

# **GOD AT WORK**

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## Introduction to Course

The church has been working alongside industry for some time through industrial chaplaincy, industrial mission, or mission in the economy. The original intention was to strengthen church links with working men, a group who had become mainly disconnected from the church. Chaplaincy work centred on large employers in industries such as steel manufacturing and coal mining. As economic life has changed industrial mission has become much more diverse, and is involved in many different companies, in retailing, and unemployment projects. The work also includes involvement in regional strategy and economic development.

It has always been a challenge in industrial mission to relate theology to the world which we all experience. This is surely something that the whole church should be doing to show that our faith is indeed relevant in today's world. Those of us working in industrial mission are very keen to be a resource to the church, to assist with developing a theology that is related to our world, and to support clergy and lay people in their working lives. Our view is that lay ministry can be in the world where people work, and should not always be confined to church activities. It is important to affirm the christian who struggles to bring their faith with them to their place of work.

I should personally like to thank those who have helped me with this course. My thinking is certainly influenced by those with whom I work in BCUIM. I am also grateful to my wife Louise, who has helped me with the course, and my thanks go to Martin Murphy and his steering committee for their comments and encouragement and to Teri James who completed the production. Lucy Ridney's good work as cartoonist is already acknowledged.

Richard Rosoman  
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## God at Work – Session One

**What is work?**

**How do we see and experience work?**

**What changes are there in employment?**

**What are the social effects of these changes?**

Work may be paid employment, but it is not necessarily so. Individually, consider which of the following are work:

caring for a family in the home

gardening

cleaning the church

visiting a housebound person

delivering meals on wheels

studying for a degree in industry and the environment...



[5 minutes]

Share your answers in the group.

[10 minutes]

Jesus talks about work. He does His Father's work, and in John 5:17 He says, "My Father is working still, and I am working."

In the group discuss in what sense work is used here.

[10 minutes]

Now try to come up with a definition of work. You will probably begin "Work is...". Start in pairs;

Then go into two groups, each made up of the previous pairs. Try to agree on a definition using the work you have done in pairs;

Then in the whole group, look at the two definitions you have, and try to produce one definition, agreed by everyone.

[20 minutes]

Think about your own experience of work. What is good about it? What is bad about it? When you have jotted a few things down, discuss in pairs the connections you can find between your faith and your work.

[10 minutes]

In groups of three or four think about changes in employment. What changes are there in employment? Use your own experience, people you know and your own family, and information from newspapers and television. You might consider some of the following areas: The expectation of a job for life, Part-time and temporary employment, Different working hours.

Flexibility in terms of mobility, working time and practises

The length of a person's working life

The type of work available to people

The balance of power between employees and employers

## God at Work – Session Two

**Work as vocation.**  
**Ethics - some examples.**  
**Struggle and compromise.**  
**Keeping faith and being a witness in the workplace.**

Remember the definition of work that you agreed upon last week. Ask some one in the group to read it out. Use this definition as you reflect on 'work' in this session.



Read through the following section about work, then in pairs taking two of the paragraphs discuss the following question: "In what sense have you experienced work as a vocation?" [10 minutes]

### WORK - BLESSING OR CURSE

#### Genesis and the Creation Narratives

The first concept in Eden places humanity as steward of God's creation. There is a strong sense of harmony with God, and humankind being in a very privileged position in the overseeing the perfect creation. After the fall it all changes dramatically. Work becomes hard and "in the sweat of your face you will eat bread". Now there is struggle, and punishment is associated with work.

#### Work as Creating with God

God's work of creation is ongoing - it has not stopped, and so creation continues all the time. We can therefore see ourselves as co-creators with God in our work. Our work is sharing in God's act of creating.

#### 'Grin and bear it'

Some Christians have seen work as something that we are required to do by God. We may not enjoy it, but if God has ordained that we should work then we should do so cheerfully. There is certainly some Biblical precedent for this (St Paul - do not be a burden on others). But this is rather a negative approach to work.

#### Work as Service

Work can be seen as service to others. The commandment to love your neighbour is expressed in work as serving the needs of others.

#### Offering to God

Work can be seen as an offering to God. As with work as service, this view may not change what is done, but it could affect the quality of work. There is a difference between compulsion and service or offering.

#### Work as Vocation

Most work could be seen as vocation in that we are called by God to do work, especially in a world where we are interdependent, and serving the needs of the whole of society. It might be hard to see some work as vocation, but in most industry and commerce there may be a significance in the presence of Christians in that place, doing that work

Sometimes the struggle is too hard, as for Jesus at Gethsemane. When have you felt like this in your work?

[10 minutes]

Jesus does not come to tell us to keep everything the same. He comes to challenge and to bring change. Christians seek to change their own way of doing things and to accept God's will, and often to work for change in society, e.g. in South Africa.

What would you like to change in connection with your work, to confirm to God's perfect will? How can you work towards this? Who should you work with? How does this witness to your faith?

[15 minutes]

For next week - The person leading the opening prayer should prepare a prayer to do with work.

## God at Work – Session Three

### The Church and work - relating to work in worship, study and practical ministry.

#### Worship and Work

*In groups of three or four*

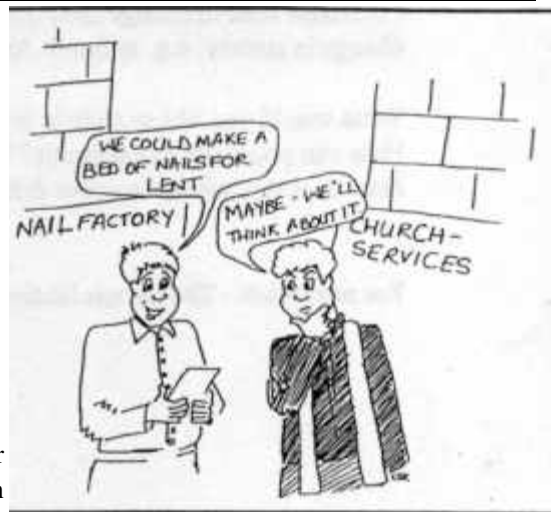
Think about the local economy in your parish

What are the main economic activities?  
eg. retail, manufacturing, service sector,  
agriculture

What is it like for people working in them and  
what issues are there?

How can your regular worship include these?

Is there a major industry or organisation in your  
parish? If there is, how can it be celebrated in  
your church



What work do people in your congregation do? (Some may work outside the parish)

How can your regular worship help them in their work?

20 mins

Now share your ideas in the whole group.

10 mins

#### Study and Practical Ministry

Too easily we may accept the view that people's actions are either right or wrong, and that the Christian faith leaves us with clear-cut choices. But the truth is that none of us can claim that all our actions are pure and blameless. We all find ourselves compromised at times, and our choices can be quite limited. Faith should embrace every aspect of our lives, and it should also be realistic, and recognise that we shall have trouble in the world. Work is an area of our lives where we may easily feel powerless when other people make decisions we dislike, or when economic forces have harsh consequences. So it is, for instance, that the Christian manager is as likely to have to make people redundant as any other manager in industry.

Spirituality is too often disconnected from the material, so that there is a division between the world in which we live and work, and our inner world, which seems apart. However, a developed spirituality will include a care for the material aspect of life, recognising that what happens in the physical world can affect our spiritual state. The Christian faith is also sacramental, so that the outward and physical expresses the inward and unseen. Therefore the nature of our economic life may show much about the spiritual state of our society.

For the Christian there can be no division between the personal and private, and the public side of life. The values which we try to live by personally are also the values that we should seek to promote in business and public life. The God, who we worship reigns over all, including industry and commerce. God is far too big to be confined to church.

## God at Work – Session Four

### Unemployment

**Raising pastoral awareness.**

**The Church and training projects.**

**The churches' response to unemployment.**

In 1997 the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland produced a major report called Unemployment and the Future of Work. The full report, a summary, a short course and a video are all available. Your industrial mission team may be able to lend/sell you copies.

#### Who are the unemployed?

It is difficult to mark out a single category of people who are unemployed. Few people are exempt from job insecurity and the threats of redundancy and 'rationalisation'. Some people lose their jobs and are then considered 'too old' by many employers when they near the age of fifty. People who are disabled have fewer choices than some other people, and may be judged unfit for work by employers who make no effort to accommodate them. There are young people who have not found work on leaving school, and whose chances of finding a job diminish week by week. There are certain areas where unemployment is high due to the closure of major industries, putting hundreds or thousands of people out of work. Some people cannot find a job because they lack confidence, educational qualifications or the right skills. For others, their domestic situation may make it very difficult to find work e.g. those caring for children, or sick or elderly relatives. Sometimes the unemployed are depicted as scroungers, and they are blamed for being out of work.

"In some churches there needs to be an initial leap of understanding and sympathy before there can be any perception of what it is actually like to be poor or unemployed for any length of time. This could be helped by meeting people who are unemployed directly and by role play activities in which the choices open to the unemployed are realistically assessed. This will help to break down the antagonism to the poor and the jobless which undoubtedly exists in some congregations." Unemployment and the Future of Work p. 192.

#### *In two groups*

Share any experiences you have of unemployment. These may be your own, or members of the family, or close friends. 15 mins

#### *In the whole group*

What effect does unemployment have on a person? How does it change over a period of time<sup>9</sup>

This is what one unemployed person said:

"Confidence is one of the first things to go. Self-esteem and self-respect soon follow. The effects of one rejection after another, for work you believed you were well able to do, bring about a change in the way you see yourself. The question 'what's wrong with me'<sup>9</sup> occurs early. Eventually you accept there must be something not quite right about you. All those prospective employers surely can't be wrong. One result of all this is a changed view of yourself, and sadly it is all too likely that any new image will be built around the negative connotations society applies to the unemployed: idle scrounger, cheat, parasite. We provide nothing good with which the unemployed can evolve new positive self-images."

Unemployment and the Future of Work p 42

15 mins

## **God at Work – Session Five**

### **The Church and the local economy**

**Tesbury's comes to town - a case study.**

**Using a theological approach.**

#### Introduction

One of the major challenges for the church today is relating our faith to the world around us. Biblical stories do not easily fit our modern world, because they are set within a totally different economic and social system. The intention in this session is to use a method to consider a situation. Hopefully, the same approach could be used to look at a variety of different cases. The 'answer' at the end of the session is not of prime importance - the real task is that of bringing our faith to bear on the world of economic activity.

You may use the example below, or, if preferred, use an alternative story connected with your parish. If you use your own story, you will need to begin by gathering information. Be sure to find out where information and 'facts' have come from.

In this exercise the whole Christian tradition, which gives particular concerns and values, is used in our reflection. You may not find particular texts which fit the situation, but themes and Christian attitudes can more easily be applied.

#### The Story

***Note: Always gather information from as many sources as possible. Beware of rumour and speculation. Try to get information directly from reliable sources, or at least seek more than one perspective to get the whole picture.***

Last month your local paper announced that Tesbury's, a national supermarket chain, were planning to open a store on a green site on the edge of your town, called Smallborough. Smallborough has a population of 4,500 and has a High Street with some small independent shops. They include a butcher, chemist, off-license, bakery, post office and two fruit and vegetable shops. There is also a small self-service store run by the Co-op. There are two petrol stations, and a few pubs, some providing meals. In addition there are market stalls each Saturday in the town square. Other shops change hands fairly regularly selling gifts, clothes, shoes, toys or operating as charity shops. There is little industry in the town, and the surrounding area is agricultural.

Local shop-keepers say that if Tesbury's open a store, it will kill their trade, and they will have to close. The nearest town with large supermarkets is 15 miles away, and there are five buses a day there and back. Tesbury's have offered to help fund a much needed by-pass for the town, and part-fund a swimming pool for the local secondary school.

Official statistics show that Smallborough has above average unemployment in the 18-25 age group. Some people associate this with complaints about vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Tesbury's say they will provide 60 new jobs.

There is shortly to be a public meeting to discuss the plans.