

WORK AND LEISURE  
IN EVANGELICAL FOCUS

Kim Hawtrey  
Chief Economist, State Bank of NSW  
Convenor, Sydney Christian Economists Group

October 1988

Topic B

Study Process to develop a Christian Perspective  
on Economic Life  
Oxford Conference on Christian Faith and Economics  
(Australian Section)

OUTLINE

1. Why examine "work"?
2. A Distinction when using the Bible
3. Four challenges to the Biblical view of work:
  - (i) When work is overvalued
  - (i) When work is undervalued
  - (iii) When work is seen as the central analytical paradigm
  - (iv) When the worker is devalued

4. Conclusion

Notes

Reading List

## 1. WHY EXAMINE WORK?\*

There is good reason for Christian apologists and thinkers to give attention to the subject of work and leisure.

Apart from sleeping, working is for most human beings their single most time-consuming activity, occupying usually eight hours a day for five days each week, and often much more. Beyond traditional paid work, there is the lawn mowing, which some, like myself, see as leisure. (One man's work is indeed another man's leisure, and I will not seek therefore to provide a rigorous definition of work; discussions of such can be found in the standard Christian literature, including the differential valuation commonly put on work depending on whether it is paid or unpaid). And there is more: house maintenance, child raising, washing up, bill paying and church working bees. From the age of five when we first attend school, to the age of sixty-five or thereabouts when we retire, and sometimes beyond, we are engaging in or preparing for productive activity.

Without work, the complexity of modern government would be greatly diminished; half the books in our libraries would vanish; every day would seem like the weekend; Marxism would probably never have been thought of; and like the citizens of Athens in Acts 17 we would most likely spend our entire waking hours "doing nothing but talking about and listening to the

---

\* I am grateful to Alex Ralston, Geoffrey Brennan, John Harris, Bill Stent and Duncan Ironmonger for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

latest ideas". Not only would our lives be dull and less rewarding in a workless world, but economists would have very little to talk about! But no: since the creation, work has been part of the human experience and has been on God's agenda for us (Gen. 1:26,2:15), with indications that it may remain so in the new creation - if the first creation is taken as a pattern. We should truly be thankful to God for the gift of work.

The widespread and dominant nature of work is by itself sufficient reason to evaluate it theologically. In most recent Australian surveys, work ranks second or third (behind family) as the source of meaning, purpose and identity for most people. Because work occupies such a large slab of life, it inevitably has acted as a focal point in human affairs for the shaping and living out of underlying values, priorities and beliefs. (1) If economics can be defined as the systematic study of processes which generate and determine "value", then the working world can be seen as the everyday counterpart in which for most people these values are crystallised and find their expression. (2) Work tends to bring our fundamental beliefs into sharp focus, at least in Western culture, because at the end of the day we are talking about time, money, power, status, honesty, dignity and purpose. These are all like knowing you will go to the gallows at dawn the next morning: they have a way of focusing the mind! Indeed for many people, as will be discussed below, the world of work not only reveals their priorities but becomes their priority (3). Thus, work is a valuable funnel for focusing Christian thought about our society.

As I will attempt to show in this paper, a Christian critique of how society views work becomes legitimate and relevant when we ask the question "What role was work originally meant to play in life?" And more than that, it helps us ask the question of what role God is meant to have in our lives. Although the Bible only occasionally touches explicitly on the subject of work, compared with other more important themes, it has much to say about the appropriate theological framework and priorities by which we should live in God's world and in this context scripture provides an implicit commentary on work which goes beyond social engineering to touch the very foundations of human objectives. Given that the Bible's diagnosis of our fallen nature is true and accurate, we can expect a lively difference between Christian and commonplace presuppositions about work. Christian commentators should take the opportunity to draw these out as a prelude (or partner) to proclaiming the Gospel of salvation, and this paper seeks to perform such a function (4).

## II. A DISTINCTION WHEN USING THE BIBLE

What can - or should - a Christian view of work attempt to achieve? To answer this preliminary, and yet fundamental, question we need to consider the scope and nature of the Bible, especially its possible relation to social questions. In this regard I will draw a distinction which it is absolutely essential to keep clear: the difference between Christianity speaking to problems and Christianity speaking about solutions.

There are two possible contributions that Scripture might be able to make in this area. First, it might be able to delineate the problem (if indeed there is a problem) with work in our society, or problems (plural) if it is the case that there are several dimensions to the matter. And second, the Bible might offer solutions, possibly in the form of models for work or guidelines of some sort.

But we should not automatically assume that Scripture will give us all of this. The view in this paper is that on the subject of work the Bible does not seek to put forward rigorous models but right motives: motives which are derived from a proper relationship with our Creator and which stand as a critique of human thinking. There is no timeless blueprint for work structures, only timeless beliefs for work. The Bible, it seems to me, offers more information on the ultimate source of work problems than on the immediate shape of work solutions. While I am therefore firmly convinced that we are called to the task of critiqueing false attitudes to work and the view of God implicit in them, I am more cautious about suggesting applied remedies. I say all this because it seems clear that the Bible does not supply us easily with practical policy solutions. This is not only because we live in a different culture, it is also because the Bible does not attempt to offer such a thing, normally understood. In this sense Scripture is concerned to give theological commentary on theological problems, not scientific solutions in the same sense that a socio-economic textbook would.

This does not mean that Christians should never make policy suggestions. But the step of putting forward practical proposals for industrial structure or change in the workplace needs to be approached much more cautiously by Christians. The task of applying God's word in God's world in God's way is a very delicate one, and I agree with the following argument by Packer and Howard (1985, p235):

"Programs for action are compounds of proposed goals and practical wisdom about means. Christian leaders, who have only limited opportunity to learn wisdom for managing public affairs, constantly give hostages to fortune and launch boomerangs by producing amateurish blueprints for public policy in the name of Christianity....The true Christian task here is to maintain a Bible-based critique of evil in all its forms and to pinpoint in God's name what in society needs changing, and not to behave as if Christian faith guarantees sufficient practical wisdom to upstage professionals in formulating policies."

Bockmuehl (1975) also argues for a similar approach. The procedure of using Biblical revelation to make commentary on work (and other economic issues) needs to be informed and controlled by a healthy dose of realism. There is clearly a role here for professionally trained Christian economists, unionists and managers, since such people are in a position to offer informed applied solutions as a follow-up to the earlier step of making a theological critique of modern work. But even in this case, they should be presented as "one Christian economist's suggestion" rather than as a generic Christian solution par excellence. For the same set of Biblical principles can nevertheless admit a wide diversity of applications, with each person believing that he is being

faithful to those principles. For example, a principle such as "all workers are entitled to dignity" may to one person mean that government should guarantee a job for all, but to another may require that each is free to choose unemployment if they wish.

If the distinction between theological critique and practical solutions is kept clearly in view, the "hermeneutical lens" through which we view the topic of work is less likely to become fogged up. In the Bible there are two big messages: the nature of the Problem (sin) and the nature of the Solution (Christ). I have come to the view that Christian discussion of economic life should primarily aim at illustrating the Problem (by pointing to its economic symptoms) but not venture too hastily into the area of solutions because this might only serve to distract from the big Solution. The issue is ultimately the cross versus the dollar sign, not "this type of dollar sign versus that type of dollar sign" (5). This is not to say that we should be purely "other worldly". We need to outline both what we are calling people from and what we are calling them to, and practical proposals will play a role. But at the end of the day, the gospel is calling us to a Person, not a program (6), as seen in the following:

Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes so he departs. He takes nothing from his labour that he can carry in his hand. (Ecclesiastes 5:15)

In this paper I will at various stages point to some practical policies which seem to me to have merit but they are not meant to be seen as timeless blueprints having the imprimatur of Scripture.

In this context, the discussion will focus on secular views of work and their spiritual pitfalls as I believe this is the basic homework we need to do before anything else that may follow.

For a comprehensive list and classification of the main Scripture references relating to economic life, see Hawtrey (1987). As mentioned earlier, work by its very nature invites and expresses all sorts of philosophical presuppositions, acting as a forum in which secular thought issues a challenge to the Christian conception of God, man and nature. However, the "challenges" are not uniform across cultures, or for that matter within each culture. For example, the working world of the high-flying executive raises a spiritual issue different from that of poor peasants in Thailand. At the same time, the blue collar unionist most likely thinks about work from a different angle again. My aim here is to identify four secular "workisms" and provide a Christian critique, as a way of classifying the underlying issues. These four views can be labelled "workisms" because they are views of work which reflect the mistakes of their parent "ism".

### III. FOUR CHALLENGES TO THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF WORK

#### (i) When work is overvalued

The tendency to worship work is closely related to the broad philosophical position known as "secular humanism". This is an umbrella label that can be used to refer to virtually anything outside Christianity, and indeed there is a sense in which the

other "isms" in this paper are subsets of this main one. Nevertheless by including it up front I am seeking to focus on the distinctive tenets of humanist thinking, namely that mankind is seen as the reference point of all there is, that values are thus set in reference to ourselves, truth is relative, and ultimately the goal of life is human satisfaction. The humanist position is that death is the end, there is no supreme being, we are little more than a collection of molecules, and that moral progress will gradually occur over time with the benefit of education and technology. In this framework, meaning and purpose must by necessity be sought within the confines of my own resources and by achieving my "full potential" as a human being.

Much has been written elsewhere on secular humanism. For present purposes, the important thing is to be clear how this school of thought finds expression in work. It is found amongst those who believe that work is the primary source of meaning, purpose and identity for them. Work becomes an end in itself. This is especially prevalent in white collar circles in advanced western cultures, where for many people work has ceased to be of critical necessity in the sense that basic needs for food and shelter are comfortably being met. On the well-known hierarchy of needs used by psychologists, work now plays the higher role of self-actualisation rather than survival, and so takes on an entirely different tone. Rather than seeing that work is made for man, this truth is inverted into the belief that man was

made for work. In extreme cases, we can talk about "workaholism" or "careerism", having in mind the person who takes the question "who am I?" first and foremost to mean "what do I do?"

The concept of a "career" is in one sense an overdone twentieth century extrapolation of an earlier soundly-based idea: the Reformation notion of a vocation. The Reformation reacted against the clerical elitism of catholicism and established the principle that the ordinary layman was fully serving God in his secular vocation. In this sense, work is meant for self-fulfillment. This rightly gave a sense of heavenly purpose to the most mundane earthly work, providing the worker approached his task with an attitude of thankful service under God. What has happened is that career has replaced vocation. What was once for service is now for self-fulfillment, and the glory is sought for man rather than for God. This leads to distorted motives, strategies and goals, as attested by the author of Ecclesiasties: "I saw that all labour and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbour" (4:4). There is a fine line between healthy competition and devious one-up-manship, a line that we fallen human beings find hard to keep on the right side of. The humanist approach results in people being fundamentally valued according to their status or perceived productive capacity, when the truth is instead that our significance really lies in our creation by God for his purposes. (7)

The "corporation man" may be a caricature but he is alive and well from New York to Sydney, from Tokyo to London. His framework of reality is the firm, its hierarchy, its customs and its values. The measure of right behaviour is promotion, a reward for sustained but sub-Christian "self-denial". Unfortunately, for some this can have devastating consequences, as Storkey points out:

"It is possible for those who have lived on this deferred gratification ideal, but who do not 'succeed', to feel very disillusioned and unhappy, and similarly for those who 'succeed' to overrate their ability, importance and the scope of decisions they are competent to make". (A Christian Social Perspective, IVP 1979, page 347).

Japan is a prime example of advanced workaholism. Professionals often work very long hours, from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm. Their children attend school until evening and on weekends there are extra activities. As a result, husbands and wives, parents and children, have very little time to spend with each other and the suicide rate is quite high, especially amongst teenagers. While Japan is the most dynamic economy of the world, this honour is being bought at a heavy spiritual price.

But as Anderson (1988) notes, man does not live by a nine-to-five job alone. Scripture has as one of its themes the folly of man asserting his empire-building skills in defiance of his Creator. The fate of King Nebuchadnezzar is a case in point. He was sentenced to insanity for failing to see his own kingdom under God's Kingship, and is told he must "acknowledge that the most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and

gives them to anyone He wishes" (Daniel 4:25). The modern city skyscrapers that house the well-salaried symbolise the theological shortcoming of the humanist's hope in his work. The Tower of Babel episode in Genesis stands as a warning against the humanist quest to build an empire without God and to prove greatness through the work of one's own hands. A close look at the passage in Genesis 11 is instructive, as it is clear that man's sinful heart has the capability to use economic skill and resources as a means to challenge God:

'They said to each other, "Come let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly". They used brick instead of stone, and tar instead of mortar. Then they said, "Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves' (Gen 11:3-4)

Notice that they took confidence from their skill in making bricks and from the feeling of strength that came from combined numbers. The motive was thoroughly humanist: to seek their identity and glory in this great accomplishment of their own hands. In essence this is a doctrine of works, where man gets what he needs by his own efforts. The response from God is judgement, and thus we see very clearly the Bible's answer to the humanist tendency to unduly elevate man through his work. It is ironic that the newest major office tower in Sydney, at Grosvenor Place, plays piped organ music in the high-ceilings of the lobby, thereby creating a cathedral effect!

As with all forms of idolatry, the humanist work heresy produces a distorted set of priorities and sets off imbalances elsewhere in the individual's life. (8) In particular, the Biblical

principle of Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11) comes under pressure. Here it is important to make the point that the post-New Testament focus is not on mechanically avoiding work on Sunday.

That was simply an Old Testament symbol, like the Temple and the sacrifices. Instead, the question is whether work begins to "drive" us in place of God. The theme of God's "rest" for his people runs right throughout scripture, from the early parts of Genesis when at the completion of the creation God fellowships with Adam and Eve, to the book of Revelation where a future picture of the new creation is given involving God's people once again restored to the rest that was originally intended. The "rest" concept is active, not passive, invoking the full richness of all that comes from knowing God personally, and this explains why breaking the Sabbath is taken so seriously (Numbers 15:32-36). It is symbolised and constitutionalised in the Sabbath principle, a commandment given both to ensure that the concept of rest remained central to the worldview of believers, and also to place prudential restraint on the tendency of some to become workaholics. For us, this is to be taken spiritually more than literally. Obviously, there may be physical as well as spiritual effects of overwork since when the humanist begins to seek his identity and purpose in his work, the situation is ripe for the Sabbath "break" to be lost and for the biological and spiritual balance to be overturned. (In the Soviet Union earlier this century, when an experimental ten-day week was tried, it proved a dismal failure for the human frame and the policy quickly reverted to seven days.) But in attitudes to the Sabbath, and to life as rest, the real difference becomes is not

in a mechanical observance of Sunday but apparent between Christians who are "called", and humanists who are "driven". Perhaps, therefore, work before the Fall was not nearly so dominant as my description in the first section would suggest.

When it comes to deciding the limits on what importance work will have in our lives, "significance is better than success". Work is worthwhile, but work is not equivalent to self-worth. The gospel first calls us to rely on grace, it does not primarily summon us to human achievement. (9) In contrast to modern man, Abraham looked for the city of God (Heb 11:10) which comes from heaven (Rev 21:10).

(ii) When work is undervalued

From work as self-fulfillment we turn our attention now to work as a ticket to self-indulgence. Under humanism the problem was that work is made an end in itself. Under utilitarianism, it can be the opposite, with the view of work degenerating to the point where it serves as merely a means to some other end. In essence, the challenge made for us by utilitarianism at its worst is that work is conceived of simply as a chore to be endured for the sake of satisfying other desires. Principally, these other desires fall into two categories: consumption of goods (materialism) and consumption of leisure/pleasure (hedonism). Here the <sup>intrinsic</sup>~~intrusive~~ spiritual, relational and purposeful dimensions of work itself are lost and instead emphasis is placed on the material benefits that work can produce.

When the workweek is simply a prelude to the weekend, conversation tends to focus on either on what everybody did last weekend, or what they plan to do this weekend. In his well-known book, *Land of the Long Weekend*, (10), Ronald Conway pointed to the way industrial societies look forward to and celebrate the weekend, especially in Australia. British rock group The Moody Blues have recently described the phenomenon in the following lyrics (11):

Counting down the days  
Waiting for the weekend  
On a Friday night  
It's alright, it's alright  
You can be who you want to be  
Take off for the weekend.

The explanation for this tendency would seem to reflect the greater scope that leisure appears to offer for self-determination, in comparison with the workweek. In industrial society there is a sharp division between work and leisure, between production and consumption. One appears to be a strait-jacket while the other gives the impression of freedom. Bruce Wilson puts it this way: (12)

Increasingly, "living" means leisure time. Leisure is the time zone where people can do what they want to do and when they want to do it. Hence the great importance attached to the weekend. "Av a good weekend" means "Now that you are free from work imposed regulations, accepted for the sake of the pay-packet, go and enjoy yourself - live!"

The result is that our work-self is a role we play and is kept separate from our real-self, where our true identity is seen to be lodged.

In historical perspective, people who hold this approach to their work represent something of a departure from the Protestant work ethic which Weber and Tawney have argued was a key factor underpinning the rise of industrialism. In contemporary Australia, there is evidence that the less religious a person is, the more he or she is inclined to disregard the intrinsic value of work and be more leisure-oriented. In the recent survey of social attitudes by Bouma and Dixon, (13), it was found that those who professed to be atheists or to have no religion at all tended to be less concerned about being useful, took less pride in work, wanted more holidays and felt exploited more often. Those who are more religious were found to be more willing to make a contribution and are more likely to regard working as a duty for all those able to engage in it.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with leisure - it is right and essential. But the consequences for the fabric of a society which idolises leisure have often been found in both history and literature. It is generally accepted as part of the reason for the decline of the Roman Empire, where images of pleasure-filled days marked by indulgence of the few are conjured up (14). In his novel *The Time Machine*, George Orwell imagines a leisured society some five thousand years into the future, but sadly it has lost any sense of right or wrong, and displays a carelessness about life which the twentieth century time-traveller finds repugnant. Brian Hill has described how the "lotus land" mentality eventually produces people who have

lost their critical capacity, the ability to reflect on what is happening to them and to ask questions about the purpose of their existence. (15)

What is the cause? At a socioeconomic level, people perceive different opportunities offered by work and leisure for personal participation, including decision-making, responsibility, reward, and personal expression. The upshot is that steps to improve industrial participation may deserve closer attention from policymakers and Christian commentators. At the same time, at a theological level the explanation is quite different. We need to be careful to take into account the Bible's information here because it is made clear that as a result of the Fall work has taken on an element of drudgery:

"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.  
(Genesis 3: 17-19)

It follows that we should be realistic about the potential for enjoyment and enthusiasm in working life: work will continue to irritate and drain us until the end of this present age, despite our efforts to improve it. (The poor blue-collar worker, of course, may have a greater excuse than his white collar counterpart for seeing work as drudgery). Ironically, with all the technological labour-saving devices now at our disposal we seem to be working harder than ever before. (16) There is a distinction between "work" which was originally an enjoyable activity (Gen. 1:28, 2:15) and "toil", which is the post-Fall

and unsatisfying parallel (Gen. 3:17ff). Work as we know it is a mixture of the two. The clinical efficiency of industrialism has brought with it a mundaneness that colours the whole of life, as expressed in this poem by Steve Turner (17):

#### Daily London Recipe

Take any number of them  
you can think of,  
pour into empty red bus  
until full,  
and then push in  
ten more.  
Allow enough time  
to get hot under the collar  
before transferring into  
multistorey building.  
Leave for eight hours,  
and pour back into the same bus  
already half full.  
Scrape remainder off.  
When settled down  
tip into terraced houses each  
carefully lined with copy  
of The Standard and Tit Bits.  
Place mixture before open  
television screen at 7 pm  
and then allow to cool  
in bed at 10.30 pm.  
May be served with  
working overalls  
or pinstripe suit.

The antidote to all this is that, in contrast to the negative utilitarian view, the Bible has a positive and relational view of work. Work preceded the Fall and was therefore seen by God as intentional and good (Gen 2:28, 3:5). Rather than work being merely a means to an end, it has an intrinsic value of its own. God himself works. In Proverbs we are warned not to be idle (6:9-11, 13:4), with a link from laziness to poverty being made clear (although the reverse is not necessarily true: poverty

does not necessarily prove we are lazy). Work is one way by which God intends man to be contented, by being "happy in his work, a gift from God, he seldom reflects on the ways of his life because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart" (Ecclesiasties 5:19-20). Most importantly, work is one context for living out godly relationships:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up."  
(Ecclesiasties 4:9-10)

The relational dimension of work is brought out in Paul's epistles, for example in the discussions about slaves and masters (Ephesians 6:5-9). Perhaps the key Bible teaching on this subject is that work is an opportunity for service. (18) Work also is closely allied with the ideal of family life. (19) That work is a gift and a God-given context for relationships is entirely missed by those who hold a simplistic utilitarian view of work.

Work is also to be viewed positively as the ordained means by which man under God is to develop the created order and provide for his own basic needs. These truths are distorted by the special brand of utilitarianism known as materialism. It is true that we work in order to eat (2 Thess. 3:8,10). But the difficulty arises when we see work as a path to conspicuous consumption. When work is mainly seen as a means toward consuming, the focus shifts from service to acquisition, from the personal to the pecuniary. The term "prosumers" has been coined by Alvin Toffler to describe the mentality of modern man

who over-produces in order to feed his consumption habit. (20) Gambling is a symbol of this underlying distortion that work is merely a necessary evil: there is an assumption that if all my future consumption needs are suddenly met by a "big win" then I will no longer need to work (although many winners find they eventually return to work by their own choice). Australians spend more per head on gambling than any other nation in the world.

Closely allied with the purely materialist rationale for work is the moral presupposition that I am automatically entitled to the proceeds of my labours. This belief underlies tax avoidance and neglect of the poor and unemployed. While true in the negative sense (that others should not steal my goods), in the positive sense the "entitlement presumption" is theologically mistaken because it forgets that ultimately all our possessions are given to us by God for the purpose of wise stewardship. We are simply custodians in the creator's world, with a calling to serve others. (Incidentally, this is the foundation of a critique of the economist's belief in determining value by revealed preferences). While forced appropriation of the fruits of our labour is not generally approved by Scripture, at the same time we are meant to give voluntarily. The Old Testament injunctions such as leaving part of the harvest for the stranger are addressing this very point.

Inevitably, idolatry is the close partner of views of work which emphasise its material rewards at the expense of its spiritual rationale:

"I'm going to be a happy idiot  
And struggle for the legal tender  
Where the ads take aim and lay their claim  
To the heart and the soul of the spender;  
And believe in whatever may lie  
In those things that money can buy  
Thought true love could have been a  
contender? ("The Pretender", Jackson Brown,  
1976)

Finally, Scripture also indirectly condemns the materialist and hedonist approaches to work in its warnings about their ensnaring capacity. In the parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21, we read that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions. Just when the rich man reaches the point of sitting back and congratulating himself on the good things he had laid up for many years, God takes his life. The passage concludes by saying: "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God".

(iii) When work is seen as the paradigm of life

The Anglican hymnbook omits the verse from "All Things Bright and Beautiful" that refers to the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate. Socialism and Marxism, nevertheless, have mostly had a tense relationship with the established church. In the short space available here I am not able to give a full treatment of this subject matter but in a paper such as this the challenge of Marxist thought to the Christian view of work cannot go unmentioned. The difficulty with Marxism, in my view, is its "hermeneutics". It views the conditions and structures of work as the key to interpreting human history, aspirations and destiny. To put it another way, socialist theory sees the

social relations of work as the guiding scientific paradigm par excellence, which in turn goes hand in hand with a deterministic understanding of history and a materialist understanding of man.

It is certainly true that Marxist thought is not without its insights, no doubt made all the more pertinent by the distressing conditions experienced by the industrial poor in the nineteenth century when Marx wrote. Indeed, there is on the surface a strong attraction for Christians in the Marxian description of 'alienated man'. Capitalism drives a wedge between the worker and his work, between producer and consumer, between the owners of the inanimate means of production and the suppliers of living labour. Hence the mass of people is subject to frustration, a sentiment that appeals to Christians. Further, Marx made a seemingly positive description of man as a worker with the potential for creativity and development of nature, again ideas with a Genesian flavour. Like Marx, Christians are skeptical of piecemeal social engineering that amounts to little more than re-arranging the deck chairs on the titanic. Building on these themes, Christian commentators - notably Wallis and Ellul - have evolved christianised social theories with a Marxian flavour, if not in the content of their prescriptions then at least in their way of seeing social questions.

It is at this point that I believe we need to stop and take a step back in the light of Scripture, because there are difficulties with going down this road which are seductive yet

serious. Principally, it is wrong to employ dialectical materialism, structural determinism, or a labour-centred theoretical framework as our central paradigm. Lyon (1979, p57) puts it this way:

"In the Bible, work and the making of one's world is certainly seen as a clue to human identity. But it is not the clue. Rather, work is seen in the wider context of the creature's response to the Creator".

Marx' starting point, philosophically, was the self-creation of mankind via suitably arranging the external conditions of social relations, with humanity answerable only to itself. By contrast, the Bible focuses on the re-creation of men and women via internal regeneration as expressed in personal relationships, under the Creator. We need to keep this contrast clear in our minds, given the almost religious meaning that Marx gave to "revolution". He described the commune as 'emancipation' and a social movement as 'the general regeneration of mankind'. Of course some would claim it is possible to be both a Christian and a Marxist (21), but the original writings of Marx himself make such a marriage extremely unlikely without having to relinquish some of the most basic tenets of Marx' thought. One of the most extensive Marxist descriptions of the nature of religion is given by Marx in his 1844 Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right:

"The basis of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has not yet found himself or has already lost himself again."

Marx regarded religion as one of the forms of spiritual oppression and Engels wrote that God was a product of man's ignorance. Indeed, religion was regarded as being correlated with the division of labour and with alienation (22):

"Bad as the communists believe the dogmatic principles of Christianity to be, the social principles of Christianity are regarded as far worse. To Marx, the more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself and under capitalism the worker puts his life into the object, and his life no longer belongs to him but to the object".

The problem for Christian analysts in strongly promoting worker fulfilment via community or social property is that the Biblical truth that man finds himself only by being reconciled to his Creator is in fundamental tension with the Marxian idea that man finds himself by being reconciled to his work.

The message of Ecclesiastes is a most telling Biblical warning against using work as our analytical paradigm. To do so is to leave completely unresolved the problem of death and decay:

"So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me...for a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune". (Ecc. 2:17-21)

Even if work exploitation and alienation could be eliminated, man's plight would remain desperate, according to Scripture. Correspondingly the materialist interpretation of history is

completely rejected by Scripture: "God presides over the nations" (Ps 47:8). God controls the affairs of men, and Christian social analysis must give greater emphasis to theological categories than to social categories.

Does this mean Christians should never comment on the "conditions of production" as Marx put it? Clearly not - Amos, for example, makes social commentary. No doubt there is some truth in the Marxian insights of worker alienation and class division. But they are not a coherent truth, merely facets of a complex diamond. They are a flat image of a reality that derives from another dimension altogether. Consequently, great care is required lest we accidentally step across the line into letting our paradigm become labour-centred rather than Lord-centred, and our notion of liberation temporal rather than eternal. The book of Exodus should teach us our understanding of "liberation", and we should note that Israel is God's "paradigm", a paradigm fulfilled in Christ (see Wright, 1983). The episode in Matthew 26:6-13 is a telling illustration of where Jesus sees the priority, commending the women for putting lavish perfume on him while others say (incorrectly) that she should have used the money for the poor.

#### (iv) When the worker is devalued

Capitalism has done much to improve the lot of the working man. No other economic system in history has had the ability to create jobs and wealth as that which the capitalist industrial machine has demonstrated over such a sustained period. This in

turn has provided the resources to permit greater availability of education, better working conditions, shorter working hours, longer vacations and higher real living standards for millions of workers compared with their forebears. These positive benefits are undeniable. At the same time, for all its achievements, capitalism has not succeeded in abolishing an age-old challenge to the Christian view of the worker: it too is capable (like all other labour systems) of presenting the opportunity for the labourer to be mistreated. The temptation in this and every other age has been to regard labour in just the same manner as the other factors of production (like land and capital).

While this is a temptation, not an inherent tendency of capitalism (indeed it can be argued that a free labour market provides the best sanction against potentially ruthless employers), it is nevertheless a real issue empirically, involving poor working conditions, callous disregard for the unemployed, inadequate wages, thoughtless redundancy, barriers to meaningful participation etc. These have been well-documented elsewhere. The point being made here is not the Marxian one, namely that the worker is alienated by loss of control over the means of production. Nor is it being suggested that the capitalist labour market will always and everywhere inevitably produce unjust wage rates - the opposite is more likely to be true if the market is working properly, accurately matching productivity with pay for each person. Rather, the point is that fallen economic agents, given half a chance, will forget to recognise the theological truth that their fellow man

is in a different moral category to machines. Nowhere in the Bible do we read for example, that "masters must treat their axe well, as if serving the Lord" or that "the plough deserves its wages"! Such statements would make no sense for machines. They are said only about human labourers, because our personhood gives us a status distinct from the inanimate factors of production.

Some might argue that this charge should be levelled at economists rather than historical capitalism, but I believe both exhibit instances of the same pressure. This is because of the (commendable) inbuilt emphasis on maximising efficiency, which gives rise to a "minimalist" or "reductionist" way of seeing things. Analytically I do not object to this because it gives economic models great explanatory power. But in practice it lends itself, in the hands of some, to a practical view of human labour that sets up an irresistible temptation for the human heart. To "get away with meeting the minimum requirement" in labour relations may be financially profitable but can lead to spiritual bankruptcy. It makes the same mistake about relationships as the Pharisees did in their understanding of God: they were moral "minimalists", in stark contrast to the gospel which demands "maximum" love for God and fellow man (see Matt - 5:21-48 for illustration of the contrast). In theory, capitalism is designed precisely to combat mistreatment of others, via its "prudential sanctions". But in practice the world is characterised by sinful opportunism and loopholes, which repeatedly create examples of one person taking advantage of another, and to ignore this is to ignore historical reality.

Thus, my first point in this section is that as Christians who are privileged to have access to God's revelation about the true nature of our world, we need to be informed by historical realism not textbook idealism. We can at one and the same time regard capitalism as the best institutional system and yet remain cautiously skeptical in its application.

The second point I want to make under this heading is normally, commentators address this by talking about the "dignity of man". But I want to argue this is not the best concept to use. We need to go back to Genesis and the fact that mankind is created in the "image of God". What does this mean? Some have suggested it refers to our superior intelligence, others our desire for progress, and others our physical appearance (including upright stature). But my understanding of the concept from Scripture is that it refers to something else: that mankind is created by God to rule with moral accountability and authority, in God's world as God's representative. Man is a creature of different status to the rest of creation: We are "theomorphic". This is indicated, for example, in Genesis 2:9 where humans are the creatures to which knowledge of good and evil is specifically relevant, and in Genesis 2:19 where it is man who expresses authority over the animals by naming them.

In the initial statement by the Oxford Conference, paragraph 10 said the following:

"Whether or not human dignity is promoted is an important criterion for evaluating economic systems and structures."

I want to suggest that man in the image of God is a better analytical starting point than the more vague concept of "human dignity". The dignity concept is too wide: all creation has God-given dignity but only man has God's image. "Dignity" makes a person's worth and freedom suddenly a function of their work situation (a cultural variable), whereas in reality our freedom and worth should be invariant, deriving from our status as God's redeemed creatures (a spiritual constant). If instead we employ the "image of God" concept we will have more Biblical data to go on when applying it to man and his work. Dignity does not figure strongly in Biblical theology, but image does. Man being in God's image means that the ideal pattern of human relationships will be modelled on relationships in the Trinity. For example, it is quite consistent to have differing functions coexisting with equal status (as is the case with Father, Son and Spirit). Employer and employee may differ in function but will have equal theological value. They are each equally made in God's image, and thus both are responsible for, and meant to participate in, the administration of God's world. One is not there to be exploited for the advancement of the other. This brings us full circle back to our original question, because it follows that the human factor of production is theologically different from the inanimate factors of production: land and machines. Management is called upon to actively recognise this when dealing with their workers and likewise unions must not exercise undue militancy purely for their own gain. Management, after all, are people made in God's image too. The practical details of striking this balance have been extensively discussed elsewhere (23).

Does this theological perspective mean all workers have a right to participate in management decisions? This proposition does not follow in strictly logical fashion. Both labouring and entrepreneurial organising are roles which are consistent with the image concept. Blue collar and white collar are equally fulfilling their appointment in God's image. To suggest that labourers are not fulfilling the image unless they also get involved in management is, it seems to me, not supported by the Biblical data. In this context, we return again to paragraph 10 of the Oxford accord: "Human dignity is furthered when individuals can participate voluntarily in economic decision-making and ownership". The cautious wording of the statement is appropriate because it stops short of asserting that participation and ownership are essential for man to fulfil his calling to be in God's image (noting that the dignity concept used would be better replaced by image). A Christian critique of capitalism need not insist that all workers have full control over decision-making. Also, we do not work towards God's image: we are already created in God's image.

At the same time, a Christian critique of the capitalist system of work must be realistic about the fact that the image concept will often be spoiled. In reality, men exploit other men and scripture is bluntly aware of this. George Orwell illustrated the tendency aptly in his novel *Animal Farm*. Calvin wrote that "insane and barbarous men furiously strive to overturn the divinely established order" (24). Brockett (1986) puts it this way: "In the absence of organised labour the employee will tend to be exploited in an industrial society...by employers whose

success depends on turning out cheap goods where no sanctions operate to prevent that cheapness being based on cheap labour" (p105). The commandment not to steal is a reflection that it is possible to stain the image of God in man by violating right economic relationships.

Indeed, let us probe a little deeper. Precisely where is the image-marring occurring? Importantly, when one oppresses another the Biblical view would be that the image is spoiled in the perpetrator, not in the victim. It is sin that spoils image in the oppressor, not misfortune that spoils image in the oppressed. The Lord Jesus himself is the best illustration of this truth. He suffered most of all, and yet at no time lost the image of God.

This is a key theological point that is often misunderstood in Christian social commentary. It leads, for instance, to an incorrect reading of books such as Amos. Christian commentators, on reading Amos, often leap to the conclusion that revised social structures would restore "dignity" to the oppressed. But the prophet's focus is in actual fact that a repentant heart would restore "image" in the oppressor. The two theological understandings are quite different.

In this light, maximum worker participation would still seem highly desirable as a practical policy. We all have a potential for creative work because we are in God's image and this should be reflected in work contracts. Workers should not be seen as merely a means within the economic process, which is always a

temptation under capitalism where labour is typically thought of as simply another business cost. The recent special Budget Paper No.9 from the Australian Federal Government goes some way towards seeing work issues as wider than simply wages (25).

In summary, differing functions in work between different people (in regard to ownership, participation and decision-making) should not necessarily alarm us as Christians, because not all people will be called by God to do all work functions at all times. The proviso, however, is that all are made in God's image and thus should play a substantive part in ruling and developing His world. Ordinary labour and homemaking fulfil this injunction just as much as managers and owners of capital. The historical tendency of capitalism is that it can tend to discount God's image in the worker and forget to differentiate humans from machines. Involuntary unemployment, social Darwinism, lack of opportunities for participation, poor working conditions, exploitation, drudgery and frustration are the well-known evidences of this and have been widely documented in the literature. Equally, unions can be guilty of spoiling the image when unduly using their leverage against management. As Scripture makes clear, there will be a constant tendency for fallen human beings to spoil the image of God in each other in the name of their own economic advancement, and this is a very real challenge to the Christian view of work.

#### IV Conclusion

The question of work and leisure in this paper has been approached very much from an apologetic point of view, because I believe it is at the level of ideas that the battle for work must be fought. In this paper I have highlighted four world views which involve distortions of the Biblical picture of work:

- . overvaluing work
- . undervaluing work
- . treating work as a paradigm for interpreting life
- . treating workers (including managers) in a manner inconsistent with God's image

These false views are homocentric whereas the Christian context for work should be theocentric.

The fundamental spiritual tussle in work is between those who would strive to create their own self-image (by achieving, consuming, socialising or exploiting) and those who seek to affirm God's image in themselves and others. All of the "isms" turn out to be, as Packer and Howard put it, "beds that are too short for us and blankets that are too narrow". Only when man is understood as the Bible sees him (fallen) and forsees him (theomorphic) does our picture of work come properly into focus.

The evangelical social method, which I have tried to illustrate, does not yield a prototype or template that can act as a universal model of work. Instead, it delineates the attitudinal choice between the creation ideal restored in Christ and the misdirected attempts at creation of self that are

prevalent in culture. The aim, in knocking down the false assumptions, is to help people see the truth of, and need for, the Christian alternative. In a word, the Christian view of work is perhaps best summarised as "service"; indeed I understand that in Hebrew, the phrase "to till the land" (Gen 2:15) literally means "to serve". As a result of this kind of evangelical analysis, it will hopefully be easier to see the way forward in applying to work the Apostle Paul's injunction: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:12).

13 October 1988

#### Notes

1. "Work is the assumed foundation of most social organisation and plays a critical part in personal development and identity"; Industrial and Economic Affairs Committee, UK, (1984).
2. George Stigler points out that economists as "preachers" are "well received in the measure that we preach what the society wants to hear" and "whether economic preachers lead or follow, they need an ethical system to guide their recommendations"; Stigler (1982), p13.
3. Even secular commentators recognise that ideology cannot be escaped from in economics. Joan Robinson (1962, p9) writes "Whether or not ideology can be eliminated from the world of thought in social sciences, it is certainly indispensable in the world of action in social life. A society cannot exist unless its members have common feelings about what is the proper way of conducting its affairs, and these common feelings are expressed in ideology".
4. If the gospel is true it should have high explanatory power and critical capacity when applied to all aspects of life, and this should be capable of being carried out in a systematically consistent manner. McKee (1987, p19) writes: "The Christian intellectual does not merely seek truth in various domains; he is also faced with the necessity of fitting it all together, at least in some tentative way. Essentially he has an integrative quest, beyond all the specialisation that is so necessary." This quest may also help resolve the apparent tension between faith and science.
5. Niebuhr (1951, p36) says "culture in all its forms and varieties is concerned with the temporal and material realisation of values". Christianity and culture are in conflict to the extent that one looks to a heavenly goal and the other to an earthly goal.
6. Dumbrell's (1981, p69) comments are useful here: "In speaking on the question of social values and their neglect in our own age, we must take the attitude to our age which the Israelite prophets did to Israel. That is to say, we should not commence with the effect, the particular social aberration (social deprivation, economic inequalities etc.) unless we are prepared to go on to causes. We should say to our world prophetically: "Things are as they are, you are as you are, because of the neglect of a basic relationship. The very existence of your social or personal problems is sufficient evidence that this is so".
7. Anderson (1988) writes that "there can be no greater significance than that of belonging to and serving the Lord" (p5).

8. "The chief tenets of humanism, both the right and the left branch, are the convictions that man is the creator of his own laws (autonomy) and that man's destiny lies in the mastery of nature. These assumptions have paved the way for the inordinately powerful role of science and technology in the modern world. However, this in turn has given rise to an unbalanced development marked by a host of symptoms which indicate that the desired goals of freedom and progress have not been realised". (Antinodes, 1982 p77).
9. As Mott (1982, p22) puts it, "Christian social action, indeed all Christian conduct, properly understood, is grounded in the grace of Jesus Christ".
10. Sun Books, 1978.
11. J. Lodge, "Here Comes the Weekend", on the album Sur Le Mur, Polygram Records, 1988.
12. B. Wilson, Can God Survive in Australia?, Albatross, 1983.
13. Bouma, G. & B. Dixon, The Religious Factor in Australian Life, MARC Australia, 1986, pp 91-92.
14. Theories on this subject are canvassed in J. Anderson and T. Lewit, "A Contact with the Barbarians? New Economic History and the Fall of Rome", Discussion Paper 21/88, School of Economics, La Trobe University, July 1988.
15. B. Hill, 1987.
16. Tibor Scitovsky (1976) examines the frustrations and paradoxes of happiness and unhappiness despite apparently improving living standards.
17. S. Turner, Up To Date, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1976, p16.
18. J. Stott (1984, p159) notes that "All work needs to be seen as being, at least to some degree, public service".
19. "Work constitutes a foundation for the formation of family life, which is a natural right and something man is called to"; Papal Encyclical, 1981, p41.
20. Alvin Toffler, The Third Wave, Pan, 1980.
21. For example, Holdom & Volke (eds), 1979.
22. F.N. Lee, 1974, p564
23. See, for example, Attwood, D. "Trade Unions: The Modern Problem and the Christian Response", Grove Booklet on Ethics, No.38, London, 1979; H.F.R Catherwood, "The Social Responsibility of Trade Unions", Chap 5 of The Christian in Industrial Society, Inter-varsity Press, 1964. J. Brockett, "Management versus Labour: The Christian and Trade Unions", chap 6 of No Free Lunches, Churchman Publishing (UK), -1986. "The community of Work", chap 6 of Perspective on Economics, Report by Industrial and Economic Affairs Committee of the General Synod Board for Social Responsibility of the Church of England, UK, 1984. K. Hawtrey and J. Neville, A Christian Perspective on the Accord, Paper presented to the Australian Conference of Economists, Melbourne, August 1986 (SCEG Discussion Paper No.4) Trade Unions: A Christian View, Anglican Information Office, 1977.
24. J. Calvin, Institutes, Book II
25. Australian Government, Labour Market Reform: The Industrial Relations Agenda, Budget Paper No.9, August 1988

READING LIST

- Alexander, J. Managing Our Work, IVP, Canada, 1975 (revised)
- Anderson, A. What are you worth if they don't pay you?, Christian Arena, UK, June 1988.
- Antinodes, H. Renewal in the Workplace, pamphlet, Christian Labour Association of Canada, 1982.
- Bouma, G.D & B.R. Dixon The Religious Factor in Australian Life, MARC Australia, Melbourne, 1986.
- Brockett, J. "Management versus Labour: The Christian and Trade Unions", ch. 6 of No Free Lunches, Churchman Publishing, UK, 1986.
- Bockmuehl, K. Evangelicals and Social Ethics, Monograph No. 4, World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, IVP, UK 1975.
- Catholic Commission for Justice & Peace Working it Out: A second look at the Unemployment Crisis, Sydney, 1980.
- Catherwood, HFR, The Christian Attitude to work, chap 1, of The Christian in Industrial society, IVP, London, 1964.
- Dumbrell, B. The Biblical Basis for Social Judgements, in J. Diesendorf (ed), Faith Active in Love, AFES Graduates Fellowship, 1981
- Ellul, J. Perspectives on our Age, Seabury Press, New York, 1981.
- Griffiths, B. The Challenge of Marxism, chap 2 of Morality and the Marketplace, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1982.
- Gustafson, J.M. Theology and Ethics, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981
- Hawtrey, K. Trade Unions: How should Christians Tackle the Issues?, Southern Cross, June 1988.
- Hawtrey, K. Evangelicals and Economics, Interchange 38, Sydney, 1985.
- Hawtrey, K. Economics: The Thinking Christian's Guide, Paper presented at School of Christian Studies, Sydney, 1987 and printed as SCEG Discussion Paper No 7, October 1987.
- Hawtrey, K. Review of "All The Business of Life" by Robert Banks, Lucas, No 3, June 1988.
- Hawtrey, K. & J. Neville "A Christian Perspective on the Accord", presented to Australian Conference of Economists Melbourne 1986; UNSW Discussion Paper in Economics, 1987, and Sydney Christian Economists Group Discussion Paper No. 4 August 1986 (Reprinted in ACE Journal, No 4, 1987)
- Hill, B. Commitment in Lotus Land, Interchange, No. 42, Sydney, 1987.
- Holdom, C. & H. Volke(eds) Christians, Marxists, Hexagon Press, Sydney, 1979.
- Industrial and Economic Affairs Committee, General Synod Board for Social Responsibility, UK Church of England, "The Community of Work", chap 6 of Perspectives on Economics, CIO Publishing, 1984.
- John Paul II, Laborem Exercens: On Human Work, Papal Encyclical, 1981.
- Lee, F.N.- Communist Eschatology: A Christian Philosophical Analysis of the Post-Capitalistic Views of Marx, Engels and Lenin, Craig Press, New Jersey, 1974.
- Lyon, D. Karl Marx: A Christian Appreciation of His Life and Thought, Anzea Books, 1979.
- Mayhew, P. Unemployment Under the Judgement of God, Churchman Publishing, UK 1985
- Marshall, P (ed) Labour of Love: Essays on Work, pamphlet, Christian Labour Association of Canada.
- Neibuhr, H.R. Christ and Culture, Harper and Row, New York 1951
- Mott, S. Biblical Ethics and Social Change, Oxford Press, 1982.
- Packer, J.& T. Howard Christianity: The True Humanism, Work Publishing UK, 1985
- Robinson, J. Economic Philosophy, Penguin, 1962.
- Storkey, A. Transforming Economics, Third Way Books, SPCK, UK 1986
- Storkey, A. "A Christian Economic Perspective", Chap 14 of A Christian Social Perspective, IVP, UK, 1979.

- Stott, J. "Work and Unemployment", Chap. 9 of Issues Facing Christians Today, Marshalls, UK, 1984
- Stigler, G. The Economist as Preacher, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982
- Schumpeter, J.A. Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1943
- Skitovsky, T. The Joyless Economy, Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Wilson, B. Can God Survive in Australia?, Albatross, Sydney, 1983
- Wright, C.J.H. Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics, IVP, UK, 1983.

We are grateful to the Sydney Group  
for this resources material

## RESOURCES

This section lists recent material relevant to the subject of Christianity and economics. The references are classified under the following headings:

- a) General perspectives
- b) Economics as a discipline
- c) The 'justice' debate
- d) Labour issues
- e) State and Taxation
- f) International Economics and Development
- g) Other

### a) General Perspectives

- Adeyomo, T., Where Do We Stand: The Evangelical's Position on Social Issues, Tear Target, Spring 1986.
- Antonides, H., Stones for Bread: The Social Gospel and Its Contemporary Legacy, Paideia Press, 1985 (First published 1931).
- Antonides, H., Socialism or Capitalism: Must We Choose?, Christian Labour Association of Canada, May 1985.
- Banks, R., Theology for Home, Work and Leisure, Zadok Centre, Series 2 Paper, No. T27.
- Chaney, F., The Human Side of the Debate About Economics, Sydney Morning Herald, 15 August, 1986.
- Christian Labour Association of Canada, Affirmative Action: The Perils of Social Engineering, June 1985.
- Costigan, M., A Diminished Voice in the Affairs of State and Society, The Australian, 17 September 1986.
- Dale, D., 'Whoyagonnacall? Ethics Doctors' (for corporations), Sydney Morning Herald, 7 August 1986.
- Docherty, P., Free Market, Self-Interest and the Bible, Southern Cross, August 1986.
- Floistad, G., Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986.
- Gasque, W., Christianity in the Marketplace, Zadok Perspectives 14 June 1986.
- Griffioen, S., Facing the New Corporatism, Published by Christian Labour Association of Canada, 1981.
- Grimond, Lord, Still No Economic Liberalism, Economic Affairs, 6(4), Apr-May 1986.
- Hughes, S., 'Earthbank: Ideologically Sound Investments', Australian Financial Review, 3 October 1986
- Hurst, A., Rendering Unto Caesar, Contemporary Christian Social Concern Series, Churchman Publishing, 1986
- Hynd, D., A Venture in Lay Theology (Review of Interchange 38, SCEG Papers), Zadok Perspectives, 14 June 1986
- Killen, H., Friends to Launch Ethical Fund, Australian Financial Review, 26 August 1986.
- Kizilos, K., Making People Work for Love and Money, The Australian, p.11, 18 August 1986.