

LIVERPOOL PARISH CHURCH
OUR LADY & ST NICHOLAS

Faith Matters

Session 1: Faith and the Workplace

River in
the City



Warning for later! During the session we shall introduce ourselves. Participants will be invited to name a point of separation and a point of meeting between their world of work and their world of faith.

I. The problem.

There is often perceived to be a dichotomy between the world of work and the world of faith. The task is to bring them together.

The problem is also that the Christian faith allows us to separate them. The theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) wrote:

Theoretically one can be a Christian and still unconsciously in practical life, by siding either with idealism or with so-called realism, not live up to this tension that confronts our freedom. As long as the history of our freedom has not reached its goal, we are always in via, always pilgrims, and thus always people who disrupt to some extent the unity in diversity that is given with this tension... We are told that we must love God with our whole heart and our whole strength, and, at the same time, admit that we are sinners. Does this not imply that we never totally answer God's absolute appeal?

Theological Investigation XXII p32

We therefore allow ourselves to have two modes of living - 'Christian' and 'sinner' - and we legitimize the areas which don't live up to our 'Christian' ideal with concepts such as 'fallen world', or 'look to future perfection'.

Our lives can be divided into two 'zones', each with their own attributes. The following list is not exhaustive.

<u>Work</u>	<u>Faith</u>
Wealth Creation	Generosity
Targets	Contemplation
Reality	Aspiration
Asset protection	Compassion
Profit	Justice
Ambition	Thankfulness

2. Bible Study

Matthew 20.1-16

Jesus said to his disciples: ¹'The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; ⁴and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" ⁷They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.

¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” ¹³But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’

Some points which we can draw out from this passage.

- The workers present a more ‘capitalist’ attitude to work and profit than the landowner does. They display some of the attributes seen on the previous page.
- Fairness, equity and justice all seem to be competing with each other, but each concept takes on a different manifestation depending on your perspective.
- Identity. The workers are all unemployed before they become “labourers in the vineyard”. When they achieve that identity they acquire a voice with the landowner.

3. Identity - what is a human?

In the narrative of our lives, we very often define ourselves by what we do. We all search for a label, perhaps to justify how we spend our time. And even in retirement we hear people say, "Before I retired I was a..."

Karl Rahner, whom we heard from earlier, wrote that

The basic and ultimate thrust of Christian life consists not so much in the fact that a Christian is a special instance of mankind in general, but rather in the fact that a Christian is simply a man as he is. (Foundations of Christian Faith, p402)

If this is true, then the labourer in the vineyard should be defined primarily by his/her relationship to God, and not by work.

- How ready are we to define ourselves in this way?

Different churches will emphasize different aspects of our relationship with God: we are made in his image; Jesus saved us by becoming one of us; Jesus died for us; Jesus rose for us.

Central to all theological narratives of humanity is our freedom. The consequences of not having freedom might mean that we would avoid making mistakes, but it would also mean that we cannot love. Love must always be a free action. Love is a reflection of the Holy Trinity.

4. **Introductions around the room**

- What sort of work do you do?
- What is the point of separation between the world of work and the world of faith in your life?
- What is the point of meeting between the world of work and the world of faith in your life?

5. **Discussion points**

The church always finds it easier to pray for vocational professions (e.g. doctor / nurses / teachers) than for other jobs. Although it is easier, it is not right. It implies that we have a hierarchy of jobs.

- Do we have a hierarchy of jobs?
- Do we say that a barrister is more important than a super-market employee? Or more useful?

Society ranks jobs in different ways, including:

- Physicality
- The need for pre-employment training
- Salary (remember the labourers in the vineyard!)

Possible factors for a hierarchy of jobs from a faith perspective:

- Job satisfaction (leading to personal fulfilment)
- Societal benefit
- Using one's personal gifts
- Being able to act with integrity

Next week we shall look at the place of wealth in the workplace and in Christian thought.

