2016

***Phil Jump** looks at 2016 as the year in which established institutions and orders were challenged. Is this a blip in the ongoing normality, or is it the first-fruit of a movement of change? If so, are both business and faith communities going to react with worry about instability, and try to cling on to the old certainties? Or can both the business and the faith communities find the opportunities within the new order to prosper and to shape this new world for the better?*

2016 has been designated as the Year of the Unexpected. Whether we are talking about Trump's election as U.S. president or Leicester City's Premier League success, things happened that no-one ever imagined would or could happen. Perhaps the biggest question with which many people are now grappling is whether these unanticipated realities are simply blips in an otherwise ongoing normality, or the first-fruits of a movement of change that will continue to challenge and dismantle established orders and institutions.

Business, we are told, does not like uncertainty, and so we might reasonably expect there to be an air of nervousness in the boardrooms of our land. But is this the only way of scanning the current horizon? In posing this question, I am reminded of an oft-told story of two shoemakers who ventured to a nearby island to see what potential markets might be there. One returned utterly despondent, declaring his venture to be futile as no-one on the island wore any shoes. The other returned to gleefully announce that this presented a great new opportunity because everybody needed a pair.

So if our world is at the dawn of some great new order, faith groups and businesses alike might begin to ask what role they are likely to play in it. Is this riven with new opportunity or the sign of their demise? It is intriguing to recognise that in the wake of banking crises and boardroom scandals, many on this side of the Atlantic are likely to cite big business as a key element in that which needs to be overthrown. Yet part of what has fuelled Donald Trump's success seems to be his willingness to sweep aside political protocols in favour of the boardroom tactics that made him famous in the American version of *The Apprentice*.

One of the features of the old order was that it did seem to be one in which the world of business managed to regularly disgrace itself. This has opened up some interesting channels of communication around the area of boardroom ethics, in which the faith community has at times been a partner which is neither unwelcome nor uninformed. Yet might we also ask whether the very movements that have been fuelled by the perceived failures of the established order are responsible, at least in part, for its moral demise?

Historians have asked some interesting questions about the role that the British Company played in shaping the "Anglicised" culture of its colonies. In short, they suggest that they were not simply the means by which economic activity and commerce was generated, but through which people learned to act in particular ways. Employment in these companies not only offered financial stability to Indigenous people (albeit in an often exploitative context) but conditioned them to participate in a workplace culture which in turn shaped the local communities that emerged.

Might the reverse also be true? Has the British workplace traditionally been organised in a way that anticipates a certain raft of cultural norms, morals and values that prevailed, pretty much uncontested, across society as a whole? With time, we have developed a far more diverse identity, accelerated by the advent of social media, whereby a whole raft of sub-cultures co-exist within the communities from which the workforce is drawn. It is not so much that business has lost its moral compass – perhaps it never had one, for shared morality was the domain of wider society.

As the reality of a set of mono-cultural, moral norms has increasingly diminished, might this have simply created a vacuum in which financial return has become the only remaining communal indicator of achievement? If society's tectonic plates are now shifting, is this an opportunity for a new and shared moral framework to emerge?

If so, what common values and principles will define us? Does business have a role in helping to discern and disseminate those values, just as it did in the days of Empire, or is it now forever