

Stakeholder or Neighbour?

A Fresh Look at Business Relationships

A report by Richard Higginson

This issue of FiBQ includes a profile of Paula Vennells, who was our keynote speaker on the Friday evening of this year's Faith in Business conference. She certainly got it off to an inspiring start, provoking a very interesting time of Q & A. We are also publishing in full the excellent talk given by David Barclay about Corporate Social Responsibility and the Common Good. We have published this talk in full partly as a follow-up to articles on CSR which have appeared in the last two issues; he gives a perspective which is refreshingly different, coming from someone who engages constructively with business rather than being a businessperson himself.

Between Paula's talk on Friday evening and David's on Sunday morning there was lots of other interesting input, and this article provides the opportunity to report on it.

On Saturday morning **Dawn Stallwood** spoke on 'Business for Kingdom Purpose'. Dawn used to

work for a law firm; now she runs her own consultancy. Her faith came alive in a fresh way a few years ago and she has found that being a Christian definitely gives her an 'edge' that was not there before. She derives inspiration both from the nineteenth-century Quaker capitalists (well chronicled in Deborah Cadbury's book *The Chocolate Wars*) and the Kingdom perspective found in John Mulford and Ken Eldred's article 'Entrepreneurs Transforming Nations'. She cited their view that 'Kingdom entrepreneurs represent an engine that can transform a nation from one of self-centred individuals to one of other-centred people who love God and each other. The business sector perhaps more than any other in society has a unique opportunity to bring transformation to whole communities'.

Dawn proposed that God is the ultimate Stakeholder. Regarding him in this way has made her resolute

and courageous in taking a moral stand, refusing to connive in clients' dodgy behaviour.

Seeing God as stakeholder is also consistent with chief executives regarding themselves as stewards and servants. Dawn invited delegates to split into groups and consider the question: 'what would a business or organisation need to look like to attract either (a) Jesus or (b) Lucifer as chairman? Interestingly, several groups reported that they felt Jesus – with his concern to save the lost – would be more interested in transforming ropey organisations than maintaining good ones.

Dawn finished her talk with an interesting exposition of the story about the widow's oil in 2 Kings 4:1-7. She feels this has much to teach us about business/life in a pressure cooker. The widow – faced by a crisis caused by a diminishing supply of oil – did not panic, but faced the facts, sought wise and godly counsel, and acted with faith. The solution was



Photo: Andrew Wilkinson