

2008 CABE Paper

**“What’s God got to do with it?
A view from the public and voluntary sectors.”**

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I thought it was honour enough when last year I was asked to join CAGE as a trustee, without almost immediately then being invited to give the 2008 CAGE paper, which is an immense honour, especially as CAGE celebrates its 70th anniversary this year with, among other events, a reception in September at Lambeth Palace. I am delighted to be here, and

I would particularly like to thank John McLean Fox for extending to me such a warm welcome to CAGE and the trust he and the other trustees have placed in me by asking me to speak this evening.

May I confess that when I say the words “business executive” I do not myself tend to spring to my own mind, even though once I did start up a promising sales venture. I found a partner and we went for it. We were a raving success and made a good profit. The fact that, at the time, I was six years old, and my partner was my five year old brother, and we were selling wild, tropical air plants door to door to people who already had plenty of air plants in their own trees, was neither here nor there. I learned a lot: mainly, how absolute faith in your product and a rock solid conviction in the inevitability of success is a winning combination! At the time my family was in Florida because we were living on a little sailboat and I spent most of my childhood sailing in the Caribbean and Mediterranean Seas.

When I think ‘executives’ I picture CEOs of banks, captains of industry, deal-clinching corporate people whose annual bonuses are greater than most people’s annual pay. Although part of what I do involves being the Director General of a charitable Trust, and being a member of the Archbishops’ Council, and, as such, being a Director of the Church of England’s Central Board of Finance, I don’t I see myself as a business executive: a Christian, yes, business executive, no, so perhaps I had better start with a brief explanation of what I am doing here.

Nearly 15 years ago, Lady Gill Brentford, who was at that time a member of the General Synod of the Church of England, as I was too, and still am, told me over breakfast one morning at Synod of an idea that had come to her the night before. She painted the picture of a network of professional Christian women, who were bringing their Christian faith in different ways into their places of work, whether that was the House of Commons, a courtroom, doctor’s surgery, classroom, building site or the mission field. Being Gill Brentford, she made it happen, and so Women on the Move was born, with an annual series of meetings over lunch or dinner for mutual support, encouragement and inspiration. Women on the Move has had many years of creative, stimulating meetings, usually with a distinguished speaker, often, I have to say, from among our own number, including CAGE Council member, Jill Garrett. I was on the original organising group and in time, as Gill’s other commitments grew, I became its chair. During a planning meeting, one of the other members, Eve Poole, Deputy Director of the Leadership programme at the Ashridge Business School, commented that the goals of Women on the Move seemed to match almost precisely the purpose of another group to which she belonged, and she wondered out loud whether the two groups might benefit by working more closely together. The outcome of Eve’s musing is that last year Women and the Move entered into partnership

with CABE. Thanks in great part to CABE's Director, Jackie Nelson, we can already see how the partnership is strengthening and enhancing both networks.

That is how I came to be here, and so, what do I want to say from my perspective, mainly in the voluntary and public sectors, to other Christians in business, whether they are the chief executives of vast international conglomerates or proprietors of much more modest concerns? What do I think the Christian faith has to say to the world of business, or, to put it another way, what does God have to do with it?

I'd like to start with the context, the whole context of life, our world and what we know of the universe. To quote Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it." How often do we reflect on the extra-ordinariness of our existence, the improbability of it all? It matters not a whit one's own particular take on the origins of life and the exact nature of the universe: the fact we are sitting here, anchored precisely to the right extent by the law of gravity, clothed, civilised, educated, sentient, self-aware, all these things are in themselves utterly remarkable facts. And somehow we manage to accommodate intellectually and theologically the joint realities of the blossom and buds and beauty near to us, and the unspeakable horror and tragedy of the cyclone which has devastated Burma and the earthquake in China. We are able to tell that the billowing plumes of ash and sulphur dioxide spewing out of the volcano in Chile are the first eruptions from that volcano in 9000 years. We can take photographs of things in outer space which we *have* never, and *will* never, see with our own eyes. We can plumb the depths of the oceans and show school children pictures of creatures, that when we were little, were not known to exist!

We live out our lives on the thin crust of our planet, as we career around our solar system at 19,000 miles an hour, with our solar system spinning within one of the millions..billions..trillions.? of other galaxies spinning in space. We rely on the relative orderliness, predictability and properties of all the tides and seasons of our planet and of our solar system to keep us alive, functioning and earthed. And yet we behave most of the time as if we actually live in a tame, confined, clock-work world of our own design and construction, and one, to boot, which we are finding just a little bit tedious, boring, irritating.

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." The significance and enormity – the sheer outlandishness - of our very existence and continuing life needs to permeate our thinking and affect the way we approach the more controllable choices and situations we encounter. Deciding an organisation's vision statement and ordering its priorities take on a different complexion when seen in the context of our world and all that we know so far about our still expanding universe. We didn't do this. We don't have the patents on our existence, on life: we still don't understand fully how we came to be and how life came to inhabit planet earth. It is still in great part a mystery.

This past Sunday, Pentecost, I took part in a live programme on BBC Radio Ulster on the significance of the book of Genesis. There were four of us supposed experts speaking from quite different points of view, the historical, literary, secular and theological, about what influence Genesis has had on Christian, Jewish and Muslim thought and in wider

society on the understanding of who we are, who God is and how everything started for the human race and the rest of the world.

In the end, the convinced creationist and the professor of quantum physics alike must acknowledge Something or Someone who did all this before we came along, whether we approach the subject with hearts of faith or only with scientific curiosity.

What if we allowed the qualities, if I may say, the *virtues*, of wonder, awe, expectation, humility, a certain lightness of touch, and the openness to further revelation to characterise our interactions with one another and our overall approach to what we are doing? Yes, the business of life is serious, our collective responsibilities are heavy indeed and our individual responsibilities may well be too. If we get it wrong we could add to other people's ongoing suffering, squander precious resources, jeopardize our children's futures, but whatever we do, whatever happens is happening in the context of our lives as creatures of this earth, sharing our creaturliness and flourishing with other forms of life, we are all born into life and are not self-made, and because of the circumstances of our lives - and I realise I'm making some major assumptions here - we have an extraordinary amount of freedom to determine what we do with our lives. We exist in a particular place and time, and we have given great power to chronological time: we mark and measure it to give us order, structure and rhythm, but we have allowed it to become our dictator rather than our enabler, yet we worship a Deity who we believe to be outside of time, and we believe ourselves also, already to be citizens of eternity.

Our responsibility, our burdens and decisions, our seemingly intractable problems, our conflicts all occur within the context of Life, which as Christians we understand and accept as a gift from a Being who has always been and will always be, who has the power to create matter from nothing, and yet who has been visible and present with us as the human Jesus and who is still present with us as the Divine Spirit who lives within each of us. The Spirit who was moving over the face of the waters, and who shook and ignited the lives of the disciples at Pentecost is still in the business of calling, sending, transforming, causing us to dream dreams and see visions and run with exuberance and delight right out of our comfort zones, causing us to "risk the holy terror of living as if love really mattered."(Gabrielle Cox, TFTD BBC R4, 11 August 1998)

We are other than our busy-ness: we are other than our business. Even though we may identify almost wholly with what we do, even though we may give it our best thought and effort every waking hour, we remain distinct and different from it, and, ultimately, are more and other than it. We existed before this particular job, event or crisis and we will exist long after our involvement with it has ceased. We are more than the sum of our salary, holiday, title and task.

If we can keep this perspective, this genuinely cosmic perspective, perhaps we can learn to sit more lightly to both success and failure, maybe we can let go of our fear of failure and allow ourselves to listen to the Spirit who also comes as the still small voice, instead of letting it be drowned out by the screaming banshees of stress and hyper-activity and the manic demons of 'but what if..?' ... 'what if?'

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So who are we then, we creatures of the Uncreated, earth-bound yet made in the image of the transcendent God who is Spirit and Truth? We begin, in this life, by being the result of our parents' intimacy, and we can hope it was a loving union, but whatever it was, here we are. Our parents, too, were the product of their parents' union, and so on and so on, back to the Garden. We are connected in every cell of our body, with every micro-dot of DNA to other people. We are so much of so many others, those we know and knew and those we never knew, and yet each of us is unique, like a snowflake, not one like another.

By being sentient creatures filled with God's Spirit, each of us has a different understanding of God and of who we are in relation to God. Each of us comes to faith in a slightly different way and comprehends who Christ is from our own unique perspective. We are, as Paul puts it, members of the one body into which we were baptised by the one Spirit. We are, therefore, joined to others, physically and spiritually. Even so, we retain our unique perspective, and, I believe, our unique call and vocation, in addition to the general call to discipleship.

We are beings who relate, and in our relating we echo the relational aspect of the Trinity, an understanding of God's nature that many theologians have claimed suggests a type of interrelatedness and communion that we humans can, and should, have, through the action and presence of God's Holy Spirit. The dynamic of the Trinity, which is the endless giving and receiving of never-ending love, is intended for us as well as for the Three-in-One. We have an open invitation to join in the Divine Dance.

I believe the Trinity gives us a particular insight into the primary context of all our relationships. It is not uncommon for the Trinity to be seen as a privately owned family company: God & Son, with the Spirit tacked on as their Man Friday: clear lines of authority and hierarchy and importance. However, some theologians have suggested another way of understanding the internal dynamic of the Trinity.

What if the relational aspect of the Godhead was about equality, not hierarchy? What if there was, as the great Augustine in the 4th century believed, and I quote "so great an equality in the trinity, that not only is the Father not greater than the Son as regards divinity, but neither are the Father and the Son together greater than the Holy Spirit; nor is each individual person, whichever it be of the three, less than the trinity itself." What might an appreciation of that dynamic do for our own faith and understanding, and how could that inform our sense of identity in relation to such a God and in relation to other people. To me it means something wonderful and extraordinary about God's nature, and it also speaks to me of freedom, movement, sitting lightly to power as position and it hints at the possibility of seeing partnership and collaboration as being the most creative and fruitful and fulfilling ways of working, with the inevitable ebb and flow of our human energies, resources and opportunities. John Polkinghorne, the physicist and theologian, after a lifetime of both scientific and theological exploration considers that "the physical world looks more and more like a universe that would be the fitting creation of a Trinitarian God, **the One whose deepest reality is relational.**"

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I do not believe we step out of our identity as members of the body of Christ, or partners in the Divine Dance, when we move into our roles in our business and public lives. We take everything we are wherever we go, and though at times, we may move more among those who do not share our trust in God, where we go, God's Spirit goes with us, the Spirit of liberation, transformation and reconciliation. We do not have to have diplomatic registration plates to be ambassadors for Christ. We do not have to be in royal employ to be those who proclaim and build up the Kingdom.

What we do matters. With the Spirit of the infinite God at work in us, who is to say what our contribution will be? Who is to say where our influence will end? We have a responsibility to guard the truth as we know it, but also recognise and dare to continue to be conduits for the Spirit, knowing that everywhere the Spirit goes becomes holy ground. We should not expect life to be tidied up and sanitised for us before we can enthusiastically and confidently inhabit it: the Spirit is our intrepid Scout and if we follow where the Spirit leads, we can become those who help to make the Way accessible to others.

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Much of what I do in any given day is communication in one form or other. It ranges from speaking and preaching, to writing books and articles, to contributing to radio and television programmes. I have been doing Thoughts for the Day on Radio 4 for a great many years, although I haven't done any in the past year. The rota isn't exactly planned in a set way, and the last time I saw the producer she said she would like me to do some Pause for Thoughts with Terry Wogan on Radio 2. So, I wait to see what happens!

In the churches, we have a tendency to think that more is better, that a certain amount of time is needed for an effective outcome. This, of course, varies from culture to culture. I remember when I was visiting in Kenya, I was told that I must preach for at least 20 minutes, any less would be an insult! In the world of business I don't think many of us would be comfortable with trying to pitch an idea to a client or bring on side a potential partner in a truncated process with, say, less than three minutes for the whole transaction. That's a bit what it feels like to write a Thought for the Day. One is given two minutes fifty-five seconds, about 450 words, selected and positioned for the listener's ear rather than the reader's eye, to highlight a current news story and to try to make a connection with something spiritual or religious. Yet, even under these controlled conditions, amazing things can happen.

A number of years ago, I made a connection between the horrific child abuse scandal in north Wales to a point about forgiveness. I said that even if we can't forgive, if that is too much, we can ask God to forgive, and perhaps one day, we *will* be able to forgive. The next week I received a letter from a woman in her seventies, who said that after hearing my little Thought she had been able to ask God to forgive the man who had abused her when she was a child. For the first time since then she felt free. All that, in two minutes and fifty-five seconds.

Another time, I did a Prayer for the Day which goes out much earlier in the morning. My theme was about not being anxious or in a rush and keeping hold of the peace of God. I ended with an English translation of a modern Japanese version of Psalm 23. The BBC said that received the largest postbag for any religious broadcast that year. Among the letters there were about a dozen from a particular group of professionals – teachers, specifically head teachers, saying that hearing my broadcast had completely changed their whole attitude to the day. I had lovely visions of staff and students at various schools up and down the country wondering why their heads seemed a bit calmer and steadier that day.

I am convinced of the power of a few words fitly spoken, of even the healing power of a voice, or as can happen with television, a kindly face or the integrity and compassion in someone's eyes. In spite of relying on words for much of what I do, I am a great believer in what Saint Francis is reputed to have said: 'Preach the Gospel to everyone you meet. Use words if you must.'

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I have spent years trying to educate our churches about the media, in order to help them to understand better how they work and to explore ways of contributing to the media in an appropriate and worthwhile way. I have to say, I've also spent years trying to educate the media about the Church of England in particular and the Christian faith in general. Gone are the days when religion correspondents had degrees in theology, or even a basic understanding of the tenets of the major faiths – and it shows. When Stephen Bates, The Guardian's long-term religion correspondent gave up that post, he was replaced by Riazat Butt, a very bright young liberal Muslim. She is coming up to speed very quickly, but I have already spent several hours having to brief her about various issues in the Church of England and the Anglican Communion worldwide. She comes with intelligence and interest, but without specialist knowledge, at least of Christianity.

In some quarters I am sorry to say that there is still a strong suspicion of the media overall as being tainted, because of some of their output. A bishop who should have known better once remarked to me that the media were the 'enemy'. Shortly after that my husband Chris, who was first a producer, then a trainer, then a consultant in the BBC, and I were jointly asked to brief the senior executives of a Christian organisation and help devise their media strategy, and we decided to call our presentation 'Sleeping with the Enemy'. We had the uncomfortable feeling that not everyone caught the irony we intended.

I've also initiated two consultations between leaders in the Church and various gatekeepers in the media, those people who ultimately influence what we see or hear or read. The inviting host of the first was the then Archbishop of York and of the second the Director General of the BBC. Hopefully, the next one will be held in 2010. The present Archbishop of Canterbury attended both consultations, which were held at St George's House, Windsor Castle.

These residential gatherings have provided the forum for some extremely revealing exchanges. During one of these the subject arose of what types of things the churches

should be discussing in the media, especially in the light of often woeful ignorance of church matters. A bishop asked rather plaintively, 'So what should we be saying?' Came the immediate reply, "**That there is a God!**" Because of the Chatham House Rule I cannot attribute that comment, but it was from a high-profile person who inhabits both the literary and political worlds.

The Director General of the BBC, Mark Thompson, is a devout Roman Catholic, and he is committed to Public Service Broadcasting, and yet he presides over a Corporation that is facing unprecedented technological change. Within a few years broadcasting as we know it will be gone. Free Sat has just been introduced which gives free access to over 200 channels. Ofcom, the media watchdog is currently re-examining Public Service Broadcasting. For those with responsibility in the media it is now a case of having to sprint to keep up.

A small footnote about a television programme: I have to say that the series *The Apprentice* doesn't necessarily make the world of business look very savoury, or as my mother would say, "edifying". The programme may, of course be presenting an extremely artificial view of high-powered executives, but the potential apprentices really do 'make one gasp and stretch one's eyes'. Proud claims of being ruthless and arrogant, willing to trample over helpless grannies or injured animals to gain one's goal, do not necessarily reflect the Christian way. I think the only non-blood-thirsty contender I've heard in the current series is Lucinda, who rather refreshingly said in one episode, "I don't think you have to be nasty to be successful in business."

I've already said that what we **do** matters. What we **believe**, of course, matters too, because what we believe will determine what we do. Question: is kiss a noun or a verb? Well, in one sense it's both: the word 'kiss' exists as a noun, but the *reality* of kiss can only be experienced as a verb. The word 'belief' exists as a noun, but the reality of belief is only experienced as a verb. As we believe so we behave. Salvation is by faith alone, but faith without works is dead.

As Christians, in all our doings, we need to be rigorous and thought-through. We need to be theo/logical: logical in the light of what we believe about God. The Archbishops' Council was created nearly a decade ago to help steer the Church of England by tying together more closely into one body those with responsibility for policy and those with responsibility for resources – people, money, buildings and land. We continually have to pull ourselves up short, and remind ourselves that, even though something presented to us is a perfectly good idea, if it isn't in line with our priorities, then we shouldn't do it. Although our investments are doing very well, thank you, above average, our budgets are tight, and we are acutely aware that for many parishes raising the parish share is a real challenge. Either people have to give more, or we at the centre will have to do less. It is as we have become more focussed on the logical implications of our priorities that our work has begun to lift, and recently we have felt a greater sense of agility, purpose and direction, and less as if we are drowning in a vast dense pudding of equally worthy competing demands.

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Some people are surprised when they discover that I spend a large amount of time working for an end to discrimination against women in the worldwide Anglican Church, of which I have been a life-long member, and specifically, for equality for women in the Church of England, the established Church of this land. Occasionally I get told that I am chasing a worldly goal and following a secular agenda. I couldn't disagree more.

To me, working for an end to discrimination against women is inextricably tied in with who I understand God - and humanity - to be. Women have had a particularly difficult time in the Church. Hundreds of years ago the cutting-edge theologians of the days discussed things like whether women were fully human, and were they made in the image of God. Augustine, in a radical departure from his contemporaries, argued that women, in their **minds**, were made in God's image. Of course, he agreed, in their bodies, they were not. In the second century Tertullian wrote that women were 'the devil's gateway'; a few generations later Jerome opined that 'woman is a temple built over a sewer'; in the tenth century, Odo, the educated Abbott of Cluny, remarked that 'to embrace a woman is to embrace a sack of manure'. Even Thomas Aquinas considered women to be 'misbegotten males'.

We can laugh or wince, but at the time of the ordinations of the first women priests in the Church of England, good Christian men were still heard to say things like 'You can no more ordain a woman than you can ordain a pork pie' and 'I'd rather ordain a cat than a woman' and perhaps most disturbingly, 'Women priests are a virus in the bloodstream of the Church'.

Ever since Adam and Eve, women have never inhabited neutral territory, and those who still see women as less able to bear God's image, less able, or not able at all, to represent Christ, and as inferior beings, if not actually a different species, have been speaking with disproportionately loud voices, aided by large amounts of money, to prevent what I see as part of the saving work of Jesus on the cross, namely the healing and reconciliation of the brokenness between men and women, and of the distorted relationships which still damage, demean and diminish countless women's lives around the world. The most truly Christian - and counter-cultural thing we could do - is to model to the world the radical equality, mutuality and love that is ours in Christ!

Sadly, the Church of England is still communicating mixed messages to women, particularly in its ambivalence to women being allowed to share with men in the Episcopal ministry. After 20 years of women in the diaconate, and 14 years of women in the priesthood, the Church now seems to be making decidedly heavy weather of removing the legal obstacles that still stand in the way of women being allowed to be bishops, in spite of the General Synod, the Church's Parliament, voting two years ago explicitly to remove those obstacles. But, we are on the way, and in two months the Synod meets again to determine the way forward on this issue.

It is, as one might imagine, a peculiarly uncomfortable stage for the two thousand ordained women in the Church, ministering as parish priests, hospital, university, prison and armed forces chaplains, with the few also as cathedral canons, archdeacons and deans. There is even a chaplain to Canary Wharf, the Reverend Dr Fiona Stewart-Darling, who has in her

patch over 97,000 people who work in that extraordinary place: all the staff of the banks and corporations and other businesses, as well as the several hundreds of people involved with the ongoing construction of new buildings. In the four years Fiona has been in her post she has been slowly and steadily establishing trust and building relationships. She has had many unexpected encounters just by *being* there as a priest, and she speaks of continually discovering the ways that God is already at work there. And, of course, she holds all the people and businesses of Canary Wharf in her prayers.

In Anglican ecclesiology, bishops are chosen from priests, and are appointed as bishops on the basis of their experience and character, including qualities of prayerfulness, intelligence, leadership, wisdom, courage, integrity and compassion, and their ability to engage and communicate with those in the wider society, as well as a most important quality of having a large pastoral heart for the clergy in their diocese.

The bishop of St Albans is retiring early in 2009 and I am part of a group helping to choose the new bishop. We have been spending hours considering the specific qualities we want in our new bishop. Alas, we hear the Archangel Gabriel is currently unavailable, but we are hopeful of finding someone who will build on Christopher Herbert's good work and take us into a new phase. I have to say that none of what we have discussed as being essential - or even desirable - in the new bishop is dependent on the person being a man or a woman. It is a job description and person specification for a mature, capable and knowledgeable Christian, someone whose faith is rooted in the Scriptures, with a breadth of experience and whose life shines with the light and love of Christ.

If I look at who we are as people in our creation, baptism and in the ongoing life of the Spirit, I arrive, theo/logically, at the full acceptability of women and men, the new creation in Christ, together given the message and ministry of reconciliation, together able to bear God's image, together recipients of the gifts, and gift, of the Holy Spirit.

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There is much more that could be said, on this and other things, but I would like to end with a special charge, written over 400 years ago by a young Spanish woman named Teresa, who, after a transformational mystical experience of God, went on to found 16 convents. This charge is for all of us, whatever our business, if we claim to live and work in the name of Christ.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
Yours are the only hands with which he can do his work,
Yours are the only feet with which he can go about the world,
Yours are the only eyes with which his compassion
can shine forth upon a troubled world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Thank you.

Christina Rees

May 2008

HOW ABOUT JOINING CABE?

The Christian Association of Business Executives
(Registered Charity 256182) was founded in 1938

Affirming Christians in leadership roles in the in the private, public and voluntary sectors in order to exercise Christian influence through our life and work

CABE aims to support Christians who work in leadership roles by exploring the relationship between the faith that they profess and the world in which they work.

We affirm that this work is a valuable and necessary part of God's creation, and that in it Christians have a unique and special contribution to offer.

CABE also calls upon individual Christians to bring the values and moral teachings of Christianity to bear upon the manner in which their work is conducted.

You are warmly invited to become a member of CABE to support and participate in our various initiatives.

Membership costs £30 per year.

Activities include:

- The annual Hugh Kay Memorial Lecture
- CABE papers by Christian business leaders
- CABE Network evenings
- Collaboration with other Faith and Work organizations for joint seminars/conferences

If you would like to join CABE, please contact our **Membership Secretary**

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with your name, address, phone numbers and email address.

Full details regarding CABE and its activities are shown on our websites

www.cabe-online.org and www.principlesforbusiness.com

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