

Engaging with the world of work

After serving as a Structural Geology lecturer, our new editor John Weaver was called to be a Baptist minister where he experienced factory activities in the shoe and printing trade. He then returned to academic life writing three major texts on Science and Faith focusing much of his work on Environmental Theology, and its implications for Corporate Social Responsibility of business and industry. John outlines the work being done on behalf of ICF to integrate faith and daily work, citing three outstanding ICF historical figures. John maintains that business doesn't need condemning – it needs redeeming.

Introducing John Weaver

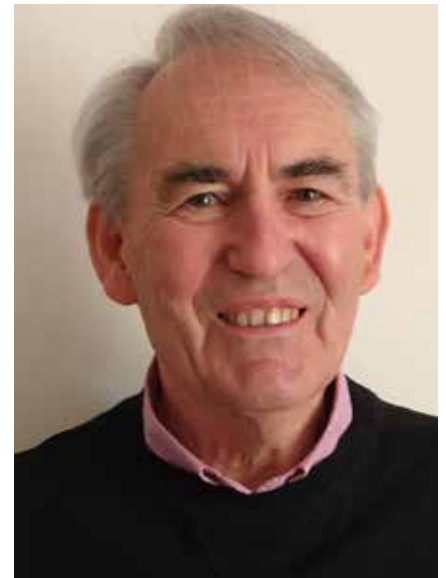
For a number of years in the early 2010s I was an editor of FiBQ. I am currently the Vice Chair of the Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF) and have been part of this organisation for over ten years. My interest in the world of work has formed part of my teaching and writing as a practical theologian.

I began my working life as a structural geologist completing BSc and PhD degrees at the University of Wales, Swansea. I was appointed a Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Structural Geology at the University of Derby (formerly Derby College of Higher Education), where, as well as teaching and research,

I undertook consultancy projects for various industrial companies.

Following a call by God I undertook training for Baptist ministry at Regent's Park College Oxford, completing an MA in Theology (University of Oxford). I was called to be the minister of Highfield Baptist Church, Rushden, Northamptonshire, where I experienced first hand various aspects of both management and floor worker activities in the shoe trade, and the printing industry through attending the workplaces of my church members.

After ten years in pastoral ministry I returned to Regent's Park College Oxford as Tutor and Fellow in Pastoral



Regent's Park College
Photo: Regent's Park College



and Practical Theology. While at Oxford I explored the relationship between Science and Faith, receiving a Templeton Foundation Award in 1998. I have written three major texts on Science and Faith focusing much of my work on Environmental Theology, and its implications for Corporate Social Responsibility of business and industry.

After a further ten years I was appointed Principal of Cardiff Baptist College (formerly South Wales Baptist College) and Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Cardiff University. While in Cardiff I served as Chaplain to Cardiff City Football Club, walking alongside management and players as they experienced the ups and downs of life in the Premiership and EFL Championship, together with a degree of success, reaching the final of both the League and FA Cups.

In retirement I continue to preach and lead services at a variety of Baptist and Anglican churches together with my continued research into Environmental Theology, and the relation of faith to work. This latter area has seen the production of a number of texts jointly on behalf of ICF with Ian Arbon, Ian Randall, and Phil Jump. As part of this project Phil and I have prepared a roadshow to

encourage congregations to explore ways in which their faith can help them to live in workplace situations. The following paper gives a flavour of this work, and is based on the explorations that Phil and I have undertaken.

Engaging with the world of work

Every day, most of us will engage in one way or another with the world of work. For many of us, it will be because we have a job to do, but even if we're retired, unable to work, unwell, at school or college or just having a day off – we are likely to engage in some way or other with someone's working life and their place of work.

If you catch a bus, visit a hospital, pop out to the shops or go to the gym you're entering someone's workplace. If you make a phone call, send an email or even if you simply throw, or don't throw for that matter, your litter into a bin – you are impacting someone's working day.

Work is an intrinsic part of the world in which we live, a world that, as Christians, we believe God made, a world that our Scriptures describe as being loved by God, a world for which Jesus died, a world which the book of Psalms describes as belonging to God,

a world in which God has called us to be agents of healing and reconciliation.

So how does God perceive the world of work? How does God want us to use our working lives? How should our faith affect the way we behave as employees, as customers, as service users and providers? These are questions we can't avoid if we are serious about being whole-life disciples.

These are questions that ICF has been exploring for over 100 years. Exploring them with politicians and policy makers, and exploring them with some of the most disadvantaged workers within our economic structures. Exploring them with Bishops and church leaders, Trade Unions and Business Schools. But while that's a heritage worth celebrating, our key concern is to help people of faith, and people of no faith for that matter, engage with those questions today. Because we believe that faith can make a difference, not only to our experience of work, but also the world we create through all of those things we do under the umbrella of "work".

So we consider the exploration of three questions:

- How might our engagement with work help us participate in God's mission in and for our world today?

- What does it mean to live out our Christian calling in the everyday tasks of life?
- What do our scriptures and faith tradition have to teach us about the world of work and the society we create through work?

Love@Work¹

As we uncover the history of ICF, we realise that we are standing on the shoulders of giants and we felt that it was important to share their stories in our contemporary world. That is where the vision for *Love@Work* originated, and while there are many whose stories are worth telling, three stand out: Elizabeth Garnett; Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, and William Temple.

Elizabeth Garnett (née Hart) was the daughter of a Yorkshire clergyman. Her concern for the navvies led her to be a force for change in what was then, very much a man's world. She was a woman who could see that the world was not as it should be, and that the church was complicit in that state of affairs.

Reflecting on an occasion when 400 navvies turned up at her father's church for a funeral of a young man who had been killed on his first day at work, she asked two fundamental questions:

- Why was it that this community, who could gather in such numbers to mourn the loss of a colleague, were otherwise so excluded from the mainstream of church life?

- Why did nobody else seem to care that a young man was thrust into a dangerous and fatal working environment with almost no protection or preparation?

It seems to have been acceptable that the great industrial projects of the Victorian era would result in injury and loss of life on the part of navvies. While we may be looking at her story over 100 years later, there are echoes in the questions asked about the construction of modern projects, such as the 2022 World Cup stadia in Qatar.

Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy was ICF's 'Special Messenger' in the 1920s and 1930s, but was someone who initially rose to fame through his work as a First World War chaplain. Studdert Kennedy, or 'Woodbine Willie' as he was more affectionately known by the troops, revolutionised chaplaincy to become what we pretty much take for granted as it is now.

He was not afraid to ask difficult questions of a society that sought to glorify the wholesale slaughter of trench warfare. He did that through his writing, his poems and his prolific public speaking. He also did this through his engagement in his local parishes, including people's places of work. He wanted to break down the separation of the church at worship from the experiences of his community at work. He believed that the heart of the Creed was God in Christ, and God as immanent in the world. It was because of this belief

in the presence of God in all aspects of life that there was the possibility for evil and social injustice to be overturned.

William Temple became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942, and one of his key concerns was the kind of Europe we would build in the wake of the Second World War, which was then at its height. Through ICF, he convened the 1941 Malvern Conference, which was an incredibly wide-ranging reflection on the ills of society: the underlying causes of war: how to sustain peace, well-being and prosperity; and long before others, our care of the environment. Early in the 21st century (2008-2013) there was a huge financial crisis right across Europe, and everything that was happening then had been predicted by Temple. He had prophetically challenged that if Europe did not find a broad, just, and from his perspective, Christian foundation for the co-operation of governments going forward such a disaster would ensue. Temple was a powerful prophetic voice, although dying in 1944 he did not see how many of his words came true.

What all three of these people, and indeed so many other figures from ICF's history have in common, is that they chose to see beyond how the world as it was, to how the world could be. They were an irritant in a Church that had become too content with some of the injustices and fractures in society – and they acted, and campaigned to change the narrative.



New ways of creating affordable energy

Oxy-steam gasification system to generate hydrogen, India.

Photo: Indian Institute of Science



We are keen to see this visionary spirit maintained through the work of ICF today. Through *Love@Work* we seek to inspire and encourage those people who might well be the prophets, the irritants dare we say, in our world and in the church now. We want to perpetuate that willingness to ask questions, to desire change, and to believe that change can be accomplished.

ICF came into being through the merger of the Navy Mission, founded by Elizabeth Garnett, with the Christian Social Union, because they wanted to address together how they could build a better world through all levels of work. We still have that vision, but now we offer Christians resources and ideas to develop a Christian perspective on their role in society, whether they're MPs, military generals, CEOs or production-line workers; and try to instil that vision in those who don't have it now. We hope to convince business that the key principles of our faith help create a positive, enriching, and profitable business environment.

We've seen industry and commerce at its worst in recent years and asked questions about ethics, the environmental cost of industrialisation and the human cost of an industrial system driven by economics alone. It's easy to condemn them, but we need business, industry, work and the profits that corporations feed into our economy. We recognise that many profit-seeking

shareholders represent the pension funds for ordinary people, and the reserves of charities committed to the common good. They're not all seeking selfish gain.

Our manufacturing sector and industrial companies are vital. People were kept alive through the COVID pandemic by ventilators manufactured in factories. Engineers and designers are developing new ways of creating affordable energy, upon which the very survival of this planet might depend. New technologies may bring challenge and upheaval to some aspects of life, but they also open all kinds of new opportunities to people who might at one time have been excluded from them.

Business doesn't need condemning - it needs redeeming. It needs narratives of redemption to help it do that. We have to be realistic and unprejudiced to help people at all levels of industry take responsibility for all the decisions they make, particularly recognising the environmental and social aspects of decision-making. We ask the question: How do we live in a Christian way in our modern world? Our responsibility as consumers is probably greater than the producers because it's our demands for more and more, as cheaply as possible, that drives the producers. We live in a consumerist society and we need a Church that resists the temptation to simply reflect that society, but encourages all of us to live out our faith in the everyday experiences of life.

Love:Work²

ICF's work has held a vision for a world that is different, and we believe that people of faith have a unique part to play in helping that 'different' to be achieved. Many of those who have worked with ICF have had leadership roles: diplomats, politicians, and industrialists, but today we are moving away from societies and organisations into a world of movements and networks. So we sense that ICF's task now is not so much to try and build some great organisation, but to be an influencer - to encourage Christians to be catalysts for change in their offices, workshops, delivery rounds, and wherever they engage in the world of work.

It was Studdert Kennedy who once famously said that 'If our finding God in churches leads to our losing him in factories, it were better to tear down the churches, for God must hate the sight of them.' We recognise that most people who find God, find God through encountering one of God's people. So we ask: how do we help people enter their workplaces, enter other people's workplaces, the place where we are likely to interact with more people than just about anywhere else, with a healthy faith attitude?

Love:Work originated through trying to answer that question. We wanted to find a way of helping people re-centre themselves on their faith identity, to basically ask the question, what defines

us as Christians, when we are living out our everyday lives, particularly when we're at work. For us, being a Christian at work is not first about challenging those we work with through evangelistic messages. That has its place, but we want to help each other to think and act like a Christian while we are actually engaged in doing our job.

We came up with ten commandments to help people do that: Be Diligent, Be Alert, Be Forgiving, Be Caring, Be Honest, Be Healthy, Be Prayerful, Be Generous, Be Positive and Be Reliable. We designed drink mats with these phrases printed on them, because most of us will stop for a mug of tea or coffee three or four times during our working day, and that might just be a good moment to remind ourselves of the values that define us as a people of faith, and not simply be captive to the culture of the place we are in.

This offers a regular prompt to people embroiled in the business of their day, to just pause for a moment and re-calibrate their thinking, their attitude, their aspirations in line with our shared faith values.

When I was a local pastor in a shoe town I went with one of my members to the shoe factory, where he and a number of my congregation worked. I was shaken by the noise environment in which they worked. I managed to put up with a 45-minute visit, but they were working eight-hour shifts! This challenged me to stop, reconnect, reflect and try to walk in another person's shoes.

My granddaughter works between 40 and 50 hours a week in a residential care home, which cares for residents with dementia. My younger daughter is a deputy head and special needs coordinator, dedicated to the well-being of the children in her care, in a Church of England voluntary aided primary school. My elder daughter works in social services, often on call for twelve hours a day.

What do these people have in common? They are diligent, caring, honest, generous and reliable. They are deeply concerned for those for whom they are responsible. The ICF Ten Commandments outlined in *Love:Work* seek to help such people to have words to express in prayer. My younger daughter, as the school RE coordinator, has adapted many of these prayers for use in school assemblies.

Perhaps, when other pressures come along, dare we say often driven in some way or other by economic factors, pressures that can take over our thinking and make us stressful, result-driven, and cause us to reduce other people to a commodity or a task, these commandments might just help people to re-connect with those key values that inspired them to engage in their chosen profession in the first place.

Some of the prayers and reflections are focused on the individual, something we might use to inspire our discipleship on a day to day basis, but there are others which are more suited to gathered worship, because for us it's vital that

when people come together in church, we hear a narrative that says that our work matters, that our faith has something to say about the jobs we do, how we do them and the world we create through them.

Faith, Work and Christian Discipleship³

There is no theological body of truth that we can apply directly to the complex situations encountered at work. We need to make room for discussion and reflection as we encourage Christian responses and action. This is what we try to achieve through *Faith, Work and Christian Discipleship*.

I believe that we need to re-interpret our understanding of work in terms of Creation, the Fall, and Redemption brought through the Cross. Our work is part of our lives as human beings, *imago Dei*. Created in the image of God we are called to be carers and co-creators. But sadly the image has been marred by the self-centred human desire for power and control, and wanting to play God, as seen in the biblical account of the Fall. But the Christian good news is of redemption and recreation in Christ. The image of God is restored and we are enabled to live life to the fullness of God's desire and purpose.

Faith, Work and Christian Discipleship considers the nature and variety of what we term 'work'; the concepts of covenant verses contract; remuneration and ethics; church worship and programmes; work, community and transformation.





'Work can actually be an expression of our Christian discipleship'

Photo: Contec

Presenting these ideas⁴

In 2023 ICF partnered with *Fuelcast* to produce a series of videos that offer conversation starters for the issues discussed in this paper.

Fuelcast is a film production charity with a mission to help other Christian ministries and charities to share their vision through the media of film. Being a Christian charity, their aim is not making money, but to collaborate with others to communicate the incredible ways that faith communities are making a difference in the world.

The presentation we have produced is available to any group or church, and a number of ICF trustees can facilitate a meeting.

Please contact ICF at www.icf-online.org.

Future plans

Phil Jump and I are preparing a third book: *A rhythm of prayer for the world at work*, with a focus of prayer for each week of the year. We offer our perspectives through twelve broad themes, further divided into 52 subsections. Rhythm is an important aspect of human experience, and one way in which this book might be used is to present a monthly theme and a weekly focus on a particular aspect of life, faith and work. As such, it could


be used as a guide to personal prayer, or as a framework for helping a local congregation or small group to think more intentionally about the world of work. But this is by no means the only way of engaging with it, and we sense that many individuals will be particularly interested to see how we have considered and presented their particular sphere of work or area of interest.

We want to offer a resource that might help everyone explore the realities of work and the workplace in a positive and fruitful way. We've done our best to draw together as many professions and strands of work that we can think of (though we're sure we will have missed some out and for that we apologise!) and explore how some of the elements in our own Christian faith are reflected and developed in that sphere of work. We've done this for two basic reasons.

Firstly, as an invitation to people of faith to take seriously the labours and endeavours of everyone around them. We also believe that if people can find a church that takes all aspects of life and work seriously, and engages with these areas that make up a significant proportion of their daily living, they are far more likely to be open to the possibility that the Christian faith has meaning and value for them.

Secondly, to invite people of faith to consider and recognise those moments and situations in their own working lives where their responsibilities and actions are an expression of the faith we share. Some people perceive work as getting in the way of our Christian discipleship, making demands on time that might otherwise be spent on the activities of the church. But we want to offer a very different perspective that work can actually be an expression of our Christian discipleship, a means through which the Church might better accomplish God's mission through participating and speaking prophetically into the systems and structures through which human society operates.

We also want to invite people engaged in the world of work to explore some new perspectives on the meaning and purpose of the job they do. It is when work is defined in terms of economics alone that it is susceptible to becoming soulless and exploitative.

This book will be unashamedly Christian, Phil and I are at the end of the day Christian ministers, so we have no right to speak for other philosophies and religions. We recognise that others have much of value to contribute to this discussion, but we offer our own thoughts in the hope that they might generate some enriching and perhaps even inspirational narratives that might make the world of work better for everyone. 

1. Ian Randall, Phil Jump & John Weaver, *100 years of the Industrial Christian Fellowship*, London: DLT, 2020
2. Phil Jump & John Weaver, *Love: Work, Reflections and Prayers for a World at Work*, London: DLT, 2021
3. John Weaver, *Faith, Work and Christian Discipleship*, Horley: ICF, 2017
4. ICF have produced a series of videos in conjunction with *Fuelcast*, which present the main issues and stories recounted here. They are available through ICF at <https://www.icf-online.org/index.php>