

in public, and only discussed with great discretion and restraint with, say, the Regional Minister.

5. Permission to remain in membership must be explicitly sought by the managing trustees of the church and granted by church meeting. Generally a minister's membership is attached to their holding pastoral office, and ceases when that office is no longer held.

These protocols are born of wide experience, some distressing. If the relationship between the congregation and their pastor is akin to a marriage (and there are certain resemblances), it is never helpful to have 'three in this marriage'.

Most ministers find retirement a time of fruitful service of Christ, with continuing opportunities to minister, especially through the leading of public worship in a variety of settings. With age may come greater infirmity and declining powers, of course, and a slow re-adjustment to narrower confines is part of what it means to grow old. For some, sudden death, or a short illness after seeming robust health and active old age, will mean that such a decline is hardly present, but it is not the experience of most. Finding the shape of ministry and discipleship when life is so 'hemmed in' raises new challenges, and ones not really of central concern here, but retirement from stipendiary ministry is one stage among many that God weaves into the pattern of being that prepares us for eternal life.

As many as welcome, and long for, retirement, there are those who dread its advent. Understanding the season and the time of God's appointing for its enactment, to be ready for it, and to see how it is woven into God's economy for us is the work of a mature spirituality and a settled faith. Indeed, it's the work of a life-time.

Work and Faith: Does the church really care?

Julian Reindorp

Retired Anglican Priest

Did Jesus really care about work and faith? During the last week of his life on earth, Jesus was asked: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to

Caesar or not?” And he replies: “Give to God what is God’s and to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Mark 12.13, 14). Everyone present knew the answer to the question. For all Jews the answer was simple – what is God’s is the whole of life, and Caesar is nowhere. All Jesus’ listeners knew that, as did the Chief Priests and Pharisees, but they could not say that publicly with the representatives of the occupying power around. Just to rub in the point, Jesus says to his questioners: “Show me the coin”. He meant the one used for paying the tax, and they have to handle it, get it out of their pockets, and in the process makes themselves ritually unclean.

Jesus, the prophetic tradition, God’s concern for the whole of life

What both Jewish and Christians scholars agree about is that Jesus was part of the great prophetic tradition, which speaks about God’s concern for the whole of life – including public policy about asylum seekers, housing provision (Amos), how the poor are treated (Amos 8.4) corruption in commercial dealings, as well the nation’s foreign policy. Amos summarizes God’s concerns: “Let justice flow like a stream and righteousness like a river that never goes dry” (Amos 5.24).

Prayer and worship was a seven day a week business and involved the whole of life in the prophetic tradition. If there is any doubt about Jesus understanding of God’s concerns and God’s kingdom, just look at the parables. Almost all his illustrations about the kingdom of God at work are about people’s working lives and the local economy - farmers and fishermen, day labourers and tax collectors, money lenders and soldiers, shepherds and teachers, lawyers and judges, tenants and landowners – and all this at a time of great unemployment (as the parable of the labourers suggests).

What have we done to this vision of the kingdom of God at work?

So often we ministers have unintentionally made the church – and particularly our church, our team – the centre of God’s universe, and the absorber of lay people’s time. Has our preaching, our ministerial priorities reflected the kingdom of God *at work*? I always remember the words of Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, better known as First World War army chaplain ‘Woodbine Willie’: “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.” And a famous 19th century East End priest proclaimed: “I believe in good drains because I believe in the incarnation”.

God on Monday

First, leading worship in various Anglican churches, the prayers start with the church, our archbishop, our bishops, often the local clergy, sometimes the Queen, the local community, those who suffer, and the communion of saints – these are the topics suggested in *Common Worship*. There is hardly ever any mention of people at work, but that is where so much of people’s lives are spent – work, paid and unpaid. What has happened to the great proclamation: “God loves the world so much that he sent his Son”. Surely we should start with prayers for God’s world? Surely the church should come last? It is the body to equip people for God’s working world. So often I feel visitors to our churches on Sundays must feel our concerns are so inward looking, so church centred.

Second, the church is ordaining almost as many self-supporting ministers as stipendiary, and listening to them, I am aware of how much they feel they are being used to ‘fill the gap’ in the preaching plan, rather than to ‘mind the gap’ between work and worship, to bring together peoples working concerns of which they have daily experience.

Third, how much do we know about the working world of our fellow worshippers? In the four team ministries I have served I have always run ‘Christians at work groups’. These faith at work groups usually meet on a Saturday morning, 9.15 to 10.15, about 15 times a year, and each time one of the participants would share something of their working world - which may include their experience of unemployment. In my ‘retirement parish’, with my vicar’s encouragement, we have started a ‘faith at work’ group. I have noticed that many of the people speaking have been known in that congregation for many years, but people have known virtually nothing about their working lives, which is quite an eye opener.

Where is the Holy Spirit at Work?

My most depressing illustration about whether the church cares about faith at work is from a recent book, *The Holy Spirit in the world today*. It has a string of distinguished contributors including Rowan and Jane Williams, Jurgen Moltmann and Miroslav Volf, who has written a book about the spirituality of work.. So I read

looking out for their views about the Spirit *at work*. I found this paragraph by Jane Williams: ‘Remaking the world in the image of Jesus is not confined to the church; politicians may do it, bankers may do it, teachers, doctors and nurses, unemployed people, suffering people, dying people. But we Christians, exercising the discernment of the Holy Spirit, can see it and praise it.’ (172). There is only one other mention of work, almost on the book’s last page: “pneumatology may well be a way that we might speak of God’s actions in work and culture” (185).

So often the church gives the impression of not taking people’s working lives seriously. It needs and uses people’s skills in the church, but does not value enough, support, listen to people’s experiences and the challenges they face at work.

Why doesn’t the church care about people’s working lives?

For most of my 40 years of parish ministry I have run Christians at Work groups, listened to people talk about their working lives in church, and often late at night in their homes. Yet when it came to the credit crunch of 2008, I found myself asking what had I and my colleagues done to prepare people for what was happening? How had we failed to read the signs of the times? As one commentator put it, “sadly, much of our teaching has not engaged the core ideologies of our time, and has not given Christians the kind of theological tools necessary to begin to formulate a critique of the system of which they are a part. You can be a lawyer, never overcharge your client, never fiddle your expenses, but through your agility with the tax laws on behalf of a multinational mining corporation, you can be involved in the systematic impoverishment of a nation whose ore the company has extracted, but to whom almost no tax has been paid. Our teaching has helped people to operate honestly within the system, but failed to help people to think critically about the system.” The structural questions are so often the key ones. Have we as preachers failed to ask the right questions, and to help others to ask the right questions. Bob Diamond, formerly of Barclays, was angry at the 14 traders who had rigged the Libor rate, but clearly felt little responsibility for the culture he had encouraged.

One feature I found most depressing about the St Paul’s fiasco was that the St Pauls Institute (set up some years ago by Ed Newall, a priest and a former Oxford Economics lecturer) was beginning to ask the kind of questions of the City that the Occupy Movement

was trying to ask from a worldwide perspective. In the process of this fiasco, Giles Fraser, one of the most gifted thinkers and communicators in the Church of England, resigned from a post that seemed ideally suited to his gifts, and with it his ability to raise some of the crucial questions the Occupy Movement was asking.

A bishop's letter makes a key point

The most telling bishop's letter I have read was in 1993 by Peter Hall, when he was bishop of Woolwich: "Religious people are peculiarly unwilling to recognize that most choices are between greater or lesser evils. Because we believe in goodness and love as absolute values, we imagine that we can make choices in which such absolutes are open to us. They rarely are. They never worked for Jesus, who was born into a world to live out fully God's love for mankind. But even by being born, it led to other children in Bethlehem being slaughtered. His mission hurt his own family, for his mother it was like – a 'sharp sword'. If our Lord found that whatever course he chose to follow was going to hurt somebody, how can we his followers expect to be free from such consequences? The people with whom we need to share our faith certainly know they cannot avoid it. They feel condemned by a faith which suggests they can make choices untinged by evil. They know their hands are dirty and will go on being so. They need a Gospel that unflinchingly recognizes that."

The challenge of the incarnation.

As Archbishop William Temple used to say "Christianity is the most material of the world's religions". At the heart of the Eucharist are the bread and wine, and as the offertory prayer says: "Blessed are you Lord God of all creation, through your goodness we have this bread and wine to offer, the work of human hands. They will become for us the bread of life and our spiritual drink". But how do we distinguish in daily life between what God has given us – the material world – and respond with thankfulness and generosity; and what has in fact become excess and greed, where consumerism and materialism have taken over? How often have we failed to be aware of the wider world and our responsibilities, and ignored the underlying questions posed by our working situation?

These are difficult issues for Christians to disentangle, let alone anyone else. For instance, it is clear that, as a society, we find it much easier to cap the poor than to cap the rich. Despite my commitment to support Christians in their working lives, have I failed to ask those crucial questions about our underlying values, about what is driving us now? Then there is another question – is there something instinctive in us that wants to keep the different ends of the commuter line very separate – the world of work and the world of home? How difficult is it for us to see our daily work as our daily worship – to have a holistic view of life?

Whenever people say to me that they don't find it easy to be a Christian at work, I respond by asking whether it's easier to be Christian at home or at work. After a pause, they smile and say "perhaps at work – they don't know me so well."

How can we make connections, share the pressures, encourage a vision?

Do we ask people what sort of week have they had at work, paid or unpaid? Do we perhaps invite people to put on the altar a symbol of their work?

For many years I led an evening with lay readers in our diocese towards the end of their training. We would draw up a list of their pinch points at work – situations they found difficult. Then, as a group, we would try to find illustrations from the scriptures and from people's lives that spoke to their situation. What I found depressing from their feedback was that so often this was the first time they had been helped to make these connections, between their work and their faith.

How can we help people through the most challenging times of change – particularly unemployment?

Charles Handy, in *The Future of Work* (1984) talked about the shifts from the 100,000 hour career to the 50,000 hour career. The idea behind the 100,000 hour career was that you would work 47 hours a week, for 47 weeks a year, for 47 years of your life. Handy said that, in the future, there would only be enough work for each person to have a 50,000 hour career. Nearly 30 years on, those in work seem to be working harder than ever, and unemployment looks as though it will go well past the three million mark.

Handy was also keen on the idea of people having a portfolio of jobs over your life. Now we are told that many can expect to have up to thirty different jobs in their working life.

In 1950 the average Briton travelled 5 miles a day. Today the average is over 30 and this is growing. People commute to London from Doncaster and the Isle of Wight and even further afield. We may have discovered leisure, but have we in the process lost the Genesis emphasis on resting at least one day in seven?

These changes need conversations, faith at work groups, sermons and time for reflection. Abbey National used to have a “Caring for Self” programme - suggestion 3 was: “Find a hermit spot and use it daily”.

Where is God at work this week?

A senior civil servant was speaking at our Christians at Work Group on “Where did I find God at work this week?” She described how it had been an exhausting week, but then on Friday afternoon they had a meeting at the Treasury. Everyone listened to each other, made creative suggestions, decisions were made, the meeting was over quicker than expected and at the end there was almost a tangible sense of achievement. She said: “I came away thinking I had found God at Work that Friday afternoon at the Treasury”.

Coming to church for worship can have many effects. One is to clean our glasses, to help us to see the world afresh through God’s eyes. Another is to ask radical questions of our lives and our society. Another is to offer to God our own daily lives with our strengths and failings and our need for God’s wisdom and guidance.

Where Christ is to be found and followed.

More than 40 years ago, I was writing a book on trade union leaders in India, as part of my last year of theological training there. All but two of the leaders were Communists and that challenged me to think afresh what Christianity was about. One of the Christian leaders, Alexander Devasunder, said: “Do encourage people to see their working lives as a key focus for their discipleship, for that is where their faith will be tested and developed, and where Christ is to be found and followed.”