

The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory

Based on a talk he gave at the recent Faith in Business conference, Cal Bailey starts by outlining the creation theology behind our material business world before tracing the history of an emerging selfish attitude to wealth creation. He then shows clearly how Christian management differs fundamentally from that attitude. Finally, he shows how family and eco-friendly businesses can bring the Kingdom.

'Theology of business' - 'business in the kingdom of God': is this a laughable oxymoron? Do such pretensions deserve a verdict of disgraceful self-deception? Does Jeremiah point at Christian business folk when he sees greedy overconsumption bringing God's judgment upon the earth, people whose mouths and lives were never more at odds?

If the church in our generation is gently talking to business again,

much conversation tends to revolve around our discipleship and our virtue. We should be more ambitious. For one thing, it seems to me that a different and better landscaped perspective is offered in this generation by some evangelical thought in the USA. For another: 'it was not ever thus' on these shores. A friend reminds me that his Victorian grandfather, selling artists' materials and framing their pictures, was respected in church as a godly

businessman while the brother who had painted many of those pictures, was generally perceived in the church community as having 'no proper job'.

What I want to do here is open a perspective that rehabilitates both shopkeeper and the artist in the 'reconciliation of all things' (Col.1:19-20) achieved when Jesus Christ 'made peace' by his atoning sacrifice. It is a perspective which takes God's Kingdom, described by Hans Kung as "creation restored", as





truly universal, with global claims on life and culture; it does not restrict "God's people, in God's place, under God's rule" (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Kingdom and Church*) to congregation, marriage and family.

I'm going to attempt to answer that core theological question, before exploring the roots of our business context today. I will end by seeking to identify the challenges and opportunities facing today's Christian in business especially through the lenses of family business and the fashionable topic of sustainability.

Theology

So what is the big picture of our world, and what is the theological place of business within it?

God made the world. Initially it was like an unworked garden which had all sorts of potential. He made humankind. And he planned for humankind to take a central role in ordering and managing the world about him. This is what our work is about. Through work, we learn and provide for our needs; through the alternation of work and rest, we enjoy God and his gift of life, and each other, and become the people God made us to become; cooperating with

him and each other; we use his creation so that it becomes what God made it to become; and always with Him at the centre – as purpose and goal. "Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory".

He allows us to share in his world, like tenants who rent a vineyard from the landlord. Tenants who love wine and are learning how to make it well, who work as a team and develop skills as good vintners, good colleagues, and good citizens in the community; Jesus' life suggests God's desire to engage with the tenants and his parable draws the analogy of failing to pay rent as rejecting the landlord's engagement. Good tenants rejoice at the owner's personal involvement with them.

For this to work, there were some rules which tenants had to keep or it would go wrong; within those boundaries, the big picture is that we may use the land to provide for our needs and enjoyment and for other people's needs and their enjoyment; so through work we explore our world and develop our skills; and discuss it with our landlord as Adam

did in the cool of the garden at the end of each day.

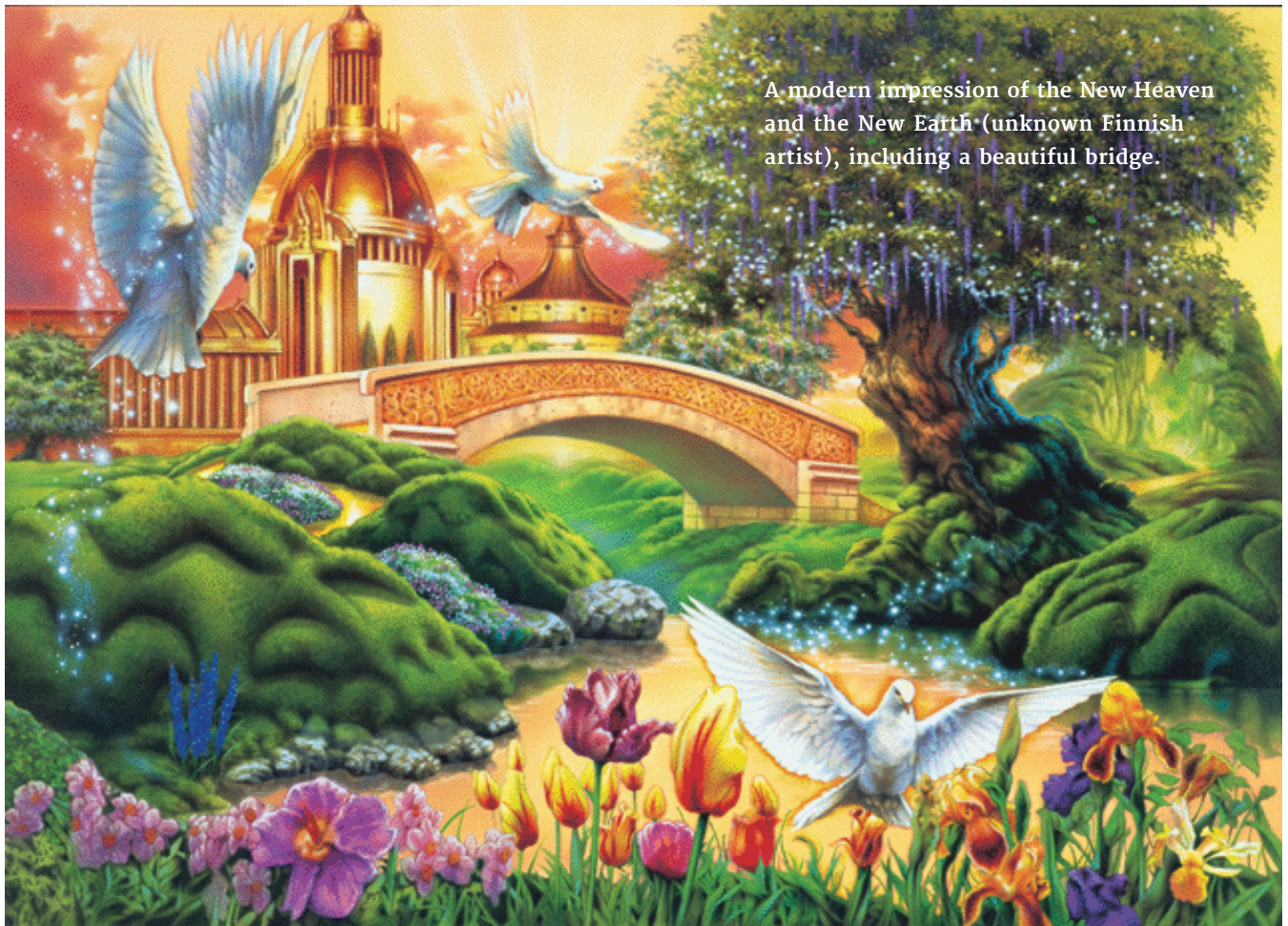
A little example can be found in Genesis 2:10–12. Verse 12 informs us of the ancient narrator's discovery that the world was full of interesting opportunities; gold, aromatic resin and onyx are all luxuries for us to find and enjoy. The writer assumes that God approves what is necessary to

make use of them – the mining, the transport, the manufacturing, marketing and retailing. This is all within the creation plan. These businesses were all intended by our landlord.

'We use his creation so that it becomes what God made it to become'

However, humans aspired to do more than work in this world and enjoy it; we wanted to be like God and broke His boundary rules – "Mine is the kingdom, the power and the glory". So much has gone wrong – in our relationships with God, with each other and with the world, not least in our work.

Work is now imbued with fruitfulness and also frustration; we can no longer work under God's limits but establish our own, or abandon them as we see fit; we can no longer work cooperatively with



A modern impression of the New Heaven and the New Earth (unknown Finnish artist), including a beautiful bridge.

God or each other but stumble between cooperation, competition and enmity; for the earth is there to be plundered without thought for the purposes of its divine owner, or our neighbour or even of our common future.

Of course there is disaster – who can be surprised? But there is good news too, because the owner hasn't given up on his creation plan – not nearly. His project will be restored and it will come to a perfect completion when all things in heaven and earth are brought back under his feet.

We have already witnessed in Jesus the power and glory of a life lived in beautiful harmony with both creator and creation; and his crucifixion has, we believe, enabled a repentant people to be reconciled and restored

both to God and to each other so that we might – by immense grace and deep transformation – be truly his people, in his place and under his rule. When he appears in glory, it's

'This is a major and dramatic change to what I was taught as a youngster at church and Christian Union, and to the underlying assumptions of most evangelical institutions today'

nothing less than the restitution of all creation that will be brought about (Acts 3:21; Col 1:20). The model for this is Resurrection; its physicality an embarrassment only to Platonists. So the material creation which fell and was materially corrupted will be restored to material completeness. This is a major and dramatic change to what I was taught as a youngster at church and Christian Union, and to the underlying assumptions of most evangelical institutions today. God is a materialist – more so than his church!

We know less about this final phase of life on earth, both because it hasn't happened yet and because scripture talks less about it. This keeps our thinking cautious, but the core idea is in no way uncertain – scripture is quite clear about the fact of God's victory; and about the place of God's victory – on earth; and about the place of his future Kingdom – on earth. Jesus is coming back, not taking us up there.

Now this earthy view of the kingdom fully admits a renewal of heaven and earth, but one in which the most striking event is described as "the city of God coming down out of heaven". Newness and renewal are central messages of scripture. But I suggest the element of continuity must be greater than discontinuity or the ideas of redemption and renewal and resurrection become a nonsense. Furthermore, without cosmic rehabilitation, Satan wins a substantial victory.

So what are we doing in business from God's viewpoint? I suggest that business exists in God's world to do the work needed to bring the bounty of God's creation to serve people's needs and to delight them. It does many other things along the way – like develop the technical and cooperative skills of those engaged in this work – but that is its core purpose. And a fine purpose it is.

It's worth noting at this point that of course business won't serve those needs for long unless it

is, among other things, financially and environmentally sustainable, which means we must make a profit and retain a healthy bountiful earth. Both are, in this view, necessary conditions of good business, but not the objective of it.

'Think how the City of London's multiple livery companies leapt to clasp the Reformation's new, ethically challenging and positive view of business'

delight in changing his children's nappies; Calvin urges Christian folk to work their property (homes and land and business are all implied) so that it passes on to others in better condition than it was first received. This developed into a cautious approval of trade in business and a generous sharing of its fruits. We cannot miss this today. Think how the City of London's multiple livery companies leapt to clasp the Reformation's new, ethically challenging and positive view of

business, trade and industry. Doing God's will on earth as in heaven didn't exclude wealth creation and didn't divorce it from the common good. Think of the benefactions to universities, schools and almshouses.

The Enlightenment, with Smith's revolutionary belief that self-love was really in the best public interest, turned caution into courage, so that it became the Victorian duty to use all God's gifts to invent, to manufacture, to sell – and to lose our inhibitions about the self-interest which motivated it all.

Today business is known above all, not for its service, but for its self-interest. It is now routine for business to express its purpose in terms of profit. I was at a board meeting some years ago when we were to hear the business plan for the following year: the business's response was a budget. None of the other directors expected anything else. Our purpose to serve had become a purpose only to profit.

The second route marker is the work of Charles Darwin in the 19th century on evolution which commenced our loss of faith in a creator and in the world as God's creation. With the beginning of the story lost, it also has no end – only a middle – which is

how our colleagues see their world, and us too in our business mindset, if we are not careful. But there is an account to be given; there is a judgment to be made – to One who is more to be feared than the most aggressive shareholder; and it need not be feared or forgotten. We need to recover a humble, practical, confidence in our God, his creation, his mercy and his kingdom.

But there are today few who think of the world as a benefaction from God to humanity, not owned but borrowed, and to be accounted for. So, for those who know their Tolkien, the "Gollum" refrain now takes over: "My own! My love! My Precious!" to do with as I like.

No longer restrained by the daily burden of serving God and neighbour, we explore and plunder without constraint. Business is free to develop, to rampage as armies did centuries ago. With interest becoming ever more allowable, banks develop unheard of services, unknown investors lend capital to others, and boards are driven by dreams of market domination. Risk becomes the high road to riches.

God remains privately engaging to a few individuals; but He is publicly irrelevant to business and to government. Christendom has ended.

My third route marker is the royal charter granted in 1880 to establish the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales because it recognises the new significance of money. Money has long existed as a measure of product value and means of exchange. And there have always been greedy people who want money and who were known for their love of it.

Money today has a much bigger role. It becomes the universal unit of accounting to shareholders and the measure of performance in trade; the measure of success applied now to people, to businesses and to countries.

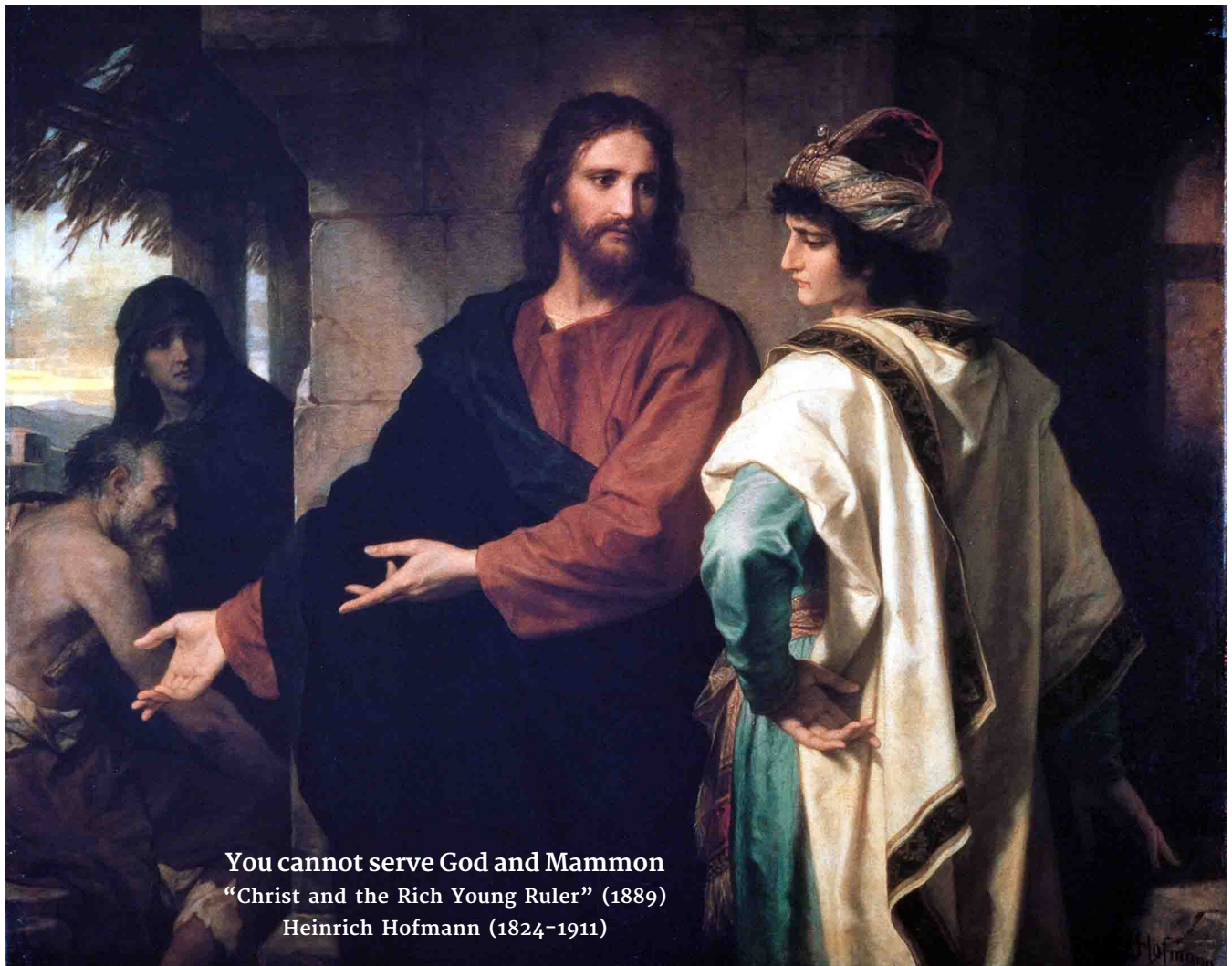
Today's context for business: the market economy

So if this is a view of the big picture, God's plan both in origin and as amended for our disobedience, what is our specific context?

I'll answer this by looking at what I see as the three central route markers that have led to our western liberal market economy.

The first is the Enlightenment, that period of developing intellectual scepticism and confidence which led to rationalism and which gave birth in the 20th century to secularism. I shall pick the key figure of Adam Smith who famously wrote: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest."

The Reformation views of Luther and Calvin had given us an understanding of work as vocation – i.e. our response to God's gifts and calling – and service – i.e. our response to our neighbour. (Luther manages to find



You cannot serve God and Mammon
"Christ and the Rich Young Ruler" (1889)
Heinrich Hofmann (1824-1911)

So we must define the measure of financial success, called profit, and subject it to rules. A whole profession in which I trained develops to do this. For in this world money has become the objective. Isn't this what Jesus meant by mammon, because we serve it? Isn't this what the Old Testament called idolatry because it displaces God?

This is our modern business context. We have forgotten the reason we are here. We have replaced the goal of service with the goal of profit measured by money. What is the item without which no board agenda is complete? The financial report! Who is the one executive on the board who doesn't run the business but is there because we value the information he/she brings? The Financial Director! Is there always a Customer Director on the board? Is the HR Director on the main board?

Certainly not! The truth is we want to know more about our profit than about either our people or our customers today because it is more important to us. It's what we worship.

The Challenges facing Christians in business

I am a Trustee of a Christian education charity called the West Yorkshire School of Christian Studies which operates in the Reformational tradition, which came out of Holland in the late nineteenth century and has now seeded Christian scholarship and enterprise throughout the world. One of our staff has developed a fascinating and innovative approach to evangelism which has been found to be very engaging for youngsters. He takes a celebrity character, like James Bond or Jordan, and asks five

questions which reveal a lot about what they believe.

I thought I might take the same approach to the business celebrity – the Chief Executive – and ask the same five questions.

1. Where am I? I am in a world brimming with resources that I can get my hands on and surrounded by sycophantic graduates who can be persuaded to ensure that what I get stays in my hands. I buy and sell in an aggressively competitive market economy, which experiences regular booms and busts. It's the modern version of the jungle; only the fittest survive.

2. Who am I? I'm the person with the highest skills round here whom shareholders entrust with their business and whom my staff look to for strategy and leadership. Because people like me aren't in great supply,

I collect a sizeable wad for the hassle. If you sum it all up, my role is to make more money than last year, and to keep doing that for ever.

3. What's wrong with the world? The job's impossible because my stakeholders are all unreasonable with expectations that are too high and customers who won't pay up; frankly they are greedy. As a result it's very likely that one day I will be fired and will end up without job or reputation. Or the media will find out (or invent) enough to put me down. And this is a world where global events over which I've no control can demolish all the good work I do.

4. What's the solution? You have to be tough in business. I don't want to have rules imposed on me which prevent me delivering profit. Let me get on with it. Give me the freedom to set strategy, and don't interfere when I want to hire and fire, play hardball with customers or take risks.

5. What happens after death? I don't know – who does? Judgment day isn't after death, it's tomorrow at the next quarterly update. I've a business to run, so get out of my way and let me get on with it. The only thing I know about death is that it means taxes – so my solicitor has set up a clever Trust to keep my money out of the Chancellor's pocket.

If that's the world we have come to, what has the Christian to say? Here's my answer to the same questions if I were a Christian CEO.

1. Where am I? I'm in a tremendously abundant world, with hard-working, resourceful and capable people who genuinely want to serve our customers. My competitors are mostly less good at it mainly because their people are focused internally on the hierarchy and the next quarterly

earnings figures, not externally on customers. They are demotivated by the re-organisation they've just been through, and their fear of being knifed in the back by a colleague. We pick up their staff regularly and they seem to stay.

2. Who am I? I'm the person with the responsibility to lead and to listen to our stakeholders and keep them fully informed. I've some of the skills needed and look for help to the rest of the team. I rarely have to play the boss card.

Our strategy is about selecting services which create real value both for our customers and the

community too. We find this is what inspires our people to do a great job. Then we help them deliver and communicate what they've achieved and learned. For example we are big believers in training apprentices, and our people love going into schools to inspire kids with what we do, hiring those with aptitude and

seeing the youngsters develop.

3. What's wrong? Mostly our people work really well, but they face distractions and teamwork problems which need sorting. Customers get offered deals by competitors which undercut our standards and you have to explain and persuade – and sometimes you lose. Some of our board members don't get it at times. And doing the right thing is costly in the short term.

4. What's the solution? It's about having core values from which you don't deviate. In our business, they are more important than any individual, more than profit and they keep us all focused on the right things. We spend time reviewing each other's performance and helping each other to improve – my team review me, especially my

adherence to our values which is published internally. That sets our culture.

Another key is that we are structured in teams of five to 80, so – although we are quite large now – teams know each other well. We don't have big salary multiples between top and bottom and everyone knows this – in fact salaries are published internally too. Sure we lose some senior guys to competitors on big salaries. That's another reason for our training programme – always to ensure there are good youngsters to replace them. And anyway – half of them will call me six months later asking to return. You'll guess we try to avoid hiring big egos and you'll be right. We don't want to hire the people who are primarily motivated by money, so we offer all new recruits £10k to leave after three months – if they accept, they were clearly the wrong recruits! And we find that this way of working focuses on the right things and creates the right behaviours and aligns us with customers and shareholders and our community. You might ask whether we make money when we don't seem to focus on it. Oh yes – plenty enough. You see – we really do deliver for our customers.

5. What happens after death? All I have learned tells me God will open up something very wonderful for those who can dance to his tune. You may know Kipling's poem called L'Envoi (The Farewell): here is what he imagined for the artist:

*We shall rest, and, faith we shall
need it--lie down for an aeon or two,
'Til the Master of All Good Workmen
shall set us to work anew!*

*And only the Master shall praise us,
and only the Master shall blame;*

*And no one shall work for money,
and no one shall work for fame;*

*But each for the joy of the working,
and each, in his separate star,*

*Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for
the God of Things as They Are!*

Family Businesses

Now I thought it might be appropriate at this point to comment on family businesses and the currently fashionable topic of sustainability, which will lead me to my conclusion.

Family businesses: together we are huge – we employ over 9 million people in the UK and generate 1/4 of our GDP. Yet you hear little about them in the news and see little of them in the business pages – partly because we don't have shares for sale, partly because I think we generate fewer stories of bad behaviour, and partly because most family businesses prefer to stay out of the headlines.

Family businesses are about family ownership, which generally means family management too. This gives rise to our biggest challenge – complex relationships. It's easy when there is one owner-manager who makes all the decisions: difficult when there are sibling owners who have inherited a business, especially if several want to work in it and they can't agree who is in charge. The complexity steps up by an order of magnitude when the third generation become owners, parents die, and the cousin consortium – now perhaps eight people, all with partners, long soaked in parental expectations – have to agree on who runs the show, and how to divide the spoils. The expression "Clogs to clogs in three generations" defines the challenge to third generation family businesses. Less than 10% survive this transition still in family ownership.

Our business, now 94 years old, is above average in size at £400m sales and is at the latter stages of our third generation transition, so far successfully, but it isn't complete yet. Our solution has been to seek

the best management we can find – which has meant a CEO from outside the family since my father retired over 20 years ago. This has been highly controversial and has led to some angry departures. When a director leaves a plc, the process generally enables the retention of some dignity: when blood is on the table, it isn't the kitchen table! Yet I am convinced we wouldn't have survived if a member of the family had tried to run it.

On the other hand, I nearly always find that family businesses embody values which are increasingly rare elsewhere. I think it's got something to do with timescale. Mature family businesses often think, not in budget periods of a year, or even strategy

periods of three years, but in generations. They might have a squabble with their brother, but they are in complete agreement about wanting to hand on a better business to their kids.

This brings with it a different attitude to risk. Many family

businesses have no debt, for example. They have seen what the banks did to a competitor, or to them perhaps 40 years ago, and they'd rather sacrifice dividends or growth than borrow and risk passing control to a bank. Nearly all families take a long-term view of investment and innovation. In the construction industry, where there is currently a severe lack of innovation amongst publicly owned firms, the most innovative companies are all family businesses. Risk for them is less about failing to get the desired return but failure to try something new.

In my experience the single biggest difference about family businesses has been the attitude of management to their people. It could be called paternalistic; but it is streets ahead

in commitment. Many companies say that their most important resource is their people. PLCs in my experience behave as if capital was most important; family businesses behave as though people are most important. So I suggest that the lived behaviour of family businesses is generally less at odds with their published values than in most other businesses.

An example: our Chief Executive came from a large listed plc, and he said to me last month, "At [my previous company] a non-exec director came to see me one day and said 'this business delivers to the city, but it must be an awful place to work – it just has no soul'. David continued – 'he was right; and the great thing here is that we have soul'." What I think he was talking about is purpose beyond profit and commitment to values despite the short-term cost.

Sustainability

Finally I want to refer to the fashionable topic of sustainability. What is it about? In my perception, it began as a nod to the environmental challenges facing our global population in general, and to our businesses – perceived as the most destructive and consumptive contributor to the problem we face – in particular.

I recognize that there is plenty of "greenwash" – behaviour that pretends to offer improvement but does little; products which are branded eco-, but which offer scant reduction in the damage caused by competitors.

I want to make three points. Firstly sustainability isn't about helping the planet to survive. There is little doubt that our planet will survive. It's about enabling people to survive, and especially poor people.

Secondly, sustainability has been very good for the businesses that have made the effort to take it seriously. While I have struggled in

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Eco-friendly family business

Solais House, a low energy building designed and built by NG Bailey as their regional headquarters on a Glasgow business park



our business to persuade all our people to behave differently, the bottom line has benefitted hugely from reducing our building energy, lowering our mileage and re-using surplus materials – and I hear that story from others repeatedly. There is vast waste in business!

Thirdly I observe that businesses which get into sustainability start listening to a wider audience and gradually get pulled into a bigger cause about responsibility. I see this, for example through an organisation called Business in the Community, of which some 800 of the largest businesses in the UK are members. I see it in our banking members in particular, who are deeply shamed by their performance over the last dozen years and some of whom are making major efforts to transform themselves.

‘When businesses genuinely start being responsible, then we shall see a change in business behaviour and a contribution to wider citizenship’


And when businesses genuinely start being responsible, then we shall see a change in business behaviour and a contribution to wider citizenship which will enable us to see better a second transformation that will astonish us. The first transformation is the physical one – transformation of mined materials

into both missiles and motor vehicles, of promises into both unmanageable debt and wonderful holidays, and of effort into personal wealth both for me and for many.

The second transformation is the transformation of purpose, whether

through customer pressure and the so-called "licence to operate", or employee action perhaps via rejuvenated trades unions, or shareholder pressure through responsible pension funds.

For when business is done responsibly, with our external focus on customers' best interests, and with our internal focus on growing people and teams and imaginations, and with self-interest transformed into effort for the common good, then we shall begin to see a world where business does not lead us into temptation, and where we will be delivered from the business evils with which we are familiar; where my kingdom gives way to Thy kingdom, because we have submitted my power to Thy power and seek no longer my glory but Thy glory. Business can be part of that temptation, and deliver its evil; or it can submit its purpose to the common good and let the market serve, not dominate, as we the business leaders determine to focus on customers not profit.

So brothers and sisters, we who work in business can choose to work for my kingdom or Thy kingdom. Those are the wide and narrow gates, which our Master has put before us. 



Cal Bailey has spent ten years working for global businesses, followed by 20 years at the £400m sales family engineering and IT services business, NG Bailey, where he started three new businesses and is now Sustainability Director. He is a Reader in the Church of England and chairs the West Yorkshire School of Christian Studies.