

The Christian at Work

*Bishop Laurie's reflections at the end of Bishops in Mission in the Thurrock Deanery,
Sunday 19th March – Wednesday 22nd March 2000
Open Synod 22nd March 2000 St Peter & St Paul, Grays*

Introduction.

The Year 2000 is a marker for the Christian Church around the globe. Significant fact about 2000 is that 'Constant change is here to stay' One important marker is that 50% of the world's population lives in urban society. By 2015 70% will live in urban society. Bishops in CD decided to mark this year with a project called 'Bishops in Mission' +L through exploration of faith and work –Christianity in the workplace is encouraging us all to consider joined-up Christianity. What happens to the Christian who has been to church on Sunday on a Wednesday afternoon? We believe God is permanently with us so we need to acknowledge him at all times. Our ministry is apostolic—we are all sent. How can we be Christian in the workplace, which is where we spend 70% of our waking time. +L is spending time shadowing people in the workplace to gain first hand experience.

Summary of 4 days in the deanery.

Tesco stacking shelves. working practice, Sunday trading
Debenhams tour..., company loyalty
Security , how to create safe environments for human beings to live in
Food court ..., conflict with customers, Christians under pressure.
Bodyshop ethical framework, fair trade issues
Big Issue .getting back on your feet when the world has let you down.
P&G waste-ecology
Fords the global economy, international control.
Carehome serving the elderly and frail, how to care for vulnerable members of society
Farm issue, complexities of agriculture in a global society and the tensions it brings.
Costco issue, supportive teamwork
Town planning inclusion, access (NB not a new issue, Thomas Aquinas wrote a book entitled 'Christian Town Planning')
Banking Responses under strain. What are we in business for, to work to live or to live to work? What culture are we creating at work?
Flying angel issue, competition, crime prevention
Thurrock Council regeneration. Christians talk a lot about sharing out wealth but not enough about creating it.
Building site Sharing gifts and skills.
Housebound self-employed

Issues

In addition to the issues listed above +L highlighted the following

- *Enjoyment.* There was a sense of enjoyment at work. When work goes well there is a proper sense of pride and fulfilment. We are made in the image of God so when we create we feel good too.
- *Ethics.* Rights and wrongs at work. If you argue you might get sacked or your promotion prospects might be hampered. When do you confront, challenge, complain, speak out? When do you take issue with brutal decisions and brutal execution? Sometimes it is so complex that it is hard to see what is right and what is wrong.

- *Pressure* There is an amount of stress which is proper, note the elastic band, no pressure and its useless, too much and it snaps. There are league tables and targets everywhere. When you reach your targets the targets are stretched. You cannot succeed any more because the goal posts keep moving. Regulations sometimes restrict and destroy creativity. The pace of change is unprecedented. There is no time to stop and ask what you are doing and why. You just do it faster. Stress is a symptom and not a cause.
- *Unemployment* is always around the corner even for those who work in big institutions. One's worth is bound up with one's job. The human being's greatest fear is not being there. If you're taken away from the work place who are you and how can you make your mark?
- *Boring and alienating work* Quality of life question. Travel is tiring, you work a long day and when you finally get home exhausted you are required to attend a church meeting. Working can take away the energy from the rest of your life. No wonder families are under stress. Work can become all consuming and sap your input into the rest of your life. Church beware you don't eat people, expecting so much from them when they have already given so much at work.
- *Contract work* selling your time, owned.

From the floor

1. Dilemma of a person made redundant, should he improve and sell formulae he brought home from work when he was made redundant? He signed to say he would not sell them
2. Stress of the shift system of parenting and its' impact on the family. Children sometimes left to attend to themselves and sometimes left unsupported on important occasions in their lives. Deregulation and round the clock working. Erosion of premium payments for unsocial hours. Overtime has been subsumed into the working week. However, on the other side of the coin, Sunday working and shift patterns does mean that women can work and be fulfilled having looked after the children whilst husband at work.
3. Difficulty of trying to get back into work after a long break.
4. Depersonalisation in redundancy. Experience shared of a person who had worked for many years in the same company. When he was made redundant he had to go through a door marked A-H to be spoken to by someone he didn't know. No longer a person known in the company, just a number whose redundancy was to be dealt with by the people 'bought in' to do it.

Christians and church in the workplace.

Vocation and call. 'I feel that I am in the place that God wants me to be' e.g. one person shared a story of how they had experienced a tough time but discovered that for them at least it had worked out for good. The mysterious presence of God allows new and wonderful surprises to occur in our lives.

Some people went to work but found their vocation outside it.

Builder 'I don't put Christian on my letter-head. I want the quality of my work to be the witness. Another builder had Premier Radio blaring out all day.

Christian witness in the workplace can result in people getting at you. You might lose your street creed. There is cultural suspicion about Christians, that they are extremely weird.

As Christians when we get together we must acknowledge that we are not angels. We may not want to own that we have problems at work or that we don't have it all together. Is church a place where you can share the decisions you are wrestling with?

We must build up honesty and trust and not jump on others who we see are struggling. We need to honour the complexity.

Sharing is the essence of one of the answers.

Sometimes the church is used as an escape. Do you want to face work issues there? We might come to church for TLC and the chance to forget about work. There must be times when all we do is enjoy the presence of God. Engagement is essential but space is also necessary.

Christian and church have the opportunity to look at real values. Why do we go to work? Can we stand back and get some perspective? Can problems feel better on Monday because God overwhelmed you on Sunday?

Some people feel unsupported by the church but not unsupported by their faith. Church must build a toolbox so people can deal with the issues and support one another.

Do you think that the church is more essentially church when it is gathered together or when it is scattered? It is both, but we have worked too much with the gathered model and not the dispersed model.

Vision shared. A man saw a picture of his workplace and on the door was a poster which said, 'Wanted; prophets, teachers, apostles, evangelists, missionaries.' This is where this person was called to minister.

Christians in the workplace are in bridgebuilding ministry too. Greek for bridge is pontifac (priest) and that's what we are bridgepeople.

What is the point of being a Christian in the workplace?

- a) to make more Christians?
- b) to seek God's will and work alongside it asking what is God doing here and how can I cooperate with that?

We are at work to co-operate with God in making the world a beautiful place to be. This is kingdom thinking. 'Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.'

CU, prayer in the workplace is good. If it isn't possible in the workplace then we must do it somewhere.

From the floor

When the kingdom comes will there be work?

(+L Gen 1-11 says a lot about work. God creates and it is very exciting and pleasurable. It is a fulfilling thing to be doing. Work can be beautiful. God is redeeming and transforming and work is transforming when we are able to add value to what we are given. Work is a way in which we give to community. It puts us into relationship with others. God is Trinity, a dynamic relationship in God's very self. We are born in God's image and therefore are made for relationship. Giving and being given to is a joyful thing.

We are gifted by God and fulfilled in that.

Work will be one of the joys of being together in heaven.

In Eden work was wonderful. Then after The Fall it became toil. In heaven it will be transformed and redeemed and be as it was before The Fall.)

If people know you are a Christian at work it sometimes enables you to be able to help them more. If there is something different about you, you can be spotted as a Christian.

(+L 'Preach the Gospel wherever you go and use words if you have to. St Francis. If your actions speak for themselves, don't interrupt)

Christians have to put the value of people back into work. If people don't feel valued then it is drudgery.

A company which one person worked for boasted of making 75,000 people redundant, enough to fill Wembley Stadium.

Are we about profits or people first?

(+L quoting Danny de Vito's answer to the question 'What's it all about?' Everyone makes as much money as they can and when you die the one with the most money wins.)

Globalising economy. Companies are no longer multi nationals but transnationals. Decisions are made in one corner of the world and impact around the rest. What can you do except keep knocking at the door?

(+L The Anglican church is transnational. +L trying to raise funding for an Anglican commission on globalisation which could report to the next Lambeth Conference. Think globally and act locally. Transform worlds locally.)

Beware the complacency of acting locally. If you act locally you may think you have done your bit. What about 'think locally and act globally'?

Remember that Jubilee 2000 was started by two elderly eccentric gents.

(+L People say clergy don't understand the workplace because they're not in it. But how much do we all know about the working conditions, challenges and joys of one another?)

The task is to build Christian wisdom about these issues.