

Working to Reconcile

Clive Morton traces his career in bringing reconciliation, sometimes in seemingly impossible circumstances, starting as a civil engineer with John Laing, and completing it with a ministry of holiday retreats near Assisi. On the way, he has been able to see God's plan for him, and to experience a widening of spiritual experience, as he negotiated with shop stewards, reconciled oncology consultants and worked for a Japanese company making excavators in Gateshead.

The theology of the Ministry of Reconciliation that captured me in the early days of faith has run through my life as a thread in all my varied roles.

My faith has encouraged a deepening relationship with God; which is consistent with Kierkegaard's existential philosophy in which to gain faith, you have to experience the relationship with God that comes with that faith. I was fortunate in my undergraduate years to stay as a 'boarder' at Rawdon Baptist College where Dr David Russell, as Principal, was willing to debate and share with us 'non-theologs'. Somehow, certain

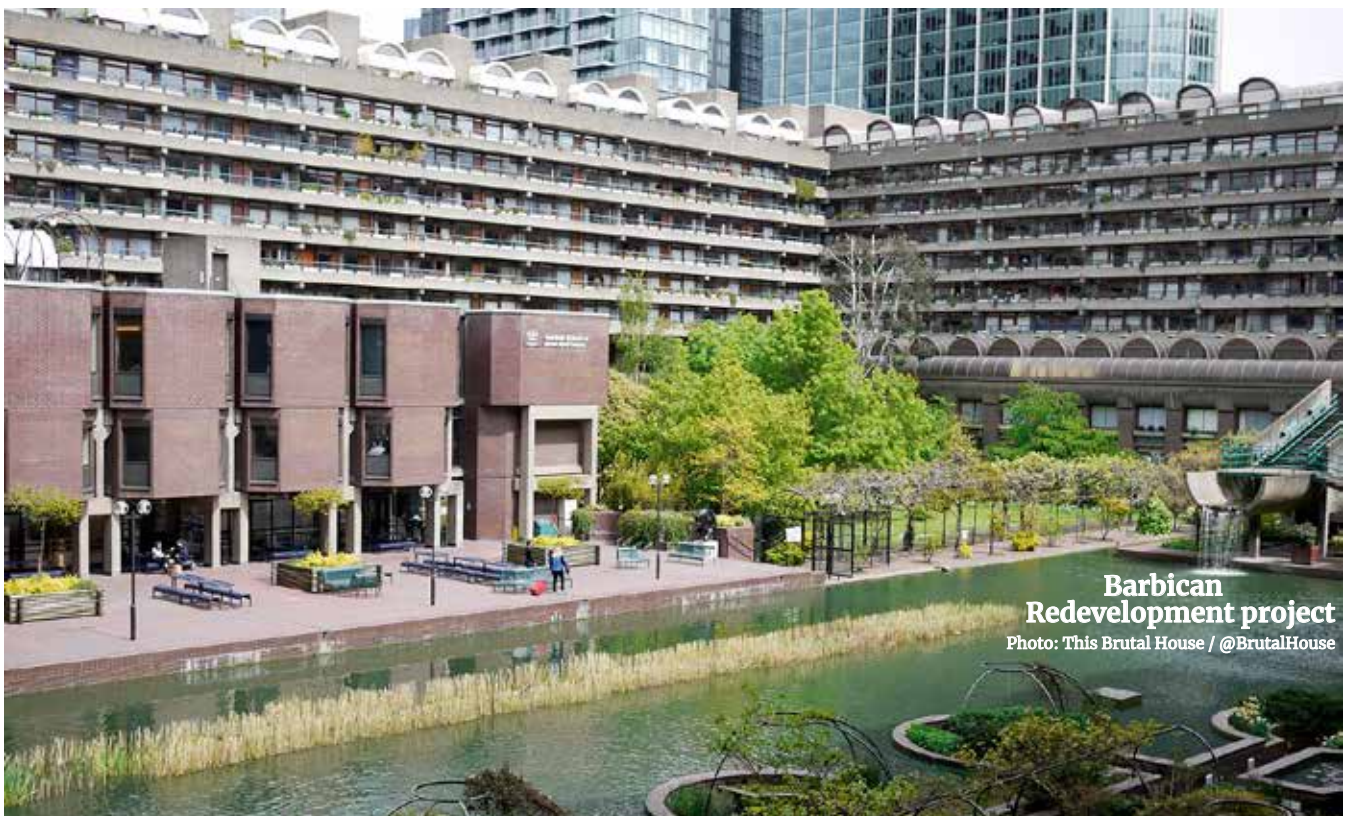
aspects of philosophy and modern-day theology stuck! Hence my developing faith through 'hammering out on the anvil' both the conflict and the links between faith and work. Dealing with dilemmas in the workplace over ethics and with the sometimes unfeeling or uncaring approach to people in the workplace are generic examples.

Learning about Industrial Relations

I found myself in 1964, after graduating as a civil engineer, with John Laing on the Barbican Redevelopment project in the foundation stage. It was a

fascinating project, immense in scope, with the foremost client, architects and engineering consultants determined to repopulate the City of London via such an iconic housing project. In amongst my engineering duties I quickly noticed that, despite the prestigious names of those organisations leading the project, conditions on site for workers were very poor, and that delays, changes of mind and poor organisation all had negative impacts on output and working lives.

Although Laing employed a Labour Relations Officer on site and relationships were generally good, other contractors who had responsibility





Smoke-filled negotiations

Photo: (Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images)

for separate phases of the total project suffered continuous disruption with strikes and walkouts which over time accumulated and led subsequently to the National Court of Inquiry on Industrial Relations at Barbican Redevelopment.

I felt aghast that, despite all the factors in favour of the success of the Barbican project, major phases were failing due to poor industrial relations (IR); the working conditions and disruption for construction workers also appalled me. Laing was very supportive of research into industrial relations and offered me reams of documents and diaries on the sources of conflict, conduct of negotiations and outcomes. Laing also extended the database available to me to include two other concurrent sites in the City of London. This was, collectively, a unique primary source of research data and persuaded LSE to transfer me to studies for a part-time PhD.

Some eight years later I was contacted by a Tarmac executive who had been in touch with Tom Boullier, Head of IR for Laing, in his search for an IR officer for the Tarmac London sites. It seemed that by happenchance Tarmac had recruited six former shop stewards with a reputation for militancy who had been employed on Barbican some ten years earlier! Tarmac was new to the London scene and had inherited contracts in the London Borough of

Lambeth through acquiring Fitzpatrick, Limmer & Trinidad. Frankly, Tarmac didn't know what had hit them or how to deal with a deteriorating IR situation. What nobody realised (including me when I joined as IR Officer) was that the game plan of the local left-wing shop stewards' movement was to undermine the credibility of the moderate Labour administration of Lambeth Borough Council (whose Leader, Ted Knight, was seen as a block on left-wing domination) by creating chaos at the construction of the Council-funded Lambeth Leisure Centre. So, we were pawns in someone else's game!

My abiding memory of one of the stages of negotiation was when the management team of five or so faced 25 angry shop stewards in a smoke-filled portacabin and it was obvious that if we could not achieve a compromise solution to the dispute, the workforce would be on strike the very next day. I was a relatively junior member of the team and I looked at my colleagues, hoping someone had an idea, a solution. But they were all looking at me with seriously blank faces! I called for a recess, excused myself, went to the loo, was physically sick, then I prayed briefly, went back into the negotiations and proposed a formula to the management team which won the day, and the strike was averted. My

faith's relevance at work was beginning to become clear to me. This experience of front-line IR was like a baptism of fire at the time! Experiencing God's faithfulness, often when facing potential failure, has progressively formed a bedrock of confidence in my faith journey.

In a relatively short period, stability of sorts was achieved and genuine progress with the contracts was made, to the extent that I withdrew from the sites and took on wider responsibilities. In fact I found these 'difficult stewards' to be full of integrity, very reasonable when dealt with face to face, and determined to right the many wrongs that were obvious to them. Dignity, respect and finding common ground go a long way.

Companies and Local Communities

In 1976 I moved to George Wimpey (Building and Civil Engineering).

My role at Wimpey started to embrace the outward face of the company. Wimpey had for many years provided jobs for those with disabilities (originally for limbless ex-servicemen as lift attendants, but subsequently extended to wider definitions of disability) and had won the government's Fit for Work Award in

the early 1980s for this widening access on disability. Subsequently I was made a judge for the National Fit for Work Award scheme, which started my interest in connecting with government and organisations outside of Wimpey in the quest for social justice and what we now call CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility.

This fired up a life-long passion in me for workplaces to relate to and support their local communities which, whilst satisfying and often very productive, invariably got me into trouble with management colleagues. Usually accusations came concerning ‘distractions from the business’ whenever I had the audacity to champion such causes! I do believe such passions have roots in my faith – in particular the social action drive to extend care into local communities that need help and support. Equally, I also believe that business and organisations gain from being involved with and helping their communities.

It was in this period that, as a member and deacon at Great Missenden Baptist Church, I had the opportunity to form a lasting and rich relationship with the Revd John Rackley who shared many of the same concerns I had over interaction between ‘faith and work’. This was the time of a focus on the ‘Worker Priest’ and the developing approach to chaplaincy in the workplace.

Achieving relationships between people is vital. So often we erect barriers to protect ourselves and our professions. It can gravitate to a ‘them and us’ mode that we can see in identity politics and political populism today. A classic example comes, in my experience, from the ‘professional bureaucracy’ within the NHS, where some clinicians arrogantly vie with each other for supremacy and have little time for non-clinicians, especially managers! At heart, good Human Resource practices are about human relationships.

Crossing boundaries: I see this as central to faith, and it is the solution to so many relationship problems – see how often Jesus crossed seemingly impossible divides!

Involvement in the NHS

After my migration to the North East in 1986 to help set up Komatsu UK, I was encouraged to join the Gateshead District Health Authority as a non-executive director. Under the regime in those days the District Health Authority ran the hospitals in their patch as well as primary care, and it was reported to the board that there were deep relationship issues between two oncology consultants at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The conflict had got so bad that the more junior consultant had enlisted the support of a local MP to

ask the Secretary of State for Health, in Parliamentary sessions of the House of Commons, about the clinical practice of the senior consultant. The NHS ‘divide and rule’ solution to this problem was to propose establishing two separate oncology departments in the same hospital for the same sub-specialism in order to separate the two consultants and their patients. I’m afraid I blew a fuse in the board meeting and said I wouldn’t put up with that situation for five minutes in industry. Clearly I had said too much, because in the next few months, when the hospital was designated by government under the then Health Minister, Ken Clarke, to become a self-managed ‘third wave trust’, I was asked to be its first part-time chairman. However, now the conflict resolution between the consultants was down to the new board. Chris Reed was a very effective CEO and Prof Liam Donaldson, the Regional Director of Health (later Prof Sir Liam and a formative and revitalising Chief Medical Officer for England), gave frequent support and advice on this tricky issue. It all took time, but eventually the issue did get resolved, using many known approaches in conflict resolution and reconciliation. This added to my passionate belief in the ‘ministry of reconciliation’.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Gateshead oncology equipment for breast cancer. Photo: Canon Medical Systems



Uncrossable boundaries



Much later in my career after leaving Rolls-Royce in the North East, I was pleasantly surprised that having given notice to the NHS that my time as Chairman of Gateshead Hospitals had to cease with my move from the North East to Anglian Water (AWG), they were keen to put my name forward for the vacant post of Chairman at Peterborough Hospitals.

The experience of chairing both Gateshead and Peterborough Hospitals was both educational and rewarding. My father had died in a hospice in 1982 following a miserable spell in Hammersmith Hospital, which was then in the midst of a porters' strike. I relished the opportunity of putting something back with more enlightened approaches to employee relations in the NHS. It worked. Peterborough had a negative 'victim and blame culture' in 1996, but under the leadership of Malcolm Lowe-Lauri, CEO, and a supportive board, the culture was transformed which led to far better patient care. It became a good place to work, and the hospital was nationally recognised for high performance which led in 2004 to it being made one of the first ten Foundation Trusts. Later, in 2006, against the odds, we were granted permission to build a state-of-the-art new hospital after two previously failed attempts under both Conservative and Labour administrations.

The major turnarounds in these examples I believe were a product of changes in culture and the creation of 'right relationships' where, for me, the inspiration comes from Christ's examples of caring relationships, reconciliation and crossing seemingly uncrossable boundaries, such as his encounters with tax-collectors, prostitutes, Roman centurions and Samaritans.

Christian Values

The values stemming from Christian belief have been at the core of the change projects I have championed – values such as diversity, equality, dignity and respect for the individual – every person being a loved child of God. The process of change is often painful and there is a clear need to learn to feel for people affected and to demonstrate empathy, love and compassion: all Christian virtues.

This serves to highlight the importance of feeling and expressing forgiveness in a world that wants to blame, shame and exact revenge. It has become apparent over the last decades that when failure occurs (as it will in public life) there has been what the late Lord Sacks described as a migration from 'guilt and forgiveness' to 'shame and disgrace'. This migration has been encouraged by many politicians and the media

with 'heads must roll' rhetoric. It is regrettable and leads to a 'blame and fear culture' in organisations, married to an inability to learn from mistakes. This does not align with my faith and values, or with my experience of continuous improvement, which is all about the richness of learning from mistakes. This is reflected in the difference the workplace has made to my faith. The historic teaching of the church which formed part of my early faith, was that the Bible was the infallible word of God. As I matured in faith, and experienced the realities and dilemmas of life, I became more open and inclusive in my faith journey and began to see the Bible and Christian teaching as the experience of us seeking, and finding, God and truth, without the 'apostolic certainties'. Recently I read *The Lost Message of Paul* by Steve Chalke which illustrates how mistranslation and distortion of Paul's writings gave us poor theology and the opportunity of control by the misogynistic church and state.

Another big impact my working life has had on my faith is the area of psychology and increasing knowledge of 'who I am' and 'who other people are' in terms of personality traits. In my working life I became very familiar with the use of such tools as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and psychometrics, but found the church very resistant to adopting such 'management techniques'.

However, one tool which my wife Florence and I discovered on our faith journey together was the Enneagram which allows the spiritual links with personality to shine through. This has been particularly valuable in gaining self-knowledge and sharing of faith journey experiences with others.

Japanese Influence

Returning to the dramatic change of career in 1986, I firmly believe God had a plan. Within one week of my decision to leave Wimpey in early 1986, a head-hunter rang me about a Japanese client who was in the process of purchasing a plant in Gateshead, in the North East of England. This was intended to be the European base for the manufacture of construction equipment (heavy hydraulic excavators) and they needed a 'first employee' HR Director to set up the plant. The client was Komatsu.

The start with Komatsu was amazing. We were taking over this second-hand factory that needed much work to bring up to manufacturing standard. We needed to recruit... find accommodation for Japanese colleagues... obtain transport.....the list went on. I have written extensively in *Becoming World Class* (Macmillan, 1994) of this incredible experience, so I concentrate here on the faith and values threads.

In many ways, although not coming from a Christian faith background, my Japanese colleagues espoused and followed many values with which I felt very comfortable. They wanted equality in practice: little or no division between 'blue collar' and 'white collar', which interestingly produced some fantastic outcomes: shop floor employees accelerated in their development. A noted example, amongst many others, has been Bob Roe, then out of a job, whom I took on in the early days (1986), as a welding supervisor, and went on to run the whole of Komatsu Australia.

I shared my concerns that with no ventilation and a leaking roof, demolition of a redundant office block at the front of the site would loom in a few years. I had talks with Government officials about the possibilities of the block becoming a community project for enabling those with disabilities into work. However, getting necessary conversion funding from Tokyo proved very difficult.

Then Ken Clarke, at that time Inner Cities' Minister in the Thatcher government, visited the North East to encourage business leaders to get involved in local communities. He said, "If you have a project, we'll meet you half-way!" I took him at his word and negotiated £200,000 from the UK government with the active support

of Peter Carr (later Sir Peter) and Vince Robinson of the Department of Employment, which then enabled Tokyo to match-fund. The Pinetree Centre Project ran for three decades, helping to set up hundreds of businesses and employ many more hundreds of people with disabilities, through assessment and training into work. All parties gained out of this arrangement. In particular, it helped Komatsu to be accepted on Tyneside where local regiments had suffered greatly at the hands of the Japanese during the war, and where you might have expected opposition to the latter-day arrivals.

Particular elements the Japanese brought, which we lacked, were firstly, the principles of engaging all in the quality of what is produced; and secondly, learning from mistakes – regarding this as continuous improvement (Kaizen), not something to feel guilty about!

Also, their focus was and is on 'the group' not the individual, which gave an unusual entrée to teamwork. This and other examples taught me that Christianity does not have the monopoly of answers on how to run the world: there are other truths that can supplement and broaden the approach of the Christian in the workplace – the first being the ability to accept and embrace diversity. Regrettably, in



Pinetree Centre Gateshead

Photo: Pinetree Centre



"Reconciliation"

sculpture by
Josefina de Vasconcellos
Bradford University,
1977

Western society, the church has had a negative hand in our over-concentration on the individual.

The ministry of reconciliation in this context turned out to be between Japanese and British cultures which starts miles apart! Further, in terms of labour relations, there has not been any form of industrial action in the 35 years since the plant was established.

Early Influences

The various involvements I have had over the years in the quest for achieving reconciliation, whether in business, academia or in church life has taught me that there is always something new to learn from others. I believe this was a product of some of the teaching and example I gained from my mother who was a committed and practising Christian and who pursued a career in both industry and teaching, latterly at Chiswick Polytechnic. This has inspired and encouraged my ecumenical and inter-faith work in later years where so much progress has been made by open and searching minds, just as was the case in the early church before it became subverted by power and the state. In looking to future challenges, I believe

that this ability amongst people of faith will be the vital ingredient to counter the binary tendencies of populist movements, whether on the 'right' or 'left' extremes of society.

My father, also a committed Christian, taught me the importance of enterprise. His hero was William Morris, later Lord Nuffield, who went from a bicycle repair shop to creating Morris as an iconic brand. My father worked for the London distributors of Morris, Stewart and Arden, for over 50 years. He also gave me the love of ecclesiastical choral singing – he was a good bass and I have fond memories as a newly broken-voice teenager, trying to emulate him in Stainer's Crucifixion!

My Welsh Baptist minister uncle, the Revd Griffith Lloyd, in the 1960s gave me a verse to live by: Philippians 4 v 13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". That has given confidence, drive and possibly the over-focus on 'doing'?! However, it is the outworking of both my developing relationship with God and the belief that 'He has a plan!' Hence, if something is not working out, my question to the Almighty is: "Where do we go next? Is there something I have missed? Is my time not Your time?"

Just in the last few years, in the context of Churches Together, the challenge of climate change, developing chaplaincy and forging alliances with local government I have found my faith enriched and strengthened by being alongside the Revd Professor Paul Ballard, who has supported and encouraged, bringing to bear his many years of research, teaching and writing on church, society, economics and chaplaincy. We both experienced an interesting challenge from the newly installed Bishop of Peterborough, the Rt Revd Donald Allister when he studied all the joint activities of Churches Together in Central Peterborough and said "these are all wonderful 'doings' but where are the 'beings' within each church as a spiritual base?" A salutary lesson.

With all the job and role changes in my career (which was unusual in the decades covered) I have rarely searched for the next job move. It has almost invariably been a recruitment consultant who has 'tapped me on the shoulder' – I have regarded this as heavenly prompting, or a nudge from the Almighty. I recognise not all will


see it this way, but I'm convinced God had a continuing plan!

Following purchase of property in Umbria, Italy, in the last two decades, my wife Florence and I believe God has guided us to develop a ministry of holiday retreats. People who are often leading busy lives need to take time to slow down, to reflect and learn about a variety of topics related to faith, including values and working and living in modern society.

This exposure has been transformational for me as I confess that achieving the fruit of patience has been a challenge, due most likely to a combination of

personality and immersion in fast-moving industry where *carpe diem* has been the watchword! I have latterly learnt the value of space, reflection and contemplation, in particular from Florence, who is a very spiritual person and shares every experience and dilemma with me. I have been introduced to the writings of Richard Rohr, the Franciscan friar best known for developing the approach of integrating "Action and Contemplation" (not 'either/or' but 'and') which emphasises the practical implications of traditional Christian doctrines and is about developing a deeper relationship with God. (cac.org).

Our close proximity to Assisi has encouraged us to learn about Saints Francis and Clare, and in their teaching we've discovered much that's relevant today, including loving care for the environment. We have found their approach is consistent with the teaching and experience of the Celtic Saints. Glenn Clark's reflection in Celtic Daily Light about the experience of Columba, who discovered that God had a divine plan with him, resonates with me and is echoed in Colossians 1:27:

"I believe that God has a Divine Plan for me. I believe that this plan is wrapped in the folds of my being, even as the oak is wrapped in the acorn..." 



Clive is a Professor Emeritus at Middlesex University and Canon Emeritus at Peterborough Cathedral. He was chairman of NHS Trusts both at Gateshead and Peterborough. He was formerly Human Resources Director at Anglian Water Services, Personnel Director for Rolls-Royce Industrial Power Group, Northern Electric and Komatsu UK. He is a civil engineer and holds a PhD in industrial relations from the London School of Economics and was appointed OBE for his contribution to business and the community in 1992. He has published four books: Becoming World Class (1994); Beyond World Class (1998); Leading HR (2001); and By the Skin of Our Teeth (2003).



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*Love:work is currently planned for publication in July 2021 and can be pre-ordered

