

# WORTHY OF HIS HIRE: The Christian in Paid Employment

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All Christians serve the Lord. That is the mark of our faith. Some serve in the ordained ministry or as missionaries. Many others serve him in their homes either as home-makers or in retirement, and there are those who spend their time at school, college, in secular employment or who work in a voluntary capacity. A significant proportion also serve the Lord in a variety of ways while unemployed. This situation is described by the Apostle Paul when he says, 'There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men' (1 Cor 12:5-6).

The amount of teaching concerned with 'the Christian at work' in today's church is very limited and the reasons for this are not difficult to understand. Firstly it is a very broad subject. Secondly the experience of most preachers in secular paid employment was either at a junior level or limited or outdated by the rapid rate of change in the work place. Even those lay-readers who are still in paid employment tend to ignore the subject.

This article considers how Christians should regard paid work. Most people spend a quarter of their week at work, and if the church is to be relevant it must deal with the concerns of these people. Many stay away from church because they do not believe that it has anything to say on such subjects which are of vital importance to them.

## **The Background**

Most of those in paid employment spend about half their waking time either there or travelling to and fro. Many also spend additional time thinking about it and what it means to them. Apart from worrying about the job content, they also consider whether they are in the right place, whether they are being properly rewarded and whether they could do it better. Today's insecurity in almost every sphere means that they also worry about how long their employment will continue.

Work is an important (perhaps the most important) part of their lives. In

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many instances it takes the best quality time, and concentration on work and career is one factor in the increasing rate of divorce. It is essential as a means of financial support and can become a measure of one's self-esteem and, hopefully, a means of satisfying one's creative instincts and desire to be needed. In Britain status in society often derives from one's job. We have all heard of people described by their job rather than their name, thus defining their role and position in society.

Even in the church, there is a tendency to judge people by what sort of job they do. Often the first question newcomers to a church are asked is what they do; they may well either be or feel rejected if they say they are unemployed. This must be regarded as an unhealthy trait but unfortunately it is true. We have all heard of those with the so-called 'less glamorous' jobs denigrating themselves and those with high-flying occupations being given special consideration. It can be distressing to hear people who feel their job is very ordinary running themselves down. God sent his Son to die for them just as much as for the so-called important members of society.

If people with routine jobs suffer a loss of esteem, this is nothing compared with those who are made redundant. It is of no immediate comfort to them to quote 'In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose' (Rom 8:28). They need practical help as they may even feel they are to blame and consider themselves failures. They have lost their place in the world and have time on their hands which they do not know how to use. They are frightened and worried about what will happen to their family. At the very least, dependence on the State will probably mean a drastic change in their financial situation. Fighting their way through the jungle of state benefits may in itself be a major problem.

So what is the Church doing about these situations? How do we seek to help the individuals concerned? Maybe it is our failure to come alongside those in or without employment that leads to so few of them coming to church. It all seems irrelevant to their problems. Fortunately the days when advice from their church to people starting work was limited to 'don't be late' and 'don't pinch the stationery or the petty cash' have passed but what does the church have to say positively? 'Work to the glory of God' sounds great, but what does it really mean? Is it remotely relevant to today's very sophisticated business environment? How does one maintain one's integrity in today's cut-throat world? Integrity is not a uniquely Christian virtue but there is an additional dimension to the Christian's sense of responsibility. It involves both obedience to God and witness to others, believers and non-believers alike. Some are worried by the sort of situation which arises all too frequently for managers. They are faced with

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the conflict between keeping the system going and knowing that redundancies are planned. When asked about the future by staff, what do they reply? There are many similar situations.

Some church members seem oblivious of the realities of the world of work, and query whether a Christian should be in this sort of employment at all. The answer has to be an unequivocal 'yes'. When Jesus was on earth, he did not avoid the secular world. He went where people were and did not sit in the Temple waiting for them to come to him. Paul kept on his secular job. In their work situation, Christians need prayer. They are put under enormous stress which affects every part of their life. Yet these are the people who are showing Christianity in the world.

This then is how things are. What does the church advise us to do? When did we last have a sermon about work with relevance to the current world of work? When was there last a testimony from a lay person (whether manager, director, secretary or cleaner) about how God was using their presence and witness in that job to bring people to know him? How many books about the Christian at work are published? Clearly work is not regarded as a major Christian issue, yet the questions it poses are of great importance to the individual. How does the Christian set about finding a job? How many Christians, not least ministers, know how to satisfy the current requirements for writing an adequate reference, and the weight put on what is *not* said? Who will provide support and advice for the unemployed? Who will help the family when the breadwinner is under stress? Many Christians go to work without any real feeling that their daytime occupation has any relevance to their faith. They see themselves as second-class citizens. There is a pecking order of 'holiness' for Christians:-

people in 'full time Christian service'

people in the caring and teaching professions

the rest

The expression 'full time Christian service' is a denial of all other vocations and wounding. Read 1 Peter 2:4-12, in particular 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (verse 9). How can we reconcile the concept of all believers being a 'royal priesthood' with the idea of only a minority being in full time Christian service? All Christians are by definition in 'full time Christian service'. Some are called to study, to teach and to lead their fellows closer to God but their role is one of service. It is imperative to support and pray for those with a 'call to the

ordained ministry'. Just as importantly there is a need to pray for, support and listen to those called to secular employment in whatever capacity.

In every congregation people are hurting because their work seems futile yet they are trapped into continuing through force of circumstance. Others work unsocial hours to support their family and therefore never have the opportunity to spend quality time with them. They also feel guilty and may be criticised because they are too tired to take part in a house group or other church activities. Others are unemployed and need someone to listen to them and build up their self-esteem. Even a 'nine to five' job together with the demands of the church fellowship can mean a lack of quality time with the family. All too often one hears of cases such as that of a hospital doctor told that attendance at church was more important than her job and if her job interfered, she should change it!

It is clear from the Bible that as well as members having a responsibility to the church, the church has a responsibility to seek to meet the needs of its members. For example, an employee contracts to work certain hours. As a Christian it is up to him or her to ensure that they are properly prepared which includes having enough rest. Do churches help by ensuring that meetings finish at a reasonable time? Do they consider whether people are necessarily called to continue their daytime job on behalf of the church? It may be understood that some teachers should not be expected to take Sunday School classes, but what of those in other occupations? On a broader front, how many churches consider the extra strain they put on already stressed individuals by arranging church meetings on numerous week nights? The choice between going out and spending time at home is often very difficult. When a proper desire to keep up other interests is added to the equation, it becomes even more complex. Furthermore these activities may lead to opportunities to talk at leisure about the faith to a non-believer who would never enter a church.

To sum up, workers live in an environment of increasing stress and insecurity. They may well feel that the church neither understands nor is able to help.

### **What The Bible Says**

As Christians, we often say that the Bible is as relevant today as when it was written. What it has to say about work is a good way of testing this statement.

The starting place is of course the Creation. It is interesting to note that Genesis 2:2 states that God finished his work and rested after each stage. He expressed the satisfaction he had from a job perfectly done. Work is not a concept which arose as a result of the Fall. Rather, as a result of the Fall,

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work ceased to be a pleasure. Adam is told:

Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat of it  
all the days of your life.  
It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.  
By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground.

The Fourth Commandment specifically requires man to work. So much attention is paid to keeping holy the Sabbath that this side of the Commandment is often ignored. Labour has always been an essential part of a believer's life.

Man then, right from the Creation, was designed in the image of God and expected to work. In the Old Testament there are numerous examples of men being singled out because of the quality of their work. Exodus 31 and 35 tell of Bezalel and Oholiab. Bezalel is said to have been 'filled with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts, to make artistic designs, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship'. Both Bezalel and Oholiab were given the ability to teach others, and because of their special skills they had a privileged position among the people. Incidentally it is recorded in chapter 31 that the Commandment to work six days and rest on the seventh – even in the work of constructing the Sanctuary – was to be observed.

Throughout the Old Testament there are cases of people dedicating their work to God often in unlikely circumstances. Nehemiah, Cup Bearer to the King of Babylon, was used to rebuild the city wall of Jerusalem as an act of worship to God. Esther was prepared to risk her whole future and her life and give herself as an offering to save her people. Solomon dedicated his fortune and attention to building the Temple of the Lord. Each of them was prepared to use their talents, possessions and lives in working in the service of God. Nothing was allowed to interfere with this objective. One also has to remember Ebed-Melech and his extra kindness in rescuing Jeremiah (Jer 38). This is reflected in the world of Jesus: 'If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles' (Matt 5:41).

Perhaps the greatest example of working for God's glory is Daniel. He is a role model for today's businessman or public servant. From his youth he was trained to serve King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the conqueror of his people. He was taken from Judah to Babylon and trained for three years as a civil servant. Having completed his training with flying colours, he stayed in Babylon throughout his career (probably 30 years) and was

still in position at the start of the reign of Darius. Throughout his working life he maintained his faith in the one true God and would not compromise his beliefs in any way despite 'unsympathetic management'. Each time there was a crisis he turned to his God. Nothing would stop him making time for his daily prayers, and, as a result, often in extreme circumstances, he was given knowledge which he used to glorify God. He was a major influence for good on the whole Babylonian empire, certainly used his talents in the service of God, and his example gave great hope to his own people. The most striking thing about him was his total confidence in God's ability to deal with any problem, whether in daily living or in matters of faith. He was prepared to stake his life because of his trust in God (Dan 2 and 6). Surely this is a lesson for us.

Jesus is thought to have worked as a carpenter until he was thirty years old. He taught that believers must use their talents to the full for his glory. They are stewards of their talents and should seek to use them for the furthering of God's Kingdom. There is constant reference in the teaching of Jesus to the fact that he came not to be served but to serve (Matt 20:25-28). Christians are expected to follow the example of Jesus and this applies to the workplace. Work involves serving others and not just seeking personal advantage. Humanity is responsible for the 'management' in God's world and for careful stewardship of its resources. The parables (the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18 for example) are full of teaching relevant to people in employment, irrespective of level.

Paul constantly stresses the importance of work. He himself considered that he was setting an example by not becoming a burden on those to whom he was ministering. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, he makes this point very forcefully and we are told he earned his living as a tent maker. It is interesting to compare this with the practice of some modern day evangelists and preachers.

An interesting feature of the New Testament teaching on work is the emphasis on having different talents, all being used to the glory of God. This follows on the examples we have seen in the Old Testament of all types of ability and skills being used. Joseph, a prisoner of Pharaoh, started from this position in his work of ensuring the future of Israel. Paul lists various types of work (incidentally including administration) and also says 'all these are the work of one and the same Spirit and he gives them to each one just as he determines' (1 Cor 12). Earlier, in Acts, Stephen and the other deacons were appointed so that the apostles could concentrate on the task of preaching the Word of God. The practical details of running the Church were left to the deacons, whose role was no less important and did not detract from Stephen's witness.

### **The Secular View Of Work**

Before identifying whether there is a Christian view of work, it is necessary to define the secular position. To say that a person works only for the reward their work brings is simplistic. It implies that the time spent at work brings no satisfaction to the labourer and may be regarded as a non-fulfilling activity. It is obvious that many obtain considerable satisfaction from their work. The need to earn money is a prime motivation to work but there are also others. The first is that some people work with the aim of self-fulfilment. This may be in one of a variety of ways – emotional, sexual, physical or intellectual. It may also be that they wish to exercise power. People who work for such reasons have certain characteristics, which may include a clear idea of what they seek to achieve. This may be an improved position or the ability to do a particular task or to acquire a specific skill. To achieve this the person must be single-minded and determined. He or she will be disciplined and will build up the know-how to achieve their purpose. Self-belief, self-confidence and perseverance are essential. The Bible is full of such people; think of Saul in the Old and Paul in the New Testament. This attitude may bring temporary fulfilment but also the likelihood that achieving one objective leads only to the identification of another. Success in the end is satisfying one's own ego and there is no guarantee that everyone who seeks this path to fulfilment will succeed.

Another motivation for work is the pursuit of status. Work is the passport to respectability. People judge others by their status at work and they do not exist except in relation to this. All too often it does not matter if one is alcoholic, immoral, unlikeable or unethical, for provided one is seen to be successful, one is acceptable. Highly publicised examples of this approach are known among, for instance, entrepreneurs and those in the world of entertainment or sport, but obviously these are not the only spheres in which they are found and most certainly not everyone in them has such traits. To this type of person success is increasing recognition and power.

Similarly there is a group of people whose prime motivation is material wealth. The pursuit of wealth is very different from earning money to meet one's day-to-day needs. It is an end in itself, almost an obsession. How the wealth is obtained does not matter; twice as rich is twice as successful.

Finally, there are those who go to work to achieve results in the job. Work is a great game and expediency is the only rule. For example, why observe a strict year-end deadline for sales? Such motivation requires no respect for legal or moral issues and no consideration for other people, be they managers, colleagues, subordinates or those outside the organization such as suppliers and clients. People are there to be used: the only crime is

getting caught. In all these cases we have stated the extreme situation, but all of us have met people who to a greater or lesser degree are like those described.

Even with those who go to work merely to earn a living, such motivation requires no commitment, no standards and no loyalty; one goes where the money is best. These people are the true mercenaries. Success is less work for more money.

However, there are many non-Christians who, although partly motivated in these ways, are considerate of other people, and adhere to their own strict codes of ethics and morals. For many though, both Christian and non-Christian, career can become a false god. Career idolatry is sometimes regarded as the price to be paid for success. People actually talk about their career as if it were a sacred quest for the Holy Grail. Everything else is secondary and if other people are hurt in the process, so be it.

None of these options is remotely Christian. All are self-centred with little consideration for others. The product is unimportant; it is a means to an end. If the pursuit of one's career destroys family and social life, how can it be compatible with Christian teaching? Yet many of these people are keen church members. There is a dichotomy between church and secular activities which is largely because the church does not deal with these issues. This leads either to career people staying away on the assumption that the church has nothing to offer them, or to a complete contrast between behaviour at church and behaviour at work. Perhaps this is why so many churches are run as if they were businesses. There can surely be nothing worse than seeing a church controlled by the same rules as the local factory. Where do God's love, faith and commitment come in? Obviously common sense and prudence are required but also a spirit of trust and a readiness to 'launch out into the deep'.

It is doubtful whether any of the reasons for work described can satisfy a person. They can certainly give short term positive motivation but they never lead to a balanced way of life satisfying body, mind and spirit. The goal posts are always moving and self-fulfilment is an impossible objective. All the objectives – status, financial reward, leisure, artistic fulfilment – change as time moves on. What is more, pursuit of these objectives is a high-risk strategy. If someone identifies himself completely with his work, what happens if he suffers a setback? What happens in the face of retirement or redundancy? The impact on self-esteem and the consequent depression can be devastating. Life becomes pointless. If, in the course of a career, one has built up self-esteem to an unsustainable level, the situation is even worse. There is a real risk of hopelessness and stagnation and the resulting frustration can lead to loneliness and the risk



of dependence on alcohol or drugs and even to suicide.

To sum up, if a career becomes an end in itself, it can lead to wrong priorities, over-competitiveness, and no room for home or church or even the other people at work. There is an inability to enjoy anything and no room for God or for any external values, leaving the basis of judgment impaired. Above all there is fear of being overtaken or that the whole edifice will crumble. It becomes the dominant motivating factor in all decisions. It can prevent a person doing a job properly because fear will not allow any risks.

### **The Christian Attitude to Work**

We have looked carefully at the secular view of work and the risks it contains. So why does the Christian work? What is the motivation?

The easiest place to start may be the Protestant work ethic. This says that we live to work in our job, in our home and in our church. We feel guilty if we are not working. Our value is not in who we are but what we do. We have allowed ourselves to become slaves to work. There can clearly be conflict between this attitude and being slaves to God.

So how do we regard the work we do to earn our living? Firstly, as with non-Christians, we have to work to support ourselves and any dependants. We have a responsibility to do our best not to be a burden on the community. Perhaps however we feel that our work is nothing to do with the Bible. It has no lasting, let alone eternal, value, provides no job satisfaction and is routine and worthless to God, and takes too much time and energy. It merely provides the means to enable us to do 'Christian' work. To some the gospel is seen as irrelevant to day-to-day work problems and Christian rules of stewardship and integrity do not apply. This is not as far fetched as it sounds. The author has actually been told that provided the proceeds of work are tithed, all is forgiven. There can therefore be tension and/or conflict between work and faith.

Regrettably this attitude is often tacitly supported by church leaders. Their main concern is that after 6.00 pm church members should be free for 'Christian activity'. Yet Christians at work are often the only contact non-believers have with the church. They meet far more non-believers than many 'full time' Christian workers. The witness of Christians carries little conviction if they are too busy with their 'Christian activities' ever to go the 'extra mile' in their paid employment.

Clearly the attitude described above is not acceptable. If we do not show Jesus and Christian values to our colleagues, who will? This leads to another problem. Employees sell their services for a given period of time

to their employer, who pays staff to do the job required. It is certainly not part of the employer's intention that staff should spend time in talking to colleagues about Christianity at the expense of normal work. We are told to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and that means, during the time the employer has bought, we must give the best of which we are capable. This is surely the start of our witness at work. We must try to behave as we believe Christ would and we must observe the terms and spirit of our contract of employment. Would Jesus have arrived at work tired and dishevelled, having just come from an all-night prayer meeting, or would he have been selfish and unpleasant to his colleagues? That is a real challenge and opportunity.

But what about the criticism that many jobs are not worthy of a Christian? It does not take a Christian to be a filing clerk or a refuse collector. The logical outcome of this way of thinking is that there will be a sub-structure of non-Christian serfs who support Christians doing worthwhile jobs. What utter nonsense! There is plenty of biblical evidence to the contrary. As Christians whatever we do should be for the glory of God and therefore holy work. If this is not possible, we should not be doing the job. We have been called to our work, just as much as a minister or a missionary.

There are very few jobs which cannot be done to God's glory. Even in an industry such as alcohol, employment may be a matter of conscience. Paul tells us to avoid activities which might lead others into temptation and for many this will be a determining factor but it is a matter for each individual Christian to decide. There are however some 'industries', such as pornography, gambling and those which have a clearly damaging effect on the environment, with which most Christians do not want to be involved. Even here the situation is not clear cut. If shop assistants are asked to sell lottery tickets as a minor part of their job, should they resign? If Christians feel they cannot do their work to the glory of God they should quit. The reason must not be that the job is menial but that it is harmful or sets a bad example to other people. Many of those who give the most excellent witness at work are doing so in relatively low profile jobs.

As has been said, the main aim of a Christian at work is to worship God through what he does. If we are to do this effectively, we must pray about our work, both individually and in groups. Without prayer, no witness is effective. If we pray, the opportunities to witness for God will come. Our integrity, commitment to giving our best and attention to detail will distinguish us as working for a different motive.

In Romans 12, Paul urges us to be different. 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world' he says, and this is the secret of effective

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witness. Because we are working for God, this brings dignity and meaning to our task. Our main aim is to serve God and to use our talents for his glory. Because of this, ambition and status are put in context. In a sense people in paid employment are missionaries witnessing by their lives and actions to their Saviour. We are the Bible for many with whom we work.

In their excellent book *Your work matters to God*, Sherman & Hendricks quote a supposed testimony telling how someone gave up paid employment to become a missionary. All of us will have heard similar testimonies though not quite as extreme as this, which is based on four assumptions:

God is interested only in the soul and not in the body.

This is difficult to reconcile with the Jesus we know from the Bible – witness for example the feeding of the five thousand.

Only eternal things are worthwhile. Evangelism is intrinsically more worthwhile than, say, making cars.

We have seen that making cars can be a method of evangelism. If the only way to hear the gospel were to attend church or hear Billy Graham, many would be beyond its reach.

‘Sacred’ work is more beneficial than ‘secular’ work.

Apart from the question of what ‘sacred’ work is, this would mean that the vast majority of Christians were wasting their time. But all believers are priests and we can serve God anywhere. Even in a highly secular environment, we can still serve God and introduce him to people who would not otherwise meet him. One has to ask whether all the so-called ‘sacred’ work is productive?

Clergy and ‘full-time workers’ are more important than other Christians.

One does have to respect those called to leadership in Christian ministry; and in Hebrews 13:17 we are instructed to ‘obey our leaders and submit to their authority’. Without leaders we may not progress, but in the church we are all called to be priests and servants and we all contribute prayer, practical support, money and fellowship. The relationship between all Christians should be one of mutual support.

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The results of this emphasis on sacred work are guilt and a feeling of worthlessness for many Christians. They are encouraged to withdraw from the world they have been told to evangelise. One has to think only of Christian students who will not mix with non-believers. In the end such an attitude can lead to doubts about the relevance of Christianity and the maintenance of Christian standards wherever one is.

There is no distinction between 'secular' and 'sacred' work: the only question is whether our witness is effective wherever we happen to be and whatever we do. We are called to worship God in all our activities and this has to mean that Christians are keen proponents of quality in whatever we do and in all our relationships.

Two final points in this section. Christians are asked to go into all the world and evangelise. It would be wonderful if more Christians took on a community role such as school governor or joined voluntary organizations. This may be more productive than attending yet another church meeting. Dare one say that there are too many church and Christian meetings? In the same way it is often said that Christians should not be involved in finance or politics. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with either of these areas. It would be a true witness if Christians made the time to be involved in the exercise of proper stewardship in both Christian and secular organizations.

The second point concerns membership of trade unions and taking industrial action. Membership of a trade union depends upon the rules of the particular union but, unless there is anything in them which is contrary to Christian belief, there is no reason why Christians should not join. Indeed, their membership may have a beneficial influence. Working together for a fair deal is certainly justifiable. However strike action is a different issue on which no one answer can be given because circumstances vary. This is a difficult subject to which too little thought has been given.

In *Issues Facing Christians Today* John Stott describes work as 'the expenditure of energy in the service of others which brings fulfilment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God'. It involves adding value to a product or service and is, whether paid or unpaid, carried out with a sense of obligation.

### **The Church's View of Work**

As well as looking at the individual Christian's view of work, it is worth looking briefly at that of the Church. Work is a necessary activity through which church members earn money which can, among other things, be used to enable the church to carry out its 'proper' work. There can

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however be a mismatch between the church's priorities and those of the earner. Most paid employees would probably rank their practical commitments in this order: work, family, church. The church takes exactly the opposite view. It is no wonder that Christianity is often considered irrelevant to modern life. Yet we have seen that, unless the Christian does go out into the community, there is no chance of spreading the gospel and Christianity could self-destruct. It is not a choice between God and mammon.

This analysis is clearly an exaggeration and there are many churches which take seriously the place of Christians in the community and the work-place. Yet there are sufficient who do not to justify the comment, for often a church looks at a member's abilities only in the light of whether they can be used in the church. This eventually produces Christians whose beliefs are effective only at weekends.

Where people have worries about their job, these are just as deserving of prayer and support as family or other personal problems. When people are worried about supporting their family, it is difficult to concentrate on anything else. People sometimes say that all Christians should support themselves by faith alone but there is no biblical basis for this. This attitude should be compared with that in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12.

The church will also have to consider the issue of the likely increase of lay ministry. It is no part of this article to discuss this topic apart from its effect on laity in full-time employment who are called to minister. To be always giving and never receiving will harm both them and their ministry. Special arrangements for pastoring them will need to be made and for ensuring that they get adequate respite or they will be working a regular seven day week.

The church has encouraged the appointment of industrial chaplains and they can certainly serve a useful purpose. Often they are called in when people are at their most vulnerable, and are able to show that the Christian faith is always relevant. Church members however seem to rely on their own ministers for support, and it is recognised that industrial chaplains' contacts are mainly with non-believers. The chaplains are not numerous which may indicate the value really placed on their work by the Church.

What about those working for a Christian organization? The way in which these conduct their affairs is a significant part of their witness. It presents problems both for those who lead in a voluntary or paid capacity and for those employed to carry out the consequent administrative or practical tasks. It calls for clarity of thought and purpose, conformity to legal requirements (including employment law), effective financial controls

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and good office practice. Much of this hinges on the calibre of committees, and the efficient conduct of their business in the preparation and conduct of meetings, the implementation of decisions and day to day routines. Unfortunately all round inefficiency is all too often the hallmark of Christian bodies from PCCs onwards.

Running a Christian organization is no easy option and the managers may have a particularly difficult task. Employees are frequently paid below market rate but stay out of a sense of 'calling' and because they share the organization's objectives. It may be understaffed, lack up-to-date equipment and so have to use antiquated labour-intensive methods which compound the problems of the staff.

It is part of a Christian organization's witness to be a model employer. This should be regarded not as a potential financial millstone but an investment paying a handsome dividend and contributing to more effective functioning throughout. It calls for the employer to understand the organization's needs, the suitability of its staffing structure, levels of accountability, definition of job content/objectives/skills and staff and appraisal selection procedures. Just being a Christian in sympathy with the work is not sufficient qualification for appointment!

### **Finding the Right Job**

There is no doubt that, in today's conditions, finding a job is a major exercise. Finding the right job is even more difficult. If there were to be a survey of the total work force in this country, experts estimate that fifty per cent would express dissatisfaction with their jobs. The degree might not be so great but it is thought that a survey of Christians in employment would not be different. This emphasizes the importance of finding the right job.

It is extremely difficult for a church or Christian organization to help in these situations. Normally they have neither the time nor the skill to do so. Those seeking any job need support and prayer. There is much confusion about receiving a call to a particular job. One view is that a voice will be heard saying 'this is what I want you to do'. In fact, although such calls do happen, they are few and far between. In following Jesus, we have to seek his will for us and this is seldom 'supernaturally' revealed.

Nonetheless, seeking a role in life, either in paid employment or elsewhere, is a matter requiring much prayer, but common sense is also needed. It is extremely unlikely that we will be successful if we set out to do something we dislike or where we have a disadvantage that makes what we want to do difficult. All of us have things that we enjoy doing, maybe as hobbies. We have family commitments which we consider important and personal traits that preclude us from doing certain things. For example

if one is claustrophobic in tube trains, it would not be sensible to take a job which necessitated daily tube travel.

If these likes and dislikes are written down together with a realistic assessment of any qualifications, training and experience, and of what the job seeker does well and also enjoys, a pattern should emerge. This can then be discussed and prayed over with one or two close friends or family and refined in the light of their comments, but remembering that the job seeker has to do the job and so has the final decision. After this, the hard work starts – seeking as many ways as possible of finding the sort of position which has been identified. It is essential to remember that the purpose is to find a means of using one's talents to glorify God whilst earning one's livelihood. It is not the gratification of personal ambition or greed.

In many churches there is someone prepared to help and their availability should be made known to those in need. In the end, accepting a new job is a matter of faith. If we have knocked on as many doors as possible and an opportunity emerges, unless there is an obvious reason not to go ahead, it is probably sensible to do so. After all, it is this for which we have been praying. The quotation from Louise Haskins used by King George VI in a wartime Christmas broadcast is particularly appropriate:

I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to thee better than a light and safer than a known way'.

If these guidelines apply to secular employment, they apply emphatically in the case of a call to the ministry. In time past there has been a tendency to encourage or even pressurize people to consider the ordained ministry. Doubtless we need those who have the requisite gifts and calling to become ministers but well-intentioned yet misplaced encouragement has led to unsuitable candidates being ordained. In some cases, one almost feels that the ordained ministry was an easy way out. In other circumstances people witnessing in their current occupations are persuaded to give up a vocation for one to which they may be much less suited. In these days where our ability to afford clergy is much reduced, it is axiomatic that we should exercise even greater care in selecting people for ordination.

### **The Christian in Management**

So far we have been discussing the role of the Christian in employment generally. Some Christians progress into management and this produces mixed feelings among some believers. It is argued that management

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involves judging people and that Christians are specifically forbidden to do this, for in Matthew 7 Jesus says:

Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you too will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Such an interpretation of the text comes from a misconception of the manager's role. They are required to assess and to discern. Parents do this daily!

Another argument used against becoming involved in management is that it promotes ambition. In certain cases this is true but equally often the opportunity to enter management allows extended witness and greater exploitation of talents. If the purpose of one's employment is to glorify God, this must allow making the most of the skills that he has given us. The reverse of the coin is to leave all responsibilities to the non-believer!

To understand the role of the Christian in management it is first necessary to understand what management is. It has been defined as 'the art of achieving designated objectives with designated resources'. It will involve setting priorities, investigating methods of operation and motivating people. The short term profit has to be weighed against the long term effect and therefore careful planning and budgeting are required.

In a sense this sounds easy for the Christian. If there is one thing we should be good at, it is motivating people. The qualities required should be second nature to us, trusting people until they give us cause not to do so, caring about them and promoting their interests. But this is only half the story. For example, a manager has on occasions to discipline and even dismiss staff or make them redundant. This is the responsibility we accept when we become managers. We undertake that we will do what is best for the people who pay us and often that is in conflict with what we would like to do as Christians. For instance:

How can we deal with people who are owed money when there is none? – we have to make and keep commitments.

Should we order supplies to keep the organization going when there are no funds to meet the cost?

We have to ask for additional effort from staff when we know there are redundancies in the offing.

How do we answer staff asking if their jobs are secure?



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As Christians the only way in which we can react is by being as open as possible and not misleading people. Whatever we do we have to do to the glory of God and certainly Christian managers need much prayer. They have great temptations and opportunities and the difference in their approach is noticeable. It has been the experience of the author that where a difficult management situation is made the subject of prayer, the situation is clarified although the hard decision still has to be made. Often the method is totally different from that envisaged but somehow the problems are overcome. Pressure on managers usually comes from both subordinates and their own managers. They have a real sense of obligation to their staff and to senior management. They will commit themselves only to what they know can be achieved. This is not a 'no risk' policy but ensuring that management is not given over-optimistic or over-pessimistic promises on which to base its plans.

The mark of Christian managers is that they start from a position of trust, but still apply proper safeguards. To do otherwise would be bad stewardship and could expose colleagues to temptation. They will however respect privacy, treat people with care and consideration and not use invasive methods of surveillance which degrade another person.

As Christians our word should be our bond. This creates problems in that we may be told things in our managerial capacity which are confidential. This is an isolating experience which also applies to ministers as Christian leaders and managers. For the secular manager there may be the additional burden of information detrimental to their employer with all that this may imply. This whole question of confidentiality emphasizes the need for there to be clear understanding of the basis on which any conversation takes place. It is a subject on which much has been written but this is not the place for a long discussion. If Christians give an undertaking they must either fulfil it or ensure that anyone else affected is kept in the picture. Above all, managers should maintain integrity.

There has been a slowness to recognise the particular needs and opportunities of Christian managers. Over the last few years the Institute for Contemporary Christianity (Christian Impact) and the Ridley Hall 'God for Monday' project have given a lead in catering for their special needs. It is essential for managers to have local support when they feel that their faith does not relate to their responsibilities.

Management is largely about the stewardship of resources, and by far the most important of these is people. It is up to all managers (not just Christians) to build up their staff. This means creating the right environment, communicating with individuals, involving them individually and as a team at a level which stretches them and produces mutual trust.

Above all everyone must be treated as a person for whom Christ died. It is very easy to think of junior staff as pawns rather than people. In particular most employers now have appraisal systems and these should be based on an honest exchange of views, helping both appraiser and appraisee. Clearly not all are equipped for senior management, but that is not to denigrate their contribution or level of achievement. As managers and as Christians we are seeking to build confidence and self-esteem. This includes taking responsibility for our own mistakes and not 'passing the buck'.

We have already touched on the subject of ambition. Accepting promotion solely for the purpose of greater status or more money cannot be to the glory of God. As Christians our aim is to serve God. We wish to make the best use of our talents but we have to recognise conflicting factors in our lives. We need time for family, relaxation, worship and work. When we find that our job is continuously damaging other areas of our life, it is time to review our position.

Part of the Christian manager's responsibilities which causes disquiet among some believers is the need to dismiss staff or make them redundant. This is not pleasant but is certainly part of the paid duties of the job and not an option. Worse still, the action may be the result of a managerial error such as poor selection technique or an over estimate of the number of staff required.

Some Christians say they cannot imagine any situation in which Jesus would take action which had an adverse impact on a person's life. Therefore no one who follows him should put himself in a position where he might have to take such an action. This argument logically leads to Christians withdrawing from secular activities. Whereas Jesus himself said 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation'. This means going to where people are. There is little doubt that it is generally beneficial to have Christians at every level including the most senior in industry, commerce, the public services and the professions. The fact is that unpleasant decisions do have to be taken and implemented; otherwise good stewardship is not being exercised.

To revert to dismissal, it is not always a disaster to the ones dismissed. They may have been stuck in a job to which they were unsuited and in which they could not succeed. Their discharge may eventually prove a kindness.

There is a distinction between discharge and redundancy. In the former the reason is either failure to perform or misconduct. Misconduct may even include spending time 'witnessing' when being paid to work. The author discharged someone after repeated warnings for just this. The

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responsibility of a Christian manager in such a situation is to handle the individual with love and consideration for their needs. Often the action brings the person to be dismissed up with a jolt and is in the end beneficial. In one case it was necessary to discharge an alcoholic senior manager and this caused him to face his difficulties and accept treatment.

Managers should do everything possible to minimise the effect on the individual and his/her dependants. Obviously this does not affect the essential problem but they might for example arrange for counselling or other support. Above all as Christians they are personally involved in the severance.

Redundancy relates to organizational or financial constraints and not to the performance of individuals. The first obvious requirement is that there must be scrupulous fairness in choosing those whose employment is to cease. Again every possible action to help them to find new work must be taken and people must be treated as individuals. Redundancy is one of the most traumatic and unpleasant aspects of modern society. There is no easy way of dealing with it and it is absolutely essential that the action is fully justified before it is taken. The only comfort to be gained is that one does meet people who say that redundancy was the best thing that happened to them, but this is rare. It is however impossible for us to understand God's will and purpose for any individual.

The stress in these situations, both from within the organization and externally, for example from the media, is immense. Managers really do need prayer support and churches must ensure this is available. The need to talk about what is happening and to receive affirmation of the continuation of God's love is paramount in these circumstances.

The lifestyle required of a manager at work makes it difficult to adapt to normality as others understand it. In order to do the job, all arrangements for travel, and secretarial and professional help, may have been instantly available. There may have been immense pressure on time to achieve maximum effectiveness making it very difficult to lead a balanced life. To compensate, in time at home there is a constant need to be 'doing' – otherwise one is 'wasting time'. Any family or dependants may be denied the pleasure of relaxing at home and just enjoying the manager's company. This may be particularly acute for families in which both parents hold responsible positions.

There are occasions when a Christian manager will feel obliged to leave a job for what is seen as reasons of principle. If serious ethical difficulties arise, the first step is to confront them. This is best done by suggesting an alternative (if possible) rather than presenting an ultimatum to one's senior.

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Share the problem with people who will join you in prayer but leave only if the situation does not improve. It is not a good witness just to walk out and certainly not in an apparent fit of pique. Above all in these situation, one must not compromise one's own principles.

Obviously in management all sorts of dilemmas can arise and, as with those already described, have to be viewed in the light of our responsibility both to our Saviour and our employer. Examples are:

partnership in a business with a non-Christian (perhaps 2 Cor 6:14 applies)

going into debt to finance a business

working for a non-Christian – in reality most of us have little option

It is probably superfluous to point out that being a Christian does not ensure success in the workplace. It does not rule it out but it certainly does not guarantee it. In the same way as with healing, God is not a 'fairy godmother'. In earthly terms Jesus was not a success – an itinerant preacher who was eventually executed like a common criminal. As Christians we measure success against different standards. What Jesus does say is that, whatever the circumstances, he will be with us through whatever happens, be it success or failure. Maybe failure is easier to deal with!

### **Redundancy**

Redundancy is a real modern tragedy. Work is the accepted pattern of behaviour as shown in the Fourth Commandment. 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat' (2 Thess 3:10). It is God's intention that all should work but, historically (after wars and agricultural and industrial revolutions) and now as a result of modern technology, this is not simply automatic.

We have discussed the importance of work in a person's life. It largely determines status and plays a significant part in establishing self-esteem. It is interesting to consider to what extent current levels of crime may relate to the failure to provide sufficient jobs. Unemployment means both lack of ready money and, frequently, nothing with which to occupy oneself. There is truth in the old saying 'The devil finds work for idle hands to do'. One does not want to exploit those without work but one of their major problems is the hopelessness and pointlessness of their existence. Yet our present welfare system and the poverty trap often encourage people to remain unemployed. Industry is doing its best to become 'more efficient'; reducing unit costs often means employing fewer people. Employers are increasingly offering short term contracts which allow cheap and quick

termination. At the last General Election, none of the parties really treated unemployment as a major issue. It was accepted that a high level of unemployment was a fact of life. Many people now leaving school may never obtain paid employment. This will be discussed later in this article.

As already stated, the effect of redundancy on a person is traumatic. When people have no work, some may become spiritually stunted. Their skills may be under-employed and they may not develop the relationships which they would normally have. At a more practical level, their self worth is injured. A major interest is removed and they are unable to support their dependants. State welfare benefits, although highly desirable for those without any other way of supporting themselves, can be degrading both in concept and operation. It is no wonder that redundancy destroys some. There are cases where people do not admit to their own families that they are unemployed. The author has met an ex-bank manager who was still 'going to work' because he had not been able to tell his wife of his redundancy six months previously.

These circumstances are genuinely tragic and the church should be deeply involved. This is difficult to manage because those made redundant are reluctant to talk about it and so the church does not always know, although they do need help. Confidentiality is essential: redundant people need to be able to talk out their bitterness about what has happened and think logically about what to do next. Do they want to continue as before or is this the opportunity for a radical change of direction? They need practical help in applying for jobs and in facing up to what has happened. Above all they need someone who will listen to and encourage them and, if they so desire, pray with them.

There are a number of commercial organizations dealing with the top end of the market but few set up to help those lower down the scale. Yet these people need to have somewhere to go where they can talk, establish whether their plans are practical and seek advice on financial and other problems. Here is another opportunity for the church to be relevant in a practical matter, and to develop some real expertise at deanery or diocesan level.

It is worth repeating that changing jobs may be as stressful as redundancy and here, too, people need to be able to have independent advice. What better way, particularly for a believer, than through the Christian community?

In thinking about redundancy, it is also necessary to think about retirement. Few of those about to retire have realistic plans about what they are going to do. Often retirement is thought of in terms of 'left over life to

live'. As the age for retirement becomes lower, the potential among those retiring becomes greater. Apart from the fact that retirement can be planned, the effect on the person concerned is not dissimilar to being made redundant, the loss of one's main occupation and the status that goes with it. Social life may be disrupted because often this is closely tied up with work. We have all met people who go back to their workplace at lunchtime even after retirement for companionship. Retired people have to devise a new life for themselves. Churches should keep a register of opportunities in the community for voluntary work suited to the newly retired. There can be enormous satisfaction in doing something totally different on a full or part-time basis and knowing that one is still useful. The retired too need to know where to find advice.

### **The Labour Market and Social Change**

So far we have been looking at the individual in the labour market but it is necessary also to look at the labour market itself. Over the last twenty-five years there have been enormous changes which have had a profound impact on people's lives. These are of four types:

Twenty-five years ago, the way in which industry was run was still paternalistic. It was reasonable to plan an entire career with one organization.

Technology and repeated re-organization within commercial, public and voluntary bodies have vastly changed the workplace. There has been a reduction in the number of jobs at all levels and many of those jobs which remain are more repetitive and less interesting. Morale is low in all sectors.

The need to travel to work each day is being steadily eroded by the creation of home work stations. These reduce organizational overheads but isolate the worker, and are beginning to have a profound social effect. This phenomenon is partly a result of a remarkable change in this country from an industrial to a service-based economy.

There have been changes in the social structure of Great Britain.

Each of these four aspects needs to be looked at more closely.

The first is the change in the nature of employment and the role of employers. Few would accept today that 'paternalistic' employers were desirable. They tend to prove controlling rather than altruistic and so degrade the people working for them. Mutual loyalty is virtually a thing of the past, as employers have no option but to react immediately to

economic necessity. The effect of this is a growing sense of insecurity in the whole workforce. They have to work harder and they are scared of acting on their own initiative. Improved information flow has concentrated decision making in the hands of senior management. The ranks of middle management are thus being steadily eroded. The effect on the employees, apart from the insecurity, is increased stress and less interesting jobs. Everyone is under strain and this is shown by the rising number of people suffering stress-related illnesses. Experienced, but expensive, staff are sacrificed in the interest of short-term economy and replaced by cheaper but less competent managers.

The second major change is the ever growing rate of technological development in both the factory and office. In car manufacture, the proportion of cost represented by labour has vastly reduced over the last twenty-five years. Partly this is a deliberate policy on the part of employers who have learnt the lesson of vulnerability to trade unions which became apparent in the industrial unrest of the seventies. Furthermore, labour is the most expensive resource and so the most cost effective to shed. The price of the very expensive electronic equipment now in use also has to be found. Management seek to reduce the labour force to which they are committed; this is one of the factors behind the increased use of sub-contracted labour which also has the additional benefit of reduced overheads. In the office the improvement is in worldwide communications and in the ability to process large quantities of data accurately and rapidly. This means that, while professionally qualified staff are still required, the number of clerical support staff has reduced and the almost universal ability to use a keyboard and send E-mail has displaced many typists. The remaining jobs at lower and intermediate levels have become increasingly technologically based.

The third major change in the work environment is still in its early stages and is in many ways the most interesting. Up to the early nineties the cost of office property was astronomical with the result that companies, particularly service industries such as insurance, started to consider why large headquarters and regional offices were needed. Facilities enabling staff to work effectively from home exist with the ready availability of computers, modems, FAX, E-mail and now the Internet. Staff can work more quickly, with less interruption and fewer errors than when in a busy office. There is no reason why most staff need to come to the workplace every day. Instead they can be paid to establish an office at home. This fits in with the modern concept of both parents sharing home responsibilities. Benefits are that employees save fares, travel time, 'wear and tear' and to an extent can often choose their own working hours. The employer reduces office overheads and in the longer term can offer lower rates of pay which reflect the absence of daily travelling expenses.

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Working from home seems an attractive proposition but has wide consequences. Firstly many have most of their social contacts through work. This is not as true of Christians who form relationships through their church but for others, work can be their major social outlet. Even if meetings for all staff to share information are held once a week, this is not adequate to maintain social contacts. No one has yet come up with a solution to this problem.

Furthermore offices will leave the big cities. There is no longer any benefit for many in a city centre location provided an adequate pool of skilled labour is available. This may not however be true for some organizations dependent on good transport facilities, for accessibility for meetings is still a significant factor.

The impact of this on urban centres is already dramatic. In the States companies have moved to locations attractive to their key employees, and have, as a by-product, found the change an effective way of reducing staff, for there are always a number who cannot make the move. In the UK, the process is well under way. Centres on the outskirts of big cities are growing while the former commercial centres are falling into disuse.

The fourth major area of change is in social structures. Personal expectations of career prospects and material prosperity have soared. These have coincided with a decline in the number of job opportunities, and an increase in the number of women wanting to work: many need to provide a second income, or to continue their career after marriage or to maintain themselves after separation or divorce. Others are the sole earner after their husband's redundancy.

A more recent but equally important development is the explosion in the student population producing high numbers of people qualified to occupy non-existent jobs. Indeed the whole question of the purpose of education is currently being debated.

The Sunday Trading Act has generated practical problems for Christians hoping to work in retailing. Contracts of employment frequently require an undertaking to work on Sundays if requested. To do essential work on Sunday is not the problem; but many Christians are now faced with either doing work outside this category or being unemployed. The position could be reached where someone was denied unemployment benefit for failure to accept a job involving Sunday work.

### **Conclusion**

It can be seen from this article that the subject of the Christian and paid employment is large and complex and can be covered here only in outline.



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It is surprising that more has not been written on Christians and redundancy. Clearly the church should be involved and express its convictions on work-related issues. These are just as fundamental to its members and the community at large as, for example, divorce and family life.

In the Bible God has promised to meet our needs, and many can instance those whose prayer of faith he has honoured. Most of us however have to work to earn a living for ourselves and those dependent on us. This is the biblical pattern.

We have seen that Christians at work face difficulties; loss of employment (or never finding it) presents even more. We have also considered the church's demands on those who do have work. How far is it encouraging and harnessing the energies and abilities of the unemployed or retired?

How is the church seeking to equip and support its representatives in the workplace to witness for Christ?

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