Ministers-at-Work

The Journal for Christians in secular ministry

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To help ourselves and others to celebrate the presence of God and the holiness of life in our work, and to see and tell the Christian story there.

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Editorial

ICF, the Industrial Christian Fellowship, has cheekily renamed its newsletter 'Ministers @ Work'. I wonder how they came up with that one? A number of CHRISM members are also in ICF, and we have a good history of working together. Long may it continue, but, ampersand not withstanding, we're glad you think it's a good name!

The Spring 2005 edition makes the valid point that ministry is too often thought of mainly – or exclusively – in terms of things clergy do, and that ICF is in the business of supporting Christians in their ministry at work. Bravo. CHRISM is right there with you.

The frenetic period of each quarter known to me as Journal mailing time is a great reminder, if one were needed, of just what a terrific cross-section of people are MSEs and / or supporters of MSE. Probably a 50-year age spread, men and women, caring professions to 'wearing' professions (choose which you belong to!), government service to private practice, multi-national industries to the self-employed, just along from John O'Groats to a gentle cycle ride from Lands End (yes, really! - though Peter Johnson might not agree with the 'gentle' bit), and eight other countries too. We have lay and ordained, Methodists, Anglicans, Reformed, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist and probably a few more Churches besides.

I'm also in a good position to note how the membership continues to grow, as the number of envelopes goes up with each mailing! It is now consistently over 300 each quarter, about 60 higher than when I succeeded (with some trepidation) the estimable Dorrie Johnson to the Editorship in 2000. Of course I don't claim any responsibility for the growth; that is down you the contributors and you the members. Folk do drop off the mailing list for a variety of reasons, but that we have maintained a steady net growth for such a long period is gratifying; we must be doing something right.

It is quite remarkable too just what MSEs get up to, or have done in the past. Incoming Presiding Moderator Adrian Holdstock re-

cently revealed that he is a former UK Parascending Champion. I always thought you came down on parachutes – but what do I know! We disclosed in the past edition that Treasurer Richard Dobell is a closet rocker – he plays keyboards with The Racketts, to be heard at various venues in the West Midlands. Not quite Slade perhaps, but Richard has been bashing the keyboards just as long as Noddy's boys have been feeling the noise. I won't reveal the identity of the member who once stood against Margaret Thatcher at a General Election, but it is not difficult to guess.

I wasn't sure whether to be dismayed or to laugh when a member recently e-mailed me to say that a 'senior member' of staff in his diocese (just how senior, one wonders?) had never heard of CHRISM. Well, indeed! Suffice it to say that our colleague's request for a pack of materials to deliver to said 'senior member' was promptly met. If you would like me to send out a complimentary copy of the Journal, with MSE 1 of course, to a friend or a church officer who should know about us, do let me know.

One matter that the Committee has discussed recently is the content of the website. There is plenty of information on it, including most of the CHRISM Papers, but not much that changes on a regular basis, apart from news of events. So a question for you: what would *you* like to see included? Possible additions are: a dedicated news page, a forum (which you could register for, then sign in with a password and post information, exchange ideas, arrange to meet other MSEs), news from local MSE groups. Over to you – ideas and comments most welcome, by the end of September please.

I'm very grateful once again to all those who have contributed to this edition. We have another excellent selection, as I'm sure you'll discover as you read on. Please do keep the contributions coming, and if you come across any material of interest to MSEs, or anyone who can write a piece, then let's have it! And it doesn't have to be an article: cartoons, photographs, prayers, amusing stories, and reviews of good real ale are all welcome.

Rob

A Pearl of Great Price

Continuing our thoughts on the 2005 Reflective weekend, this contribution comes from ***Catherine Binns****.*

For the CHRISM reflective weekend we were asked to bring along an item which was symbolic and represented our ministry.

I struggled at first to know what to bring, what was expected, and what item was symbolic in my ministry? My initial thoughts were towards my ministry in the church, rather than in my workplace. As a musician, my clarinet is my pearl, and it enables others and myself to worship through the music I play. God has given me a gift, which can be quite powerful when I allow the Holy Spirit to work through me, instead of relying on my own strength.

However, on reflection I realised that the pearl of great price was represented in my ministry at work. The items I brought along to the weekend; a tiny nappy and a tiny premature 'wee thummie' dummy. This represented my profession as a Specialist Neonatal Nurse, the nappy was so tiny it designed to fit a 24 week gestation premature baby and even then it would be too big! These precious babies are symbolic of the pearls of great price and certainly cherished treasures themselves!

On Saturday morning, during the first session, (which was in silence) we were encouraged to reflect on 'What price have I paid?' So with this in mind, armed with a pen and paper and my CD player, I quickly found a place to sit, just beyond the Retreat House, looking out upon the open countryside, with a single tree in front of the backdrop of a clear blue sky. A scene I am reminded of constantly when my screensaver is active. Rob thought I was sketching, when he saw me busy with pen and paper. Although, I would love to be a skilled at painting, my creative eye is in photography.

The reason I was busy with pen and paper, was to use the time effectively, during my reflection a lot of pain and hurt came to the surface and it helped to write this down. The cost or the price I have paid to become who I am today.

The treasure I brought was not of high value or personal value to me. It represented my path of who I have become as a person, as a Christian and as a nurse. The treasure represented my role as a neo-natal nurse. It represented the pain, the hurt, the frustration, the failure, as well as God's presence within my life and how through my weaknesses and failures, He has made me into the person I am to-day.

Although, I had to leave on the Saturday evening, I found the time I had on the retreat very beneficial. As I write this reflection I am coming towards the end of my first year of ordination training, I am sitting in front of an open fire, listening to the wind, in the peaceful village of Trevor, North Wales. The last couple of weeks I have been experiencing the exhaustion side of training and working full-time. In last Sunday morning sermon, a phrase struck me, 'Bruised and bat-tered', this was exactly how I had been feeling. This is all part of God's service and all part of the formation for the future!

Coincidently, the track I listened to whilst reflecting on 'What price I have paid?' was 'I am the treasure in His Heart. Treasure in His Eyes.' (Doug Horley, On Eagles Wings album).

Adrian Holdstock:

Each of us shared our pearls and I was intrigued to discover from the list I made that we had 3 "activities", 3 "relationships", 4 "ideas or ideals", and 6 "signs or symbols".

I noted for myself "at what price?" The price of learning, discipline, being discipled, justifiable knocks to pride, incredible passage of time, developing patience and humility, recognition that the appar-ently insignificant also contributes to the design. I thought of other lives I might have had, but no longer desire, other lives I might still desire but which I accept are for God to set before me or to set aside. I recognise the need to "grow where I am planted", warming in my understanding of the "fit" of my life's pattern to the MSE model, recognising the service I give through a) people at work; b) the Church through CHRISM; c) the Church through having "a foot in

both camps". But I am also wrestling to see whether the pattern should alter for future years of ministry - if, when and how and precipitated by what? Ultimately, my "rule of life" is to "live servant leadership" which I associate with Jesus, Nehemiah, bits of everyone and myself as God has fashioned me.

The Foundation for Leadership Studies

... was launched earlier this year by the Archbishop of Canterbury as a foundation for leadership studies to promote good practice in leadership, management and ministry among the Christian Churches. Malcolm Grundy, former Archdeacon of Craven (Bradford) and long-time supporter of MSE, was appointed Director on 1 March.

The Foundation will initially have an Anglican focus (the Church of England is heavily represented on the Board of Trustees, chaired by Michael Turnbull, former Bishop of Durham) but intends to 'spread out' as further funding becomes available. MODEM has already had significant input into setting it up.

Archdeacon Grundy says: "The history of leadership in the church is of a hierarchical, top-down structure. In a church with fewer clergy, the whole thrust is to share the way we run the church with lay people."

I wish the Foundation well. It does however look to be yet another 'inward-facing' endeavour to replace clergy with lay people in running the Church, rather than recognising and supporting their ministry outside the institutions. Ed.

Christians in Politics

... is a new cross-party initiative aimed at helping Christians to take a fresh look at the possibilities of political service. It seeks to cover all levels of political involvement, local as well as national, and is a co-operation of the 3 main groups: The Christian Socialist Movement, The Conservative Christian Fellowship and The Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. It is well worth visiting the website, www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk, which has links to arrange of resources in this area, including lectures given by political leaders.

Service, solidarity and self:
a Christian ethic in a competitive workplace

Edward Lucas, Britain correspondent, The Economist

(*This article was the 7th South London Industrial Mission Annual lecture 2004 and is reproduced here by kind permission of both SLIM and the author. The views expressed are those of the author and not of The Economist. A piece such as this fully merits a wide audience!*)

What does holiness at work mean? How should Christian employees balance their duty to the employer, to colleagues, to customers and to themselves? Does a competitive, achievement-oriented work environment aid ethical workplace behaviour, or hinder it? Edward Lucas is an economist by training and a journalist by profession. He has worked for the (non-profit) BBC, as well as for daily and weekly commercial publications, most recently The Economist. In 1992 he founded and ran a newspaper in the Baltic states.

Seldom does graffiti prompt interesting theological thoughts. If you're lucky, you may see an occasional “Jesus loves you” or the more satirical “Jesus is coming, look busy” But most of the time graffiti is little more than the detritus of gangland and popular culture—incomprehensible tags, the names of football teams and so forth. So I was all the more impressed the other day to see something interesting painted onto one of those black telephone junction boxes, outside Victoria station. The first words read, “**Working for money is slavery**”.

It strikes a chord. Isn't being trapped in a dead-end job, flipping burgers, stacking shelves, picking vegetables or sweeping streets, being humiliated by your superior, cheated out of your wages, suffering dangerous or squalid working conditions-isn't all that just a modern kind of slavery? Marx spoke of wage-slaves in the context of 19th century industrial capitalism-but there are strong echoes of the same harsh, boring, and unjust lives in a 21st century service economy?

There’s no doubt that work gets a rough deal in the way it’s portrayed. Novelists such as Dickens portrayed the grinding, ghastly

world of work in the early days of industrial capitalism. Charlie Chaplin's film Modern Times showed a more hygienic, but no less soul-destroying world of repetitive mass production and exploitation. In the post-war world, the film I'm all right Jack gave a scalding and all-too-convincing portrait of the resentful, lazy, cheating, self-defeating ethic of the 1950s shop floor.

More recently, it's been the practices of the financial world that have stuck in our minds. Gordon Gecko claiming that "Greed is Good", or Tom Wolfe's Bonfire of the Vanities, with its memorable description of investment banking: a world where you cut a very big cake made of money, and share it out, while keeping the crumbs for yourself.

None of that is flattering. Work exemplifies for many of us everything that is wrong with society. The world of paid employment, in short, is unfair, boring, and most of all greedy. Money, we feel, demeans what we do. It reduces the human relationships between the producer and the consumer, the provider and the taker, to narrow and sterile confines of the cash nexus. When money comes in, humanity goes out.

And there is such an attractive-sounding alternative. The next line of the graffiti reads: **"work for love**". That sounds much better. After all, the things we do in our lives that are most important, like bringing up children, caring for our parents, loving our spouses and looking after our friends, are indeed work for love. Imagine a world in which we invoice our children at the age of 18 for the money we have spent on bringing them up. Or if we charged our parents by the hour each time we visited them in our old age. Spending time and money on other people without thought of reward is a powerful way of manifesting our love for them. The good Samaritan is the best-known example here: he didn't tell the wounded traveller "pay me back when you can". He gave and gave generously. It is tempting to think that it would have been an even more beautiful story if the innkeeper had refused to take any money too? Surely that is the model on which we should live our lives? Money represents greed and calculation: Christianity is about reckless selflessness-giving up not only your possessions and your time, but even your

life, for the good of others, at the ultimate extreme for people you do not even know, without calculation or qualification.

And there are indeed people who live by this rule: monks and nuns, who forswear any possessions of their own, are the most powerful example, but there are others too: volunteers, for example, must manage on the same benefits as the people they are helping. It's not necessarily a lifelong commitment. Charities that work with the poor, such as the Cyrenians where I spent my gap year working in a house for homeless people, often insist that their live-in volunteers live on exactly the same dole money as residents of the hostels.

And at a wider and more modest level, the idea that love of money is the root of all evil chimes with what we see in the people with jobs important in our own lives: the vicar, the teacher, the family doctor, or the artists and composers whose music inspires, consoles and enriches us. These jobs are not really just working for money. They are vocations—spiritual, emotional and aesthetic. Money is a by-product of what they do with their lives. In the modern world it may be a necessary by-product-not many people these days join the great religious teaching orders. But the salary is only seldom the main reason for working in these jobs. They are routes to what industrial sociologists call self-realisation.

Indeed the idea that money might be the main motivator in jobs like these strikes many of us as shocking and demeaning. I'll never forget when I was at the London School of Economics some two decades ago, when, as the final exams approached I and a bunch of other students asked the junior academic who took one of our main classes whether he'd mind holding some extra revision sessions. He looked at us coldly. “Sure: but will you pay me more?" he replied. Despite having spent the previous three years studying the economics of the labour market, I was very unsettled. He was a graduate student, paid by the hour, and acting in a wholly rational way. There was no reason why a dozen of us couldn't contribute a few pounds each to buy some extra hours of teaching. But it was a stark and dispiriting contrast to the inspired and inspiring teaching I'd had until then.

And although I think our anonymous graffiti writer is many respects gravely mistaken, here at least I agree with him. For those paths in life which are really a question of vocation, then working for purely for money is at least soul-deadening, if not slavery in the literal sense. If you are a priest, even of the most modern and liberal minded tendency, who no longer really believes in God. Or if you simply worn-out and find you parishioners' troubles tiresome, or if you are a teacher but have come to dislike children, and find the classroom boring, but carry on because you have only five years to go before you collect your pension, then there is certainly a question mark over your continued fitness for the job. And even for those people in such professions who still find the job interesting, on the whole we'd be worried, and rightly so, if someone was going into the priesthood, or teaching, or counselling, or social work, or mainly because they thought it was an easy way of earning lots of money.

So much for the true vocations. But what about that large category of jobs that are not exactly vocations, but are still in that happy land where job and hobby overlap. The obvious examples are artists, writers and musicians, but there are plenty more: the man fascinated by clocks who restores them, the woman who loves dogs and runs a kennels. Here our God-given talents, and the love and joy we feel when we exercise them, are woven into our working lives. Again, money is seldom the prime mover here. If as an artist you have a lucky break and sell some paintings for a lot of money, what do you do? Very few retire to their yachts; most will gladly seize the chance to paint-perhaps experimenting with something different. JK Rowling never needs to write another word, but is plugging away with the remaining three Harry Potter books.

It is beyond doubt, then, that there is a large kind of work where money is a by-product, but not the goal, of what we do all day. We might not be sufficiently committed to paint, sculpt, write, teach or preach if it were wholly unpaid, but we are happy to do it for less pay than we might make elsewhere, so long as it does not impose huge sacrifices on ourselves or our families.

Well that's fine, of course, for the kind of people that I've been dis-

cussing: those lucky enough to have jobs that they love. But is hard to draw a wider conclusion from that. What about the large number of people-certainly the majority in this country, and the vast majority in the world as a whole, who have jobs that are anything but love-able: jobs that are usually repetitive, often uncomfortable, arduous, humiliating, maybe even unhealthy or outright dangerous? Surely here our graffiti artist is right. If money is the main reason you do your job, and you'd certainly give it up if you were able, then it amounts, pretty much, to slavery.

I don't think so. For a start, slavery is much too strong a word. Like Stalinist and Nazi, it reflects conditions so extreme that there is seldom justification for using them about features of our own generally peaceful and pampered existence. Slavery is compulsory work coupled with absence of money-that's what makes it so abhorrent. Money means choice. It is the way we turn our time into something that lasts, something we can save or spend as we please. Slaves have no choice about where they work. Their masters' only consideration is the relationship between the price paid and the cost of keeping them alive.

Slavery is the very bottom rung of the ladder of human existence. Below that is only death by starvation. Just a step above slavery comes another money-less and miserable existence, subsistence farming. You eat what you grow and you grow what eat. The absence of money means that the subsistence farmer is tied to his land and the weather. Once money becomes a means of exchange, turning crops in the barn into cash in the pocket, the next step on the ladder is in reach, whether it's moving to another place, saving to make the farm bigger or better, or investing in children's education.

So boring work is not slavery. Nor is it necessarily bad to have boring work-the kind that at first sight has no inherent spiritual, emotional, aesthetic or other transcendent importance. At this point I would like to quote, but not, you'll be glad to hear to sing, some lines of a Teach Me thy God and King, a hymn by George Herbert:

This is the famous stone
That truth all to gold

For that which God doth touch and hold
Cannot for less be sold?

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine
Who sweeps a room as for thy cause?
Make that and the action fine.

That is, to put it mildly, an extremely ambitious goal. When I used to sing it as a child, in St Cross church in Oxford, I used to wonder if George Herbert had himself done a lot of room-sweeping, or whether he sat there reading Colossians chapter 3, writing hymns, and watching his servant doing the cleaning and thinking about the divinity of drudgery. It's all too easy to witter on about the nobility of labour when it is other people doing the sweating. It's rather like the people who worry that economic development is going to spoil primitive cultures, without thinking about the high infant mortality, low life expectancy, and shrunken horizons that are enjoyed, or not enjoyed, by the people actually concerned. As someone who has one of the nicest jobs in the world, writing more or less whatever I like for a generous and well-regarded newspaper, I have some hesitation in praising the station in life of people who work long and boring hours for less reward.

Yet from a Christian point of view, it is hard not to conclude that George Herbert is right, and the graffiti artist is wrong. I would also argue that George Herbert is righter and righter in a more modern society. There are four things that we find in the workplace which are all profoundly important, and transcend the simple business of earning a living by selling our labour. They are: service; solidarity; self-realisation and self-reliance.

The first of these is the most central. A paid job, in a modern democratic country with a market economy, exists for two and only two reasons: either because consumers want it, or because voters do. If the customers no longer buy the product or service with which a private-sector job is associated, then ultimately the employer will decide to divert that bit of his payroll elsewhere. Whether you are frying hamburgers, sitting at a supermarket

checkout, or answering the telephone in a call centre, you are doing something that someone, somewhere, is voting for with pounds and pennies, dollars euros and cents, in their pocket. The same goes for a job in the public services. The mechanism is not as crisp and crunchy as it is in private business-after the elections earlier this month, it seems dispiritingly soggy. It's possible for non-jobs to drift on for years and years. But in the end, politicians want to spend money on things that their voters like. And if a job contributes nothing to public safety, to public enjoyment, to public education and improvement, then sooner or later politicians will be inclined to send the taxpayers' money elsewhere. And if they don't, then the voters will eventually choose a bunch of politicians who will do that.

I don't want to sound pollyanna-ish about this. And there are two big provisos. The first is that there are jobs in the private sector where the interests of the business seem to be a long way from the interests of the customer. The extreme example would be dealing in addictive drugs, for example, like crack cocaine or tobacco, but there are plenty of other examples too. The high-pressure, high-margin end of finance, for example, selling expensive loans and credit cards to people who don't really understand what they are signing up for. Or the telephone salespeople who bamboozle you over the phone to change your electricity provider, or buy double-glazing, when you neither want nor need it. The ruthless and ingenious marketing of consumer goods to young children, the snake-oil merchants who sell useless or outright harmful quack remedies to the desperate, or the people who use bribery and corruption to sell arms to third world governments—all of us can draw up our own personal lists of jobs that we find more or less morally reprehensible.

Then there are jobs that may benefit the customer, but are bad for the wider society. The clever lawyers and accountants who help the rich, ruthless and well-connected to cheat the system, whether it's getting out of paying taxes, building a house in a beauty spot, or finding a legal loophole to get out of a criminal conviction that would see any ordinary citizen behind bars or heavily fined. But at least these are, more or less, exceptions.

On a wider scale, there are plenty of countries, such as Russia where

I worked for four years, where the whole relationship between state and society is very different. The state extracts the money it needs, buys the goods and services that it wants, and fixes the elections and the media to make sure that things stay that way. In this system, the state exists in predatory and parasitic mode, taking what it wants from the productive part of society, and giving back as little as possible. That turns the ethics of the workplace upside down. If your boss is stealing from the citizens or the voters, is it wrong for you to do so too? And why should you take pride in your work, or try to be a Christ-like servant in your dealings with colleagues and customers, when by any fair analysis, the organisation you work for should be abolished, and the job you are doing for it is abhorrent. If you are working in a Soviet or Nazi armaments factory, making weapons for a regime you despise, your moral choices are about passive and active resistance, balanced against, perhaps, your duties to your loved ones-but in no sense are you worried about taking pride in your work and delighting your boss.

But totalitarian countries are outside the scope of this discussion, or at least this part of it. I want to confine the analysis to countries where voters do make a difference, where the media is free to scrutinise the quality and effectiveness of public spending-and where the business environment is so competitive that bosses lie awake at night worrying whether they are giving their customers what they want. I know it's only a small part of the world, but it's the richest and most peaceful bit, and the bit that other less fortunate places seem to want to emulate.

I also want to exclude for the moment the kind of morally reprehensible jobs that I have outlined above. It is a matter for the individual conscience whether the arms trade, cigarette marketing, or the wilder shores of financial casino capitalism are the best use of our talents. What we can say with certainty is that the Christian has to make a moral choice about where he or she works, and how our God-given talents should be put to work. From a secular viewpoint, we may say all legal jobs are morally neutral. But that is not enough. We have to choose, and bear the consequences of our choices.

So given those provisos, what does that idea of service mean in practice? It means that when we go to work in the morning, we can at least in part think that our efforts in the course of the day are serving a wider purpose, even a rather dilute one. Public services are there because the public wants them. Private firms survive only so long as they offer what the customer wants.

Before developing this idea further, I want to make a brief academic digression. As some of you will know, the academic study of industrial relations has developed three basic models for explaining the attitudes that workers have to their employers.

The first model is unitarist - the idea that everyone is on the same side, has shared interests, any disagreements in the work place will be about how to achieve the commonly agreed ends, rather than about the distribution of profits, the organisation of working time, the level of wages and so on.

Second model is the pluralist. This was for decades seen as a much more realistic explanation than the unitarist model. Capital and labour have irreconcilable differences. They need each other, but they don't naturally get on. Their representatives will always need to negotiate, perhaps peacefully, perhaps driving their point home with strikes and lockouts, about issues like wages, overtime, working hours and so on. In extremis, one side may give way voluntarily: the unions will usually not want to drive the company to bankruptcy by wage demands; some employers may decide to put philanthropy before profit. But such cases are exceptions not the rule.

Third model is radical: the workers' struggle is not just about pay and conditions, but has a wider purpose: in the sixties, seventies and early eighties, this revolved round ideas such as workers' control, industrial democracy, nationalisation, the extension of trade unions rights, and radical social and economic change. From this point of view, relations in the workplace are the unjust and abhorrent practical expression of an unjust and abhorrent wider society. Changing one is the first step to changing the other.

Now if it works, the unitarist model, of shared goals and interests,

fits very neatly with the idea of service in the workplace. A company that offers profit sharing and share-options to its workers is encouraging them to take a unitarist approach to the firm's future: if you do well, we do well. Work hard, cut costs, think up new products, and the bonus will be good. A that treats its customers well will probably do the same to its workers. At best, that creates a positive spiral: satisfied customers mean satisfied shareholders and also satisfied workers. That brings out the best in us: we try harder, think harder, go the extra mile, show willing, help out, make allowances. It is fair to say that this is the benevolent ideal to which we should expect people to aspire.

But reality's another story. Despite the improvements in industrial relations over the past two decades, harmony and excellence are far from being the rule. If you work in a company where the managers are treat the workers badly, it's hard even for the most saintly employee to get very excited about the common interests of all sides. Labour, capital and the consumer resume their historical tug of war, and the question then is: what is the saintly, holy, morally right thing to do?

There is a line of theological reasoning which gives a very clear answer to this, dating from the way the first Christians dealt with slavery and Roman colonialism in the first century AD. The powers that be are ordained by God; Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. He who does not work, neither shall he eat. If you are willing to be sufficiently selective about texts and their interpretation, you can create a clear argument that the worker's job is to work and be grateful. If the manager is good, that's a bonus. But rebellion or resistance is not an option for the Christian. There are a number of protestant groupings that forbid membership of trade unions outright to their members for exactly this reason.

I don't think that holds water. It is also a Christian duty to stand up to bullying-not always on your own behalf, but certainly on behalf of people weaker and more needy than yourself. Although it certainly is a Christian duty to seek common ground and reconciliation where possible, that does not mean being a perpetual doormat for greedy, bullying, dishonest or incompetent bosses, or even worse

an accomplice in their bad behaviour.

One obvious thing to do is to leave. Pharaoh did not create a progressive modern workplace for the Israelites and they reacted sensibly by terminating their employment in Egypt and looking for a better business location-one flowing with milk and honey, albeit found after a bit of what nowadays might be called ethnic cleansing. And simply walking away may be the best thing to do in some circumstances. But not always. That brings me on to the second of my four points about the run-of-the-mill workplace: solidarity.

It is in solidarity with others that we become something bigger than ourselves alone. In its best sense, trade union activity has echoes of the Magnificat. By raising wages to the point where workers can feed their families, it fills the hungry with good things. By restricting the petty tyrannies of the workplace, it brings down the mighty from their seats. By creating new pathways to advancement and self-improvement, it exalts the humble and meek. In short, it turns the weak into the strong.

And faced with a harsh or incompetent employer, it is that pluralist model of industrial relations that offers the best way forward for the believer in the workplace. A really well-run company, one that is generous to those in need, sensitive to the day-to-day problems of its workers, dynamic and competitive in its reaction to the world outside, that kind of company will have little need of trade unions. But in one that is none of those things, standing up collectively for workers' rights is not only the ethically correct thing to do, but also the economically rational one. Bad and arbitrary decisions are more likely to be questioned by workers organised to defend their interests. If incompetent management is driving the business into the ground, it's only fair that the shareholders, who appoint the management, suffer more than the workers. If the shares become worth less, then someone will buy them who will install better management, to the benefit of everyone. And if the business goes bust, then it is freeing land and labour for a more productive use.

The virtue of solidarity in the workplace is that it turns an individual selfish response to a bad situation into a collective unselfish one.

When the only way of dealing with injustice is to exit, then those with the most oomph, energy and character will be the first to go, leaving the weaker brothers and sisters behind to face the employer's nastiness and incompetence. Without solidarity, the danger is that my discontent with my bad employer turns into a zero-sum game at the expense of my fellow-workers. If overtime, for example, is allocated on arbitrary or corrupt criteria, it is much better for the workers to get together and boycott all overtime until a new and fairer system comes into place than it is for me, as an individual worker, to use my brains, wits, connections or force of personality to get the best slice of the action possible. In this sense a strike is an extremely unselfish act. Say, for example, that a foreman is picking on a black worker for reasons of racial prejudice. If I keep my head down and say nothing, it costs me nothing. I may even benefit slightly, because it is less likely that the foreman picks on me. But the self-sacrificing, ethically and spiritually correct response is to befriend the persecuted worker, to challenge the foreman, and to threaten, and if necessary to carry out, collective action against the injustice.

It is important not to exaggerate here. The virtue of solidarity in the face of injustice does not create a blank cheque for unions. It is quite possible to think of examples where the Christian response to misguided workplace solidarity is to cross the picket line, and break ranks with fellow workers: there were examples of this in the 1960s when British workers threatened to strike if they were forced to work alongside black employees. Trade unions can be just as selfish and wrong-headed as the worst kind of management, and it may sometimes be the case that there is only a choice between the lesser of two evils.

But there is an important proviso. There is little that an individual worker can do to influence a bad lot of managers. But the trade union structure is, with a few exceptions, democratic. If you don't like what your shop steward is doing, you can stand for election against him. From the branch meeting to the annual conference, unions abound in opportunities for discussion about both central and peripheral issues. Apathy and selfishness mean that many of these opportunities are not used, or not used wisely. But they are

there.
And there is one further aspect to solidarity. Suppose not only the workplace is profoundly unjust, but the wider society is too. Then the more radical approach to industrial relations comes into play. Not perhaps nowadays in the Marxist sense, that a general strike will bring the nationalisation of the banks and downfall of capitalism, but at least in the sense that widespread industrial protests may bring the downfall of a bad government. The most compelling example of this was the Polish spring of 1980, when the interests of the industrial workforce in the shipyards, mines and steelworks of that country coincided with the increasing national self-confidence brought about by the election of the first Polish pope and his first papal visit to his homeland. The strikes of the polish workers dealt a deathblow to the claims that the Soviet Empire was about the dictatorship of the proletariat. Poland's not the only example-workers in Venezuela have tried, so far in vain, to bring down that country's deplorable government by strikes. In benighted, forgotten Belarus, the industrial workers are one of the few flickers of resistance to the despotic regime of Aleksander Lukashenka.

The third feature of life in the workplace is self-realisation. Some of you may be familiar with what psychologists call the Mazlovian hierarchy. This is a convenient typology of need. Our first and most basic needs are physical survival-food, warmth, shelter. Then we desire comfort, and less tangible needs such as choice and relaxation. At the apex of the pyramid is self-realisation: the chance to express ourselves, and transcend our day-to-day existence by aligning ourselves to a higher purpose.

I've already touched on this with the kind of work that is closer to a vocation than a job, where there is an inherently satisfying and enriching creative or emotional element. And I've already argued that the element of service to the wider public can make even a dull job a profoundly satisfying one. But there are some other aspects too.

The biggest is that for people living alone, or living in unhappy homes, work is an escape into a more interesting and happier world. For some the friendship of colleagues, the intellectual and social stimulation of the work place, may even be a substitute family. For

the shy, or depressed, the discipline of going to work each day, and the enforced contact with other people can prevent the gloom and isolation setting in. It should never be enough-after all, the vast majority of people will stop work at some point, and there needs to be something to take its place.

A second form of self-realisation is the knowledge that by earning money, even in a job that may not be essentially very rewarding, one is helping loved ones. The husband who takes on a dreary part -time job in order to finance his wife's studies; the parents who work longer and harder than they would like to pay for their children's education; the man who works an extra shift to buy a present for his girlfriend-all these are imbuing their jobs, however dreary, with a rich and deep spiritual meaning. They are a way for us to turn our own patience, effort and discomfort into a practical expression of love for those close to us.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this is people who go and work in another country in order to support their families. If you go into Westminster Cathedral for an early morning mass, you will see dozens of Filipino women, working as nannies, cleaners and maids for the households of SW1, who are supporting their families back home. Some of them are lucky and work with kind and respectful employers. Others are treated abominably, working long hours and suffering every kind of humiliation and hardship. It would be wonderful if the Philippines had been better governed—like neighbouring Singapore or Malaysia, for example—and was rich enough to provide good jobs and free education for its population. From a Christian perspective, we should certainly question the global economic system, and ask why some countries rise out of poverty while others stay mired in it. But we should also see the transcendent virtue of the sacrifices made by migrant workers who send remittances home. It would be easy for them to save the money they earn for themselves; to enjoy a little bit of the fruits of the developed first-world economy in which they work. They could have a nicer life now, or save for a prosperous old age. But that is only very rarely the case. For the vast majority of the Filipino workers in London, the sacrifice for their relatives is not only willingly

borne, but unquestioned.
Thirdly, even dull and repetitive jobs can have a role in our own spiritual discipline. When the mind is not fully engaged, there can sometimes be more room for contemplation and prayer, as well as friendship with others.

There's another hymn I'd like to quote here, it's New Every Morning by John Keble:
The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask
Room to deny ourselves, a way
To bring us daily nearer God

Again there's an important proviso: these are sentiments which flow easily from the pen and the lips, but are much harder to practise than to preach. But offering up the trivial round and the common task as a kind of prayer can at least blunt the edge of tedium and give a purpose to something that otherwise may seem pointless.

So there are three aspects to that seemingly unrewarding work for money which, as I am arguing, is anything but slavery: service, solidarity and self-realisation. But there's a fourth: self-reliance.

It's very easy as idealists to fall into the trap of perfectibility. Measured against divine love, so many things in our lives seem inadequate, and it's tempting to focus on those that are other people's fault. Bad jobs are indeed dreadful. Poor people may have a miserable time at work, just as they may have cramped uncomfortable homes, bad schools for their children, bad health care, and a hungry and uncertain old age.

We spend a lot of time at work-on average, for those in full-time employment, more than we do at home, or with our loved ones, certainly more than in prayer or worship. So it's tempting to see work as the source of everything we dislike about the modern world: for the poor and rich alike, it's stressful, unfair, demoralising, limiting-the way in which we shackle ourselves to a consumerist culture that forces us to work more and more in order to spend more and more. But that's a mistake. We should not focus on jobs as a symbol of

everything we dislike about the imperfect world we live in. A better world will undoubtedly have better jobs. And a less greedy world would probably work less and live better. But that does not mean that we should blame bad jobs for a bad world. The important thing about work is, in the end, not the constraints that it imposes, but the choices it creates.

That may sound odd. Madeleine Bunting argues in her new book about work that we have “no choice" but the treadmill. Only through overtime and the hunt for promotion, commission, and other forms of extra income, she argues can we afford the so-called “necessities" of modern life. Through consumerism, she claims, we find our sense of dignity. “You put up with the bullying boss and salve your wounded pride by treating yourself to a pedicure at the weekend". If that really were the choice, it would indeed be an exhausting and debilitating one. We do things we don't like in order to buy things we don't need, and to do so, we work ever-longer hours, in conditions of ever-greater uncertainty.

But the Christian ethic makes the work-life balance look a bit different. For a start, the special holiday, the pedicure, the new car--look less attractive. That means the choices we have about the kind of work we do are a bit more real. Yes we can choose to do a high-pressure, high-income job, and identify ourselves completely with the success of our company, our team, or our project. But we don't have to. We also have the choice to step back, to put work in its box, and decide to spend our time differently. That may mean turning down a new job, consciously avoiding a promotion or transfer that would harm our family life-or it may mean a decision to work particularly hard for a period in order to discharge one set of responsibilities, in order then to spend another chunk of our lives doing something that uses our time and energy differently.

Every individual will approach these decisions differently. But from a Christian viewpoint there is a common thread: we have not sold our souls to our jobs. We are not serving Mammon, let alone worshipping him. We may need to play the game of self-promotion, to chase success, to work longer hours than we would ideally like, but at least we are approaching these choices with **values firmly**

rooted in a moral universe that transcends the simple issues of power, fame, money and success. Work is certainly a test of our faith and determination, it requires clear thinking, the willingness to make choices, to be flexible and adaptable, to put our selfish interests for comfort and rest behind the needs of others. But that is a matter for rejoicing. How much better to have complicated choices that test our God-given capacity for reason, learning, and self-sacrifice than to be faced with the narrow world of semi-feudal subsistence farming and primitive agriculture of biblical days.

Some words of John Paul the second, in an excellent restatement of the Catholic Church's social teaching with regard to work. *"Work is **a Good thing for humanity - because through work we transform nature, adapting it to our needs... and achieve fulfilment as human beings.**"*

Book Review – 1
Silence and Honey Cakes
Rowan Williams, (Lion, £9.99)

Margaret Joachim

This little book has already been around for a couple of years, but at the convent where I make my annual retreat the nuns are still queuing to read or re-read it. It is short (just over 100 pages), relatively cheap (£9.99 in hardback), and quite wonderful. If you have previously struggled with Rowan Williams' writing, don't worry. This is Rowan Williams speaking, and it is as clear as he is in the pulpit. The main body of the book is a transcript of four addresses he gave to an Australian seminar run by the World Community for Christian Meditation. Reading it, one can hear his voice and sense how much his audience must have enjoyed and been challenged by them.

If you feel that the Desert Fathers and Mothers can have little relevance to life as a 21st century MSE, prepare to be surprised. As well as one very specific reference in a story told about Abba Antony, one of the originators of the desert tradition (which I won't spoil for you - it's on page 43), the book is full of helpful ideas and exposition. Certainly the desert monks and nuns left the cities and secular life (and

the organised churches) to gain a greater understanding of God in the silence and vastness, but not necessarily the solitude, of the desert. But what they found and learned there, about themselves, each other and God, is of timeless value in any environment.

"What if the real criteria for a properly-functioning common life, for social existence in its fullness, had to do with this business of connecting each other with life-giving reality, with the possibility of reconciliation or wholeness?" (p. 32.) This question is posed as part of a discussion of the desert understanding of love and duty towards one's neighbour. One must know oneself, but this knowledge is necessary because it enables one truly to know one's neighbour and "put him in the way of God." The greatest sin, for the Fathers, is the one Jesus describes in Matthew 23, 15: to shut the door of the Kingdom to others, or to manipulate their access to it in ways which mandate conformance with our own views of what the entry criteria should be or which reinforce our personal pretensions to piety or spiritual achievement. Thus the Fathers' message runs completely counter to religious fundamentalism, extremism and notions of churchmanship, and outlaws any form of competition, whether *"competitive virtue, or competitive suffering or competitive victimage, competitive tolerance or competitive intolerance or whatever."* Some of this is perhaps easier for us to understand as MSEs, with our semi-detached links to the institutional churches, than it will be for self-confident Christians who are busy maintaining their own certitudes within their self-chosen, self-defining groups.

One of the Fathers' most important themes, which they expressed in many different ways, was that of stability, of acceptance of responsibility for who and what one is, of commitment to the full, costly and often painful exploration of one's humanity before God. "Go, sit in your cell and give your body in pledge to the walls." Be who you are, where you are. Jesus himself, says Dr. Williams, was *"above all (and) literally 'a body pledged to the walls' to the limit of this world. His Body the Church is 'promised' to the end of time, never defeated by Satan's forces, and that means that in this Body Jesus works with all the limitations, the fragility and the folly of the human beings he summons to be with him."* He stresses the im-

portance today of having a 'pledged Body' (or person) in a *"community from which so much has fled or drained away."* And he points out, as the desert monks themselves discovered, that *"holiness involves a new encounter with the prosaic along the way to transformation."* That encounter takes place in the here and now of our actual humanity - who we are, where we are, in what we are doing every day.

Rowan Williams clearly has a lot to say to MSEs. I hope that, as our Patron, he can be persuaded to come to one of our events before too long. But while we're waiting, get hold of this book, read and apply liberally.

Book Review - 2

Priest & Worker

The autobiography of Henri Perrin, trans. Bernard Wall

Macmillan / Catholic Book Club, 1965

Rob Fox

It may seem strange to review a book first published (in French) 50 years ago, but over the next few pages I hope it becomes apparent why this one is well worth it!

A few minutes spent casting the eyes along the second hand selves of the SPCK bookshop in Birmingham before a recent CHRISM Committee meeting proved fruitful when they fell on a copy of Henri Perrin's 'autobiography'. Parenthetical as it is not conventional. The book was compiled by a group of his friends after Perrin's untimely death at 40, in 1954, in a motorbike accident. It is largely a collection of his letter's (and a few to him), with a minimum of explanatory narrative in between. The result is an intimate view of one worker-priest's experience of that ministry, with enough context to illuminate the early years of the French movement as a whole.

First, an overview. Perrin studied at a seminary from the age of 12, was ordained priest in 1938, and joined the Jesuits. With them he engaged in teaching and youth work, being influenced by both the extensive Catholic social action movements of the pre-war era and the manifest marginalization of the Catholic Church from the bulk of the people. Although very much a loyal Catholic in his acceptance of

authority and doctrine, Perrin held views on the self-inflicted wounds of the Church and the irrelevance of so much of its ritual that I identify with strongly. In the '30s Perrin travelled widely in Europe and the Near East, did his national service, and on the outbreak of war in 1939 was called up into an Algerian regiment, wounded and captured in the fall of France the next summer. Recovered and repatriated he then began work with the Mission de Paris in a working class arrondissement.

When conscription of French workers to Germany began in 1943, Perrin and a few other priests secured permission from their bishops to go with them as volunteers, but also as workers, not revealing their priesthood to workmates or German organisers. Perrin spent 8 months near Leipzig, gaining the trust and appreciation of his fellow workers, who slowly learned of his vocation, before being 'found out' by the Germans and sent back to Paris at the end of May, 1944. Some of the other priests were less fortunate, being despatched to concentration camps. In the summer of 1945 Perrin returned to Germany to help arrange the repatriation of the hundreds of thousands of French workers, then help build up co-operative and reconciling Catholic youth work between the two countries.

By 1947 Perrin was convinced that he was called to minister as a worker-priest. He was not the first, post-war: a small group were already, famously, working on Marseilles docks. With the blessing of the Archbishop of Paris, support of two local parishes, and aid of a small but dedicated group of lay co-workers, he set about entering the life of the poor working class arrondissemont XIII. He lodged in a series of run-down rooms and took various low-paid manual jobs in the factories locally. He made it his practice not to advertise his priesthood, but not to dissemble as it emerged. This seems to have worked. It is not easy to appreciate how far the Catholic Church was (and is) irrelevant to working class life in France. As Perrin himself put it, the ordinary people had even ceased to call "caw-caw" as a black-robed priest passed. By gaining people's trust and respect for his personal qualities – especially integrity - first, he was able to help them look passed their prejudice when his priesthood became known.

After three years living thus, and having postponed his tertianship once already, Perrin's Jesuit superiors insisted he undertake the year of study and retreat it entailed. During this time he realised that, reluctantly, he could not remain a Jesuit. The order demanded deployability and obedience, and Perrin was so convinced of God's call to him as a worker-priest that he recognised he was not prepared to be otherwise deployed. The (new) Archbishop of Paris and the Jesuit metropolitan agreed that Perrin be asked to leave Paris, though they were content for him to remain a worker-priest, so with heavy heart he removed to the south-east of France and took a job as a mechanic on the massive Arc dam project in Savoy.

In the crude 'township' that housed the French, Italian, Spanish and North African workers on the dam and associated tunnelling, life was as tough as it could be. Perrin soon gained respect for his integrity and fairness and was before long co-opted on to the union committee and Joint Works Committee. It was some months before his priesthood became known, most widely after the death of a worker, whose funeral he took, but by this time he was known as a workmate first, and the evidence of his writings is that he was simply accepted for *who* he was. Perrin was involved in a range of union activities: negotiating with the management, helping organise two long strikes, welfare and support schemes for fellow workers. There are two passages quoted from a Communist-run journal praising his qualities and work in the comradeliest terms!

It was this association with the unions and preparedness to work with anyone, including Communists, which eventually proved the worker-priest movement's undoing. By the early 1950s the Mission de France was in full swing to develop the movement: it had its own seminary, the most influential bishops in France backed the movement, and the numbers were growing – over 70. Significantly, requests were coming in from other countries to train worker-priests. Then in the spring of 1954 Rome intervened. In a series of directives the French bishops were firmly told that the movement was to be reined in: the seminary was to close, no priest was to take full-time secular work, they were not to hold any office in a secular organisation, and they were to play a full role in parish organisation –

on pain of excommunication. The worker-priests themselves were appalled and held a series of meetings to decide what to do. About a third submitted to the new discipline while most of the rest remained in their calling. Perrin was an exception to both. The work in Savoy had just come to an end so he was jobless. He secured agreement from a local bishop to take a sabbatical, which he spent reflecting on what to do next and visiting family and friends. He considered asking to be 'laicised', but never posted the letter. It was on one of his trips to visit friends that he lost control of his motorbike and was killed instantly.

The book that is his memorial is an extraordinarily good read as well as being a window into the early worker-priest movement. The letters themselves are thoroughly readable, the minimalist link material is well selected to complement the story Perrin tells, and the translation captures the immediacy of what each letter relates. Perrin himself comes across as both human and led by unconditional love for those with whom he worked. He clearly gave himself and his talents in the service of others, which was recognised. Typically he took no pride in what he did, and several times appears embarrassed by the gratitude of others. Significantly there is no sense whatsoever of self-abasement on the part of Perrin, and not a hint regarding other worker-priests. Sharing the daily work and life experiences of ordinary people was not 'beneath' them but rather the joy of following God's calling.

There is much I could quote, but that might spoil the pleasure of reading the whole book. One dialogue I will refer to though. A Jesuit friend wrote to Perrin about his view of the priesthood – a high and traditional line. Perrin's reply is typically right to the point, and expresses his drive to minister among the people. "The priesthood, far from belonging to us, is delegated to us by the Body of Christ, which is the whole Christian community, of which you are a member. The whole universe is sacred from the fact that it finds its unity from Christ and bathes in the grace of the Holy Ghost. Sometimes I get the impression that the world we live in ... seems to us purely and simply the kingdom of evil, as yet not divinised. Whereas a vision of genuine faith seems to me to demand that we view the world not only as wrestling with God but also as already

making its way slowly towards Him, through the Incarnation."
So how is this different to ministry in secular employment? Firstly, the worker-priests experienced a call to a different expression of ministry after already having been called to the priesthood. Having made this point it is also very much the case that the worker-priest movement was from the beginning far from exclusively priestly. Perrin was clearly following a normal pattern when working as part of a cell group of lay, religious (especially nuns) and other worker-priests. This more closely parallels MSE. A second difference is that MSEs predominantly remain in the work milieu in which they are called. By the nature of Catholic selection and training for the priesthood, especially in pre-war France, the French worker-priests could rarely have had first-hand experience of the work and social environments in which they were called to work for the Kingdom.

MSE is not the *same* as being a worker-priest, but Perrin's experience makes it easy to see where the common ground, of which there is much, lies. This excellent edition will (eventually) find it's way into the Michael Ranken Memorial Library. Please DO read it, and keep your eyes peeled for a copy lurking on a second-hand shelf.

Church watch

The Church of England is conducting a survey of the ethnic and disability composition of its ordained clergy. The need for the questionnaire sent out in June highlights the paucity of central records of clergy – and most likely Readers and other categories of employees and volunteer staff. Does anyone know if a similar survey is being conducted of these groups? The question is: when will a comprehensive record be established of the Church's 'voluntary' ministers, lay and ordained.

Another worry is the increasing proportion of income and capital resource being expended on maintaining places of worship. Half of congregations are said to number under 50 souls and one suggestion mooted is that some meet in homes during the winter months to save having to heat over-large churches.

The Times reported on 8 June that the Church of England is planning to cull 3,000 stipendiary clergy posts to help balance the books. This was strongly denied two days later by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who pointed out that in 2004 566 new candidates were recommended to train for the ordained ministry. What he omitted to mention was that half of these will not be receiving a Church stipend. The Bishop pointed out that "the Resourcing Mission Group document considers how, in today's circumstances, the Church can use more effectively for mission all the resources at its disposal. Certainly there are substantial challenges to be faced, but the excellent performance of the Church Commissioners in recent years and above-inflation increases in the amounts given by parishioners mean that resources have continued to grow." An acknowledgement of the contribution of self-supporting ministers – MSEs, OLMs, NSMs, Readers and many others – would have been nice.

The United Reformed Church has a scheme called Special Category Ministry, which allows for a controlled number of URC ministers to be deployed outside the usual Synod quotas in a variety of pioneering and boundary edge roles. As part of current 'Catch the Vision' campaign to encourage all members to be involved in the Church's ministry, it is proposed to expand the Special Category Ministry scheme, making more resources available for Districts and Areas who want to develop new models of ministry.

The best people for some specialist roles will not always be URC ministers and so part of the proposal will be to make the new posts open to ministers from other denominations or, in some circumstances, lay people. In this way it is hoped to address several pressure points in the life of the United Reformed Church. For example, we need to find ministers for churches with congregations worshipping in more than one language.

Kom Helge Ande

'Come, Holy Spirit'; traditional Swedish prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit, come to me
Illuminate my soul.
Fill my mind
So I may remain in thee.
Let life's light shine upon me

And lead me upon the true way.
I will give myself wholly to thee.

Pentecost 2005 - UK Paper

The 2005 gathering of European Worker-Priests took place at Pentecost in Belgium. In preparation for the event, national groups were asked to respond to 4 questions, agreed at a planning meeting in Paris in October 2004. Here is the translation of the paper presented by the UK contingent.

1. Workers, Unemployed, Pensioners – what do we do in these situations? With whom, for whom, for what do we therefore take action?

What do we do? We do our work the same as the others, among the others and with the others with whom we work. That is to say we have a vocation to work in the many different situations and the many different levels of our businesses in which we find ourselves. (It is no longer necessary to explain that we have become priests while we remained in our own jobs).

But, perhaps, we work with a different meaning (see below). We can explain with some small examples:

- Phil works in a form of about 150 employees. We give service to our clients for the safety of chemical processes in the industrial world and the oil and gas industries. But he also has the responsibility in the firm for the health and safety of his colleagues. And in the previous week he found it necessary to say to the Directors that: "I believe in Safety to save my colleagues and other people, not to gain a commercial advantage".
- Margaret had to change her role in a large firm which provides service for the IT systems of large commercial clients. In these great changes and the pressure which follows from them, it was others in the workplace who recognised the different meaning. She left an office of many people – and some among them have spoken of the reality which they had seen.
- And for those in retirement? It is an important question for many among us - does retirement become the time for rest, or a time

to engage with new struggles and engagements? There are, for example, many people who engage in the politics for the older members of society – "grey power".

2. In these situations, are we conscious of the new enslavements which are developing? Which enslavements do we live or do we spot in the society in which we live and work?

We find new forms of slavery in all the levels of society and business enterprises:

- For all those who work there is a slavery of stress, of pressure and of the need to work longer and longer hours. This is increasingly so for those who rise to the higher levels in the business. Indeed, they receive more money and better packages, but at what price to themselves?
- But the same pressure exists at all levels. "In our firm (Phil says) we had to sign a new contract – this would give us all, after several years, shares in the business. So we are "married" to the business – and we must work all the more to gain the recompense."
- We see other new slaveries. Many people are employed in small contracting firms – cleaning, warehousing, security, nursing etc. This is the world of "out-sourcing" – minimum salaries, much to do with insufficient time and without the security of work tomorrow.
- But there is a fourth form of slavery – of those who are unable to work. Or rather, those who can only work outside the systems of organised business – "the black economy". Because their work is not regulated, they receive perhaps €40 for a day's work – exploited by others.

When one is retired one can work with the churches in the local community. One can fight the slavery of the young – a slavery of poverty and frustration. As a result of the pressures from school, family and government, young people find themselves in many difficult situations, and many things seem impossible to do.

It is important that the resources of the churches are used to create opportunities for young people, if the young want to join in the community. Often, the churches and the people of God seem to be afraid of confrontation with the community – another slavery. A priest can help people to look for ways to liberty and equality for everyone.

3. Around us and with us people struggle for a better world, but in different ways from us. What motivates them? What can they give to us?

We must say that there are many people who say that a better world will come through economic growth. There are many Christians in our countries who say (and we think, believe) that the key is to be found in the creation of greater and greater wealth. We know of Christian organisations in England who speak of the world of workers from this perspective. And we must accept that they say this with the sincerity of their personal faith.

And we must acknowledge that, in England as in other European countries, that continual growth has given a better lie to many people. But again we ask – at what price? What does this continual growth do – to men and women, and to the whole world? Does this give a sustainable model?

But, certainly, there are others who want to find a more simple life, a life more in sympathy with a world of limited resources; who change their lives and their ways of living to look for a sustainable model and to work for a better environment. And there are Christians among them who say this with the sincerity of their personal faith.

We live between the two. We try to understand the two propositions. And we hope that we shall be able to reach a synthesis – in our work and in our lives.

4. European Worker Priests, in a secularised and multi-religious world – what meaning do we bring for the

people with whom we share life and work?

- **how to be intelligible for our companions in work and struggles?**
- **and in all this, of our experience of Jesus Christ ?**

For us it is very important to say that we want to live the same life as our colleagues in the world of work. Therefore the meaning that we bring is to say, through our lives, that we believe that God is there – that is to say that in all our life we can make the experience of the presence of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.

We hope that this meaning is visible throughout life and work. But we know that this meaning remains for the most part hidden. And we accept that it is very difficult to speak with others about this reality in the context of the office or the factory. (It remains even more difficult to speak of it in the context of the church!).

But they come. The little moments where one can speak of this meaning. It comes – the question from a colleague or from a customer: "why are you working here as a Priest?" And the response – simply – "because God is here!"

Phil discusses the finer points of brewing Belgian beer!

European Worker-Priests: Probably the most Significant Ecumenical Gathering of 2005

Stan Frost & Phil Aspinall

The questions seemed easy but it took 3 days of discussion to compare the answers – there were the usual language difficulties coping with personal limitations and attuning to assorted accents sharing a lingua franca. As usual the main language was French, although there was translation into Flemish on the Saturday. And the Germans especially were particularly helpful in translating the French into English and vice versa (ah, the gifts of tongues that the Spirit gives!) Maybe this is what it used to be like when France ruled Europe, everyone had to use the same language and probably experienced the same difficulties. Fortunately the fluent ones steered the proceedings sensibly, although they also tended to be the ones who made most contributions. But there was enough information coming through to help build a picture of the outcomes from discussion in several countries across the Union. France, Germany, Spain, Catalonia, and Italy were represented, as well as the two Belgian groups (Walloon and Flemish) and the UK.

We met in the old abbey at Drongen, which dominates the little village in the suburbs of Gent. It had been a premonstratensian abbey that had then become a Jesuit seminary. Now most of it is a well-appointed conference centre and a small part is a home for retired Jesuits. The surrounding grounds were superb and very relaxing. As well as a meeting room we had a snug little bar - with a supply of Belgian beer on tap and various offerings of potent spirits from the participating countries.

The European Union and the Constitution were a big issue with the group and the British attitude towards the Constitution might well influence the way in which we are perceived by the group. But that is still for the future. By now of course, after the French and Dutch Referenda, the future has caught up with us and will no doubt give a changed backcloth for the meeting in 2006 which is to be in Germany.

The issues raised by the questions this year, provoked similar responses from different countries – there is a separate article in this edition of the Journal, which gives the questions and our British responses. Wherever we are, what we do presents the same challenges of who we are and what is possible. Being retired or unemployed offers different opportunities and inspirations. Working outside the church encourages the Worker Priest (Pretre Ouvrier) to be more of an entrepreneur, dealing with circumstances as they arise and without the structures and constraints provided and imposed by the parochial system.

Phil Aspinall and Peter King, as well as myself, represented CHRISM; Eileen Frost came along to meet with old friends and to help with translation. Peter gave a succinct account of the British Immigration Policy and the difference between immigrants and asylum seekers. This has not only pre-occupied the British electorate over the past few months but is also a political football throughout Europe. Peter explained his personal difficulties in making just and right decisions in stressful circumstances and when the personal situations of those he cares for are often both difficult and emotionally charged.

This short presentation gave a succinct summary of how things are in Britain and reinforced some of the contributions of others seeking new ways of doing and being – struggling to change what happens to make a better world. Knowing that many people around the table were no longer in paid employment it was a privilege to share their undiminished enthusiasm and concern to struggle to improve things and to work for a Better World. They each remained active and concerned about the local and national issues they live with, engaging with people in diverse circumstances who struggle against the odds to survive and thrive.

The questions, prepared well in advance of the meeting, guided us from personal challenges to identify how society is creating new slavery. Themes seemed to keep recurring: consumption, social isolation, de-location, and working hours. The talk is of "power to chose" but people find there is no choice and suffer a loss of per-

sonal sovereignty. We talked about the slavery of women, as the victims of violence.

The effects of job insecurity, political policies, the media, expensive housing, threats to pensions and the underlying influences of globalisation combine to contribute to poverty which affects all age groups. We talked both about the changes to the world of work and what we do within it: "to pose the signs of hope". One person told the story of their whole day - and some of us wondered if it would have been good to have space for each of us to do this.

Saturday afternoon we went by coach to a local steel works. Here they transformed raw materials of iron ore and coal, with some scrap metals, into stainless and specialist steels. It was a 24-hour operation and we were shown each stage in the process from smelting to galvanising and coating to storing the final products. It was fascinating to see - but there was some concern that we didn't meet with any of the workers. This emphasized that we had risked losing the recurrent theme of working with others (such as anti-globalists and fellow union workers) in a shared humanity, and the meaning discovered in living with others. The motivation of others doesn't matter - the key thing is to build a better world. Don't look for the differences - but for what unites, and what we are united against. Many considered the 4th question about experiences of God in the workplace the least important (and it might have been changed if the Germans had been at the planning meeting). The issue is not what I take or experience, but the process of being with others. "I wanted to go into a convent to give my life to nursing; I went to work in a factory and the people there (of other faiths or none) gave me the gift of faith".

The discussion on the questions was brought together in the Saturday evening Pentecost Eucharist, led by the Flemish group. We all joined in the Eucharistic prayer together - the service was facilitated by a lay man and the bread was broken and distributed by women. For the "sermon" we were invited in small groups to write our consensus words onto building blocks that could be the gifts (of the spirit) that we wished for the world today to build the fabric of a Better World – Justice and Peace occurred on many groups' blocks.

On the Monday afternoon – a small work group was left with the task of generating questions for the next meeting in 2006. Whilst Phil and the team laboured over the linguistic detail, the rest of us went in minibuses to visit Bruges. We were led by Jaak Kerkhofs (who is on the organisation team) and Jef Devisscher, who had generously kept the group supplied with beer during the evenings.

We were taken to the centre which Jeff had helped build on a derelict garage site in down town Bruges. This is an impressive community enterprise which provides assorted activities – seemed to be everything from Billiards to Yoga especially for the elderly local residents. The premises were also of very high quality with stainless steel fittings and marble finishing. We had coffee served from the kitchen adjacent to the computer room. They have a web site in Flemish (www.stubbekwartier.be). We also had time for a quick guided walk around the town to see the canals, chocolate shops and lace working but not enough time to go into the museums, though we managed a visit to the Church of the Holy Blood. Despite the best efforts to get us back into the mini buses quickly we did not arrive back at the centre in Ghent until well after the start of the evening meal due to slow traffic on the motorway. (Yes – the Belgians have bank holiday traffic too!).

Some questioned the committee approach to developing next year's theme, and really wanted the whole group involved democratically in deciding the theme - but we managed to resist making further changes in the bar that evening. This ensured that the working party finished their task so that sometime after the meeting a copy of the questions for next year were circulated. We expect to include these in the first edition of the Journal for 2006. This gives us time to cogitate and discuss so that whoever represents the UK and CHRISM at the meeting in Germany next Pentecost can go well prepared. Answers are invited – on an email, sometime before Easter 2006.

If you would like to attend the next get-together please let Phil or someone on the CHRISM Committee know of your interest.

Tentmaker Conference in the USA

As reported in the April Journal, the USA Tentmaker conference will be held November 4 - 6 at the St. Mary of the Lake Conference Center at Mundelein, Illinois, just outside Chicago.

The organising committee has told us that this year's conference will feature the progress of the Bishop's Advisory Council on Tentmaking Ministry in the Diocese of Chicago. This group grew out of the APT/ NASSAM conference held at Mundelein in 2000. Davis Fisher is the moderator of the Bishop's Council and he reports that the group is keen to take leadership at the November conference. The Bishop of Chicago will be at the conference, as will the Dean of the Episcopal Seminary in Evanston. They hope that the Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of Chicago will also attend, and that former member of the General Assembly staff, Tom Dietrich, will also be at the conference – he has been a staunch supporter of the Presbyterian tentmakers.

CHRISM members are warmly invited to attend. For more information, contact Phil Aspinall, or check the NASSAM website www.nassam.org.

3IG Launch Event

For some years there has been an attempt to draw together an International Interfaith investment network. This has come to assume the title 3IG (International Interfaith Investment Group), and it was launched on 11 April this year. (Interestingly around then I read a very informative paper on Islamic finance – Ed.).

The following is an address by Richard Chartres, the Bishop of London and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Church Commissioners for England, for the launch.

After the prudent research and feasibility stage, in which the Alliance for Religions and Conservation has played such a notable part in animating the meetings in New York, London and Istanbul, we are now

on the eve of the formal launch of the International Interfaith Investment Group. Representatives of the founding members are assembled; Buddhists, Christians, Druze, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians supported by major banks and investment advisory groups.

It has been estimated that the portfolios held by the world's religious bodies amount to about 6% of the total world investment capital but of course the reach and influence of the great world faiths into their various constituencies is even greater. We should not underestimate the influence which we could exert. Recent examples of initiatives launched by members of faith communities and supported by religious bodies include the Jubilee 2000 campaign to secure debt relief for some of the world's poorest countries and the continuing Fair Trade campaign on behalf of primary producers. Both these campaigns have had considerable impact and have shifted the terms of the debate about debt and trade justice.

Together we could be influential in developing a dialogue and a practice of faith-consistent investing. This is one of those moments where our one wired-up world is struggling to express its unity while celebrating the diversity of our voices.

The trouble is that we have hardly known as people of faith what to say in this area of investment policy, beyond the scope of some traditional prohibitions. I remember a Russian priest in the early eighties of the last century, prophesying that believers would soon be able to speak on the radio. It seemed inconceivable at the time but it has come to pass. There was another part of the prophecy, however, "they will be able to speak on the radio", he said, "and they won't know what to say". We have many opportunities but sometimes what we say, especially in the field of macro-economics and responsible investment, is sadly illiterate.

In Christian discourse the erroneous translation of one of the most familiar texts from the bible has not helped. Paul is commonly quoted as saying in his letter to Timothy that "money is the root of all evil." In fact the word he used is "philargyria" – this is falling in love with money for its own sake and treating it like an idol.

We should spend time with the Hebrew Scriptures. By chance the first reading set for Matins this morning was an extract from the eighth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. A wonderful picture is given of the wealth which God intends his people should enjoy in a "land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass." But the passage continues, Beware lest when thou hast eaten and are full thou shouldest say "my power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth" instead we are to "remember the Lord God", the God of justice and compassion for the poor and needy.

All the faiths represented here treat wealth not as an idol but as a tool. We have funds which we invest in order to provide resources for worship as well as to finance community building and development work to alleviate poverty and need. If we did not invest prudently the poor would be the sufferers and the various aspects of our agenda of social and spiritual regeneration would be starved of resources. Quite apart from our fiduciary responsibilities as Charity Trustees, we should be acting in an ethically dubious manner if we did not respect our duty of care for our beneficiaries.

But we do have an opportunity. Our funds are modest but not negligible. We have to balance our fiduciary responsibilities with a spiritual imperative to be faith- consistent investors and to learn by being engaged in the debate.

There has always been a *via negativa* in that we do not invest in areas which we consider to be negative or inimical to human well being such as the international arms trade. This obviously continues to be a vital part of any faith-consistent investing.

Calculations are done of how much income is forgone as a result of running an ethical investment policy of this kind. One London firm, CCLA suggested that the figure in 2004 was a diminution of 0.63%

on the return that could have been expected from a portfolio with no ethical inhibitions.

While respecting this *via negativa*, 3IG is proposing something rather more adventurous, a *via positiva.* It could have three tracks.

First is there a potential for deliberately investing in those enterprises directly involved with beneficial developments in areas of most concern to people of faith?

Faith communities invest for the long term which in any case has an impact on their investment strategy. Could support for the industry concerned with developing the technology for and the production of renewable energy be the kind of investment which balances responsibility to beneficiaries with pro-active faith consistent investing? Part of the preparation for this launch has investigated this possibility.

Britain according to the recent survey in the Economist derives only about 4% of its energy from renewable sources which is less than America or China. There would seem to be scope locally for a closer look at this sector as a subject for a proactive faith-consistent strategy.

Second as responsible players we are in a position to engage in dialogue even with multinationals given the international character of our constituency and our many opportunities to highlight particular issues.

Global business is organised in conglomerates and it is difficult to target investment in a way that isolates ethically challenging parts of the business. Hence it is very important that faith communities should use their involvement in the market to be ethically informed and concerned investors, and at the very least more frequent attendees at AGM's to ask searching questions. I am grateful for the lead given in this respect by Andreas Whittam Smith a former financial journalist who is now the First Church Estates Commissioner.

Recent examples of more probing dialogue by faith based investors

include conversations with Shell about oil extraction in the Delta of Nigeria and what can be done to reduce corruption and to secure a fairer return for the local community from the wealth that is being extracted. Also, just to draw another example from the experience of my own community, as both a landowner and investor, our continuing dialogue with the large supermarkets aims at providing a fairer return for primary producers.

These are activities which are both ethically responsible and also in line with our fiduciary responsibility to our beneficiaries.

Thirdly there is the possibility and this cannot fail to be enhanced by the network we are launching together in 3IG, of ourselves developing in partnership with banks and other providers of expertise some faith based vehicles for investment in beneficial areas. Our constituencies dispose of infinitely more resources than the relatively modest historic assets held by the central institutions of the faiths themselves but we could develop attractive investment opportunities with the hope of appealing to our wider membership.

One example of such a potential investment opportunity is the plan developed by the Church of Sweden with its close links with government and centuries of experience in managing forests, to replant the forest on the Lichinga plateau in Northern Mozambique, one of the poorest regions of that very impoverished country. The forest was cut down and sold during the era of Soviet domination and the present plan endorsed by the Mozambiquan Government and the World Bank has been developed in partnership with the Anglican Diocese of Niassa to benefit local people. In the process they have been enlisted as enthusiastic allies in protecting the investment. They will benefit also from the development of secondary enterprises like a furniture factory.

This is one of those areas of life where we can look together in the same direction and build our unity with integrity as people of faith. We can learn from one another and from the complexities of the scene which presents itself as soon as we set out to be serious, ethical players. Those gathered here this afternoon represent the rich Jewish tradition of reflection on the ethical conduct of business and

on the generosity which is such a marked feature of the Jewish community, certainly in London. It is good to have a Buddhist contribution speaking from a culture which has commended the restraint of appetite and craving as a contribution to living a balanced life by following the middle way. Then there is the Christian ethical tradition which is fed from both Athens and Jerusalem but which also seeks to follow Jesus by respecting the reciprocity of "do as you would be done by" but then by seeking, as he did, to go beyond reciprocity in a life of self giving.

Especially important for Christians is Jesus' meditation on the Rabbinic teaching which combines love of God with love of neighbour. Jesus was asked by a prudent lawyer about the limits on neighbour love – 'Who is my neighbour?' was the question. In reply Jesus told the story of a man mugged and lying wounded by the roadside. The professionals of his day saw him lying there but alas they were on their way to attend a conference with the Chief Constable about reducing violent crime and could not stop to assist the victim. In the end it was a most surprising person, perhaps for us someone with no religious convictions whatsoever, who gave the wounded man some practical help. The question is not so much "what are the limits on who is my neighbour" but "to whom can we be a neighbour".

In our circumstances we are seeing more and more that some of our most important neighbours to whom we have a great responsibility are yet to be born. We are living in a way that is exhausting finite resources and we are purchasing our comfort at the expense of our children. Inter-generational ethics seem to me to be one of the moral frontiers of our own time.

We have much to share and there is material for mutual encouragement here. I hope very much that my own church will become an active partner in 3IG.

Jesus told a story about a corrupt Chief Executive who knew that he was facing the sack and who went round his firm's debtors, offering them easy terms as a way of providing for his future beyond dismissal. You would expect an ethical teacher to condemn such

behaviour but Jesus administers a kind of Zen slap. Without sanctioning the dishonesty, he points out that the corrupt CEO is at least more aware of the danger of doing nothing and the need for urgent action than many of the dozy people listening to the story.

In the complexities of the modern world and its economy we simply do not dare to declare a truce between spiritual matters and our investment policies on the basis of mutual irrelevance. We have to do what we can, according to the limitations of our understanding, to invest in a faith-consistent way. We have to earn the right to address one of the greatest intellectual and practical challenges of our time. The Germans call it Das Adam Smith Problem. How may we relate the insights of Smith's first book, the Theory of Moral Sentiments with its reflections on how human societies flourish and well being of individual persons is enhanced with the laws which have been extracted from his subsequent work The Wealth of Nations?

Sometimes the so-called laws of economics have been treated as autonomous and studied in isolation from what is conducive to human well-being. The time for such a segmented approach to policy making and living is over. In reality there can be no sustainable prosperity and flourishing market without moral and ethical preconditions, not only the habit of truth telling and the ability to trust and co-operate but also a conviction that the economic order in which we are operating is fundamentally just. I do not deny the profit motive as a powerful motivator and I have lived in the City for so long that I do not underestimate the influence of short term exploitative thinking but I do not either believe it to be wise or realistic to be cynical. No civilization can live divorced from convincing and agreed ethical norms for very long without self-destruction. I hope that what we are doing will make a small contribution to this wider debate.

Website Review –
"Prayers for the World of Work", John Ogden
www.stets.ac.uk/resources *Moira Biggins*

I have to "declare an interest" in this collection of prayers. The author, a Methodist non-stipendiary minister, a retired Computer Sci-

ence lecturer, introduces them by saying:

> *The Prayers for the World of Work project began as a result of conversations with another Methodist NSM who works full time in a large software company*

and I am the un-named NSM. However the words of the prayers are all John's own. I encouraged him to get them published and he has done so at the website of the ecumenical Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme.

Three categories of prayers are provided: for Roles and Functions, for Moods and Dispositions, for Industries and Occupations.

Roles and Functions includes such diverse groups as "Directors, Managers and Shareholders", "Risk Management and New Technology", and "Those who take decisions about staff redundancy".

Moods and Dispositions addresses, amongst others, "The contented and fulfilled", "The restless and unsettled" and "The target-chasers".

Industries and Occupations covers "Government", "Primary Industry", "Manufacturing" and "Services".

Because of my special interest, I won't presume to comment on the prayers. John regards them as a work-in-progress. He says:

> *I would love to see this stock of prayers increased in scope and variety. If you have any suggestions, please email me at john.ogden4@btopenworld.com*

So – try them – see what you think – and let him know.

Website Review – www.ReadingatWork.org

Rob Fox

The churches in Reading have a strong record of working together and this website is the net end of one such venture. The home page announces the site as "Supporting, nurturing and encouraging business people to transform the marketplace for Christ." The site

is an initiative of and supported by RCN – no, not the nursing body but the Reading Christian Network, which itself has a more extensive website linked from the home page. RaW is led by Magnus Smyly, a tax inspector with the Inland Revenue *(well, it was the IR until we took them over – Ed.).*

The layout of the site is simple and clear, with a 'quote of the month'. Sections are: Timetable (future RaW events), Purpose (brief and to the point, and noting that RaW subscribes to the Evangelical Alliance statement of faith), Workplace & Professional Groups (with links to websites where appropriate and e-mail contact addresses in most cases), Resources (see more below), and Testimonies.

The resources section includes previous quotes of the month, previous seminar notes (roughly one seminar a month), a booklist (many of which have been reviewed in MaW), links to other websites (but not CHRISM!), practical workplace [action] plans, and 'WELL Centre'. This last is a local initiative with a full time chaplain, Susan van Beveren, funded by the Anglican Deanery of Reading, "committed to promoting wholeness and well-being at work. We draw on a wealth of professional expertise and spiritual wisdom to deliver creative and innovative staff care, support, training, and consultancy." The Centre is explicitly Christian I approach.

Useful? As it is aimed at the Reading area, not surprisingly a lot of the information is local. However it is worth a visit and click around as much is about ministry at work

Diary

The Ridley Hall Foundation, Cambridge, hosts a seminar on the ***Virtues of Business*** on Friday 16 September, organised jointly with CABE (the Christian Association of Business Executives), and part of the follow up to the March 2004 conference on the subject. If you are interested in going, please contact:

Richard Higginson, RHF, rah41@cam.ac.uk, or
Clive Wright, clive.wright6@btopenworld.com

The Co-ordination Group of CHRISM, CABE, RHF, St. Paul's Institute, MODEM, the Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF), Industrial Mission Association (IMA and Heythrop College is holding a one-day conference in the crypt of St. Paul's on Thursday, 17 November, titled: ***The Integration of Work, Life and Faith.*** It will be "an opportunity for personal exploration by Christians, struggling under pressure, to reflect with others on how best to hold everything together." More information from www.stpauls.co.uk and enclosed flyer.

This will be followed at 18.30 by the ***2005 Hugh Kay Memorial Lecture,*** given by Dr Laura Nash, Senior Research Fellow at Harvard Business School, and titled:
"Church on Sunday, work on Monday: the Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life."

CHRISM Weekends 2006!

Two dates to put in your diaries now:

The **2006 Reflective Weekend** will be on:

10 – 12 February, at
Launde Abbey, Leicestershire.

To find out more about he venue, see the website, at:
www.launde.org, where the Abbey is introduced as "an Elizabethan Manor House surrounded by beautiful parklands, gardens and woodlands."

Look out for the booking form and details with the October edition.

The **2006 Conference** will be on:

14 - 16 July, at
Henderson Hall, part of the **University of Newcastle**
see: **www.ncl.ac.uk/accommodation**

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Our faith imposes on us a right and a duty to throw ourselves into the things of the earth Teilhard de Chardin