation to see this school's future unfold.

Dr Beverly Lindsay OBE, OD, Founder and General Manager of Diamond Travels

Purpose, passion and serving others, when combined, leads to something quite compelling. Something the world needs. To compel leaves an impression, and is so powerful that the agent will stop at nothing to see vision become reality. This must-read book is not merely a story of a faith school opening, but an example of the determination to not let go of God through any valley, shadow or criticism. Dr Cheron, besides evoking the interest of every other pioneer, shows how to lead by the courage of your convictions. Be compelled!

Revd Jonny Lee, Senior Pastor, Renewal

Cheron reminds me of a couple who moved from the UK to West Africa, and started an all-through school, producing students for Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge. They said that had they remained in

the UK they would not have been able to achieve this. I pray for the day when politicians and their officers in this nation will begin to have the foresight to recognise the talents and gifts of all its citizens and to use them to develop and make significant improvements in communities and the nation. I want to remind Cheron and every person who has passion, zeal and commitment to a worthy goal to never give up but to continue to empower their communities. God has given you the tenacity to withstand, to rise above, to continue to forge ahead and to establish your purpose for your generation and generations to come.

Revd Les Isaacs OBE, Founder of Ascension Trust and Pioneer of Street Pastors

Despite the challenges faced by Cheron Byfield and her colleagues, it is encouraging to read about their tenacity and faith, driven by a sense of purpose, to set up a Christian Faith School in the West Midlands. The Christian characteristics of the school were certainly not a threat to social cohesion, but an asset. The many stories of the work with the children, parents and staff of all faith and non, demonstrates the power of Jesus' love. Their engagement in the wider community shows the important role that schools can play in society. The government should be supporting schools like King Solomon that are making such a significant impact on the lives of children, their families and society. Those involved in establishing and working in the school are to be applauded for making such an impact. I hope the future sees this good work being successfully built on.

Revd Paul Rochester, General Secretary of Free Churches Group