

WORK – A ‘NECESSARY EVIL’ OR A WAY TO HONOUR GOD?

An Evangelical View of the Workplace

by

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In this article Gil discusses evangelicalism and the workplace. After establishing that we need a biblical view of work and the workplace he outlines a number of important factors concerning the work place.

The work place is -

1. to be a means of growth of character
 2. intended to be a place of worship
 3. a primary venue for doing God’s will
 4. a place to seek justice
 5. a place of witness
 6. where people are prepared for eternity
 7. a ministry of the church
 8. a place for work to be balanced with rest
 9. a place where we can learn from those who are mentors
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Over the years I have been asked many times to speak about ‘evangelism in the workplace’. This BCV Men’s Retreat is the first occasion on which I have been asked to reflect on ‘evangelicalism *and* the workplace’. There is a significant difference. Important though it is to find appropriate ways of sharing our faith with our fellow workers, it is important too to consider the workplace itself from a Biblical point of view. This is something we do not often attempt. Yet, it is crucial to do so if we are going to have a truly Christian understanding of our daily work situation. Without this our ‘witness’ there will not be authentic. To achieve this we need several perspectives –

1. A BIBLICAL VIEW OF WORK

God Himself is a worker. The worker “par excellence”! God created the universe out of nothing. Every act of creation involved work on His part. He “separated, made, spoke, planted and formed”. Genesis 1, 2. Everything existing God created. All space, matter, vegetable, animal and human life. His creation is of immense value, diversity, power, durability, complexity, beauty and usefulness.

God is still working, continuously sustaining the entire universe in all its myriad functions. God’s work expresses His nature, His character and His personality.

Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:18-20. God works because He is a worker. He created work because He is a worker.

God created us in His image. Thus we also are workers. ‘Born workers!’ Workers, to work together with Him.

The first thing God said to us was about work. Genesis 1:28 “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it”. He put Adam in the Garden of Eden, asking Him to tend, cultivate, husband, till and care for it. Work, as God intended it to be, is not a curse, not a “necessary evil”, not something to be avoided at all costs, but to be done with “all our might”.

God created work before the Fall. To affirm our likeness to Him, to involve us in creativity, stewardship and providing for our own needs.

Work was corrupted by our fall into rebellion, selfishness and idolatry. It became destructive, competitive, frustrating, a struggle, difficult and far more demanding than God originally intended it to be. Contrary to Malcolm Fraser’s famous quote, “Life, and work, was meant to be easy!”

But now in His amazing love for us, God has, through the death and resurrection of His Son, rescued and restored us, and not only us, but our work too! Satan hijacked and corrupted our work. But Christ has laid hold of it, torn it out of Satan’s hands, and restored it to us again. As we trust in Christ all things “become new” including work. Now we can work with God again in the task of good stewardship, reconciliation, recreation and establishing His Kingdom, honouring Him as we do so, whatever kind of work we may do. Jesus Himself, a carpenter, a ‘chippy’, by His own work endorses and dignifies our work, including manual labour, forever.

And work dignifies us too; this is why lack of work is so demoralising, so destructive to our sense of worth, ultimately the most harmful effect of unemployment. Recently I watched as an African man in his war-torn country was asked by a television reporter, “What is your greatest need?” I thought, surely he will say food, or perhaps housing, as it was obvious he desperately needed both. But no! “What I want most of all”, he said with remarkable insight, “is the freedom to be able to work”.

For some time I have been seeking to summarise all the teaching of the New Testament on work. I believe it can be expressed in these few words - “Work hard in order to provide for yourself, and for those who are dependent on you, and to be able to help those who are in need”. So work is to be a means to obtain, not what we want, but what we, and others, need, not to become wealthy, but to become prosperous, such prosperity meaning, not being affluent, but ‘having what you need when you need it’.

2. WE NEED A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE WORK-PLACE

We evangelicals need to understand that there is more to our workplace than “meets the eye”. It is indeed a place of witness. But also of growth, worship, doing God’s will, and seeking justice.

First of all **your work place is to be a means of growth of your character.** As Paul said in Ephesians 2:10 “You are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works which God has planned beforehand for you to walk therein”. If you have been asking God to make you more the man or woman you want to be for Him, then work and family situations are God’s major “classrooms” for you. If you desire the fruit of the Spirit to increase in your life, your workplace is one of God’s most effective means of promoting growth in your character.

Secondly, your workplace is intended to be a place of worship. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul speaks of ‘presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to God’ which, he says, is our ‘reasonable service of worship’. He is not speaking here about a Sunday morning event of an hour or two. While such events are certainly times to praise God with our fellow believers, there are many other ways of worshiping God. In fact, the Greek word used for worship in Paul’s statement here, i.e. *latreia*, is never used of public events held for the purpose of worshipping God. Furthermore, a “living sacrifice” cannot be a ‘Sunday-only’ matter, but obviously means a way of living – day by day – including in the workplace. Worship is the business of honouring God in every aspect of our daily lives, seeking to put Him first in all our relationships, decisions, practices and business dealings. Worship is not a form of meeting, but a manner of living. God is much more interested in our ‘worship of service’ than in our ‘services of worship’.

Who would have thought that you might go to work to worship?! Or similarly, worship God by what you do in your home? A lady I know of understands this well. She has a sign over her kitchen sink saying, “Divine service is conducted here three times daily”. When your worship is the way you live from Monday to Saturday, rather than something you do on Sunday, the Sunday morning event becomes different too. What we then have on Sunday morning is not members coming to worship, but worshippers coming for fellowship, mutual encouragement and praising God together. Christians coming together not to worship, but from worship. When this happens the Sunday gathering displays a reality that cannot be achieved by any other means. Thus God is honoured, Christians encouraged, and the uncommitted are given reason to believe.

Thirdly, your work-place is a primary venue for doing God’s will. Much wishful thinking, wondering, daydreaming, and even unnecessary prayer is spent in pondering the “mystery” of God’s will. I have lost count of the people I have heard say, “If I knew what God’s will for me was I would do it!” The fact is we are already very well informed concerning the will of God! In a quick cruise through the New Testament recently I discovered 42 chapters packed full of detailed, specific instructions about God’s will for every one of us. How then can we say that if we knew what God’s will was we would do it? I think our attitude should rather be that of Mark Twain. He said, “It is not the parts of the Bible which I don’t understand which trouble me, but the parts which I do!” Our problem is that we confuse God’s will with His assignments. God’s will is not a change of vocation and location somewhere out there in the future, but a new attitude of heart and mind in the present. You can be as much in His will today, where you work right now, as you will ever be in the future, even if God does give you some other assignment in some other place. Furthermore, if God does have some other assignment for you in the future the most important

prerequisite for receiving God's direction is to put Him first where you are right now. Moses, Gideon, Amos, the disciples and many others were busy in their workplace when God gave them new assignments. Your present place of work is the place to do God's will and to do it now. As Paul said, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God". I Cor.10:31. For some strange reason, when we Christians begin to think about God's will, we imagine that it will mean joining the ranks of those who are paid to be good instead of remaining with those who are 'good for nothing'!

If you are in doubt concerning God's will for you let us consider a sample of His instructions, "Don't be conformed to this world, let your minds be renewed, don't over estimate yourself, use your gifts, love others without discrimination. Abhor evil, value the good, prefer one another, don't be lazy, be enthusiastic, glad, hopeful and patient. Give to God's children who are in need, invite them home to dinner, give them a bed for the night if they need one. Pray for people who ridicule you, be happy with those who are happy, share the sorrow of the sad, never pay back evil for evil, be transparent in your dealings. Don't quarrel, be at peace with others as much as possible, don't take the law into your own hands, don't let evil get the upper hand, conquer evil with good. Obey constituted authority, pay your taxes honestly, pay your debts in full, stop being mean and bad tempered, forgive one another as God has forgiven you. Rebuke and expose evil, make the most of every opportunity for doing good, be careful how you act, be filled with the Holy Spirit, talk with each other much about the Lord. If your brother is overcome by sin don't condemn him, give honour and respect to those who it is due, don't get tired of doing what is right. Put off your old nature, if you are angry don't sin by nursing a grudge. Employees obey your employers, be eager to give them your best, serve them as you would Christ, don't work hard only when they are watching, work hard and gladly all the time, doing God's will from the heart."

And this is just the beginning! There are hundreds more specific statements revealing God's will for you. How can you say you would do God's will if you knew what it was? How can you still be in doubt about God's will? You must be joking! There is no mystery about God's will whatsoever. It is as plain as the nose on our faces! Our work places are the best places for doing the will of God.

Fourthly, **your work-place is a place to seek justice.** 18th and 19th century evangelicals were legendary for their ceaseless and costly involvement in the struggle for justice and reform, especially in the workplace. Wilberforce, Shaftesbury and a host of others fought for the abolition of the slave trade, secured freedom for the slaves, improved working conditions in mines and factories, reduced working hours of exploited labourers, sought genuine worker representation, and many other reforms. Although the modern work- place is no longer plagued by most of the problems of the past, today's evangelical has much to be watchful about, especially in the interest of his fellow workers. Forms of harassment and discrimination, employees being pressured to act contrary to their convictions, company's requiring their workers to work longer and longer hours regardless of effects on marriages and families, the socially, physically and spiritually damaging effects of extended weekend trading hours, the need for encouraging workers involved in repetitive, tedious work and the many in fear of losing their jobs, giving and finding help for

ethnic people for whom English is a second language (approximately 1/3 of our population), for whom the paper work relating to employment and government departments is often a nightmare.

There is justice to be sought and encouragement to be given to those in the workplace who are too fearful, too easily intimidated, or too ill-informed to seek it for themselves.

Fifthly, **your work place is also a place of witness.** You witness there by how you work, who you are, what you do and what you say. One of my good friends, an electrician, is a very effective witness at his work. I asked him to tell me from his many years of experience as a Christian in the work place, the things he felt were most important. Here is his advice:

“Do a good day’s work for a good day’s pay”. Ephesians 6:5. “Christians have a reason for work their workmates don’t have”, he said. That is, their work can be a means of honouring God Himself. I am reminded of a lady who became a Christian during a mission I conducted some years ago. On the final Sunday of the mission she stood and said to the audience, “Last Wednesday morning I became a Christian. Last Thursday morning I had a brand new reason for getting out my vacuum cleaner!” So, Christians have a motivation to work well. Not because the boss is watching, but because the Lord is watching. My friend said that there are three other things which are very important, too – competence, character, and concern for others welfare.

“Continuing competence is part of my witness in my work place” he said. “I am there to do a job. My employer, my customer, wants a good job done. If I do well, they will ask me back again and again, so I get consistent clients. Thus I get to know those people well. “This”, said my friend, “is important because it greatly increases my opportunities to share my faith with them.”

Character. Honesty, consistency, values, attitudes, priorities, relationships, hope, contentment – all of these speak loudly to our employers, employees, customers and workmates. We often think of speaking evangelistically at work, i.e. sharing our faith, but why not live evangelistically? “Evangel” means Good News. Why not let our lives as well as our words be good news? Things we would consider basic or elementary can be quite stunning in their implications to those around us. For example, if you have been married for 21 years, that is three times the national average! This is a real message of encouragement to your fellow workers concerning their own marriages. And it provides them with another reason to believe.

Concern for your fellow workers and customers is also an important aspect of your witness in the work place. Being interested in them, their families, their hopes, their struggles and their needs. Seeking to be of practical help where possible, and offering to pray concerning their needs. Very few people will turn down a Christian’s offer to pray on their behalf. The fact is, many non- Christian’s pray! Not publicly. Not in front of their families. But many a man or woman prays fervently behind the wheel of their car, behind the closed door of their office, in the cab of their truck, on their tractor as they plow, in their kitchens as they care for their family, in the laundry, in the hospital ward, and as they face piles of bills. Many a non- Christian has good

reason to pray given the difficulties, stresses, uncertainties and challenges they face in their lives. They have a great deal to pray about!

My friend, the electrician, says that competence, character and concern, raise questions in his customer's minds concerning his faith. It is exactly as we read in I Peter 3:15. "Put the Lord first in your life and always be ready to give an explanation of the hope that is within you....."

Even when people stir, "rubbish" you, and give you a hard time because of your faith, it's their way of 'checking you out', as we say, of seeing 'where you are coming from'. This is "seeking", Aussie style! During a time I worked at a factory one of my fellow workers related to me like this. But in time the Lord got through to him. He was soundly converted, deeply changed and has since become a minister through whom God has loved thousands of people, many of whom have been brought into God's family.

In our 'work place witness' we are "workers together with God". God Himself is the evangelist 'par excellence'. Recently I was greatly encouraged by a Christian leader's conviction that "God is speaking to most people most of the time". In other words, if we share our faith with another person, God has been speaking to him before we do so. That is, God has been there first! God has a multitude of ideas of how to get through to people. I have a friend who became a Christian through listening to the "Top 40". I know a lady who found faith in a clairvoyant's consulting room. I know of four people who became Christians as a result of listening to the Ayatollah Khomeini! God has many, many ways of speaking to people. So don't push. Be willing to be a part of what God is doing in the lives of your fellow workers in the work place, not the whole of it. Our evangelism should not be "you too should be like me", but rather, like "one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread". Our message needs to be "God loves you like He loves me. God will be patient with you as He is patient with me. God will forgive you as He forgives me". There is nothing our fellow workers need to hear more. We don't have to have "all the answers", but our lives need to be demonstrations of what only God can do. In one sense, as D.L. Moody said, "We must win people to ourselves before we can win them to Christ".

Your work place, believe it or not, is also **where you are being prepared for eternity!** "The world passes away (and everything you earn!), but He who does God's will abides forever". I John 1:17. According to Arthur Holmes in his book All Truth is God's Truth, "We cannot take the material results of our work with us when we die, but the character we take into the life to come will be, in part, the result of how we work, and why we work while we are here. What is it that survives death? It is our personality, complete with our values and beliefs, and the qualities of character and mind that we cultivate in this life. Whatever contributes to making us what we forever will be has eternal significance. We shall take more with us than we sometimes think".

We also need a sense of "calling" to our work. And we have a calling! A calling to honour God and further His kingdom. The means by which we do this are of secondary importance. I know farmers, mechanics, miners, garbage collectors, electricians, managers, plumbers, doctors, nurses, pilots, truck drivers and assembly

line workers with as strong a sense of call to honour God in their work as any pastor, missionary or theologian. As a Christian farmer said to me recently, “God ordained me to till the land”. That’s exactly how God intends it to be. And no wonder, because as one wise man said, “Our spirits are too big for mere jobs”.

The means by which we honour God, i.e., the assignments which He gives us, are not necessarily life long. He may give us several different assignments during our lifetime. But the goal is always the same “The chief purpose of man is to honour God and enjoy Him forever”. God’s assignments for us may vary, His will is always the same.

What matters most is, not the task, the role, the means, or the assignment, but the purpose, the reason for them. The perspective we have about what we are doing. Whether it relates to honouring God and furthering His Kingdom.

During the building of St Paul’s Cathedral under the direction of the great architect, Sir Christopher Wren, a visitor to the site spoke to three stone masons. Each man was doing exactly the same work. However, when he asked them what they were doing he received three different answers. Said the first, “I am shaping some stones”. Said the second, “I am building a wall”. Said the third, “I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build a great cathedral!”

There are still three more things the Bible makes clear about your workplace.

Your daily work is a ministry of your church. So often discouraged Christians tell me, “My church is going nowhere!” “I disagree”, I reply, “that’s not true, your church is going everywhere!” Every day you and the other members of your church find themselves in a great variety of neighbourhood, community and workplace situations. If you were to list the names of your members, the localities in which they live, the sporting, civic and community organisations in which they are involved, their places of study, their means of travel, and particularly the places in which they work, if you listed all this information on a large chart and unveiled it one Sunday morning saying, “All this, yes, all this, is our church’s sphere of influence and outreach!” your church members would be amazed. Even if the church to which you belong is small it has, through it’s members’ daily lives, a sphere of influence and outreach far beyond anything you have ever imagined. All this, without another dollar spent, another committee meeting, another late night, another program, activity or extra responsibility.

There is a huge and urgent need for churches to give greater priority to the ‘church scattered’ than the ‘church gathered’. Many perennial questions concerning the nature of what we should do when we meet will never be resolved until our priorities are reversed. Only when we give priority to the church scattered will we know how best to use the times when we meet together on the first day of every week.

One way each church member can help turn this situation around is to seek the prayer support of his fellow members and local church leaders in his daily work situation. The ministry of a church is not just what the minister does, not only what appears in the church bulletin, but the total effect of the lives, work, attitudes, words, values,

relationships, lifestyles and convictions of every member in every situation in which they find themselves every day of every week. Local church leaders have long acknowledged this truth in principle but not in practice. Consequently, the gifts that God gives to His people have been understood primarily as equipping them for ministries for use when the church is gathered. However, they have equally been given to be used in the workplace and in the community. Similarly, members have been seen as those who “support the church”, rather than being supported by the church, to be the church in their workplaces, neighbourhoods and communities.

Gordon Preece, in his “Everyday Spirituality” a Zadok publication, tells of a former Vice President of Bethlehem Steel in the USA, Bill Diehl, who wrote about the gap which existed between his church attendance on a Sunday and his workplace involvement Monday to Friday. He wrote, “In the almost 30 years of my professional career the church has never once suggested to me that there be any type of accounting of my on-the-job ministry to others. My church has never once offered to improve those skills which could make me a better minister, nor has it ever asked if I needed any kind of support in what I was doing. There has never been an enquiry into the types of ethical decisions I must face, or whether I seek to communicate my faith to my co-workers. I have never been in a church where there has been any type of public affirmation of the ministry I perform through my career. In short, I must conclude that my church really couldn’t care less as to whether or how I minister in my daily work.” This is a devastating indictment of the attitude of local church leaders towards their members’ workplaces. This tragic situation is true of churches of every kind throughout Australia.

It is very significant that this businessman himself chose to use the word ‘ministry’ several times in referring to his workplace involvement. In doing so he inadvertently confirms what the Bible teaches and life underlines, that ‘ministry’, for most Christians, is to occur in their workplace and community situations. Confirming the reality and effect of the great gulf which Bill Diehl described, Jacque Ellul said, in effect, “The reason the Church has so little to say to the world of business and work is that the Church is comprised of ministers who know little about the workaday world and of members who are careful to keep their faith and business life in separate compartments.” This situation is summed up well in these words –

“Mr Business went to Church,
He never missed a Sunday
Mr Business went to Hell
For what he did on Monday!”

It is reported that a McDonald’s restaurant chain president, a professing Christian, said “I believe in God, family and McDonald’s and when I go to work, I reverse the order”. The Church will only have something to say to the world of work and business when both ministers and members make the sacrifice necessary, i.e. the members “taking the risk” of living with integrity at work and the ministers taking the trouble to find out how difficult and costly that can be: then committing themselves to supporting their members in every way possible as they seek to honour the Lord in their workplaces.

Our services and meetings should also reflect the fact that our members daily lives are the primary ministry of their church, because they are their church! On Sunday mornings we should commission them to their places of work, travel and study. We need to publicly commission one or two each week, businessmen, housewives, farmers, students, nurses, families, drivers, teachers to their work and neighbourhood situations. Just as we commission missionaries to minister in an overseas country. Why not? Christian people in Australia live, for the, most part today, in pagan situations. They are missionaries to this paganism in their everyday lives. And let some of them also, Sunday by Sunday, report back, sharing news and requesting ongoing prayer. This commissioning and reporting, encouragement and prayer should be an on-going process, part of the normal life of every church. As a result our services will be marked by far greater reality, and this practice will prove an encouragement or challenge to every member.

Pastors and elders, pray for your people in their everyday situations. I'll never forget a member of a church in which I was a pastor asking "Do you pray for me, every day? I hope you do. I pay you to pray for me!" Find out all you can about their workplaces, and, wherever possible, visit them there, and pray for them, 'on site'!

And something else! Sometimes, as Christians honour God in their workplaces they will be respected, rewarded and promoted, but in other situations they will face opposition, ridicule, be ostracised and even dismissed. If your church calls on its members to honour God uncompromisingly in their workplace, it must also make preparation to assist them when this results in hardship, suffering and loss of employment. This is not primarily a Government responsibility, it's a local church responsibility. Is your church preparing for such situations? Providing funds, encouragement, practical help and assistance to find new employment where that is needed? These should come from the congregation. Honouring the Lord and suffering for doing so is not an individual but a corporate responsibility.

The next lesson **we need to learn about our work is the Biblical connection between work and rest.** God is not a taskmaster, a slave-driver. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said "My yoke is easy and my burden is light". Serving the Lord is not meant to be a health hazard. We have much to learn, I think, from camels! When a camel is overloaded, he lays down and refuses to budge! Rest is God's idea. He led the way in the business of resting. Having created the world, He Himself rested (Gen. 2:1-3). And Jesus, in the midst of a very busy life, also took time to rest (Mark 6:31, Luke 6:12). Many years ago I told a respected Christian leader how weary I was. I had been very busy for months on end. I was disappointed to see he was not greatly moved by my lament and offered no sympathy! His response instead was to ask me plainly "Have you been taking a day off each week?" When I admitted I had not, thinking it more spiritual as a young Christian to 'burn out rather than rust out', he reproved me, saying, "Then I'm not the slightest bit sorry for you!".

Several times over the years I have fallen victim to physical exhaustion requiring several weeks of recuperation each time, and involving cancelled commitments and inconveniences for many people. I am sure most of these times were the result of carrying yokes or burdens of my own making, not the Lord's. Times of rest are

essential. In a piece of music the ‘rests’ are as important as the notes. Without them there is no melody. Quite a parable for us to ponder.

The leisure/recreation industry is one of the fastest growing in Australia, but most of this leisure in the “land of the long-weekend” is seen as an escape from work, a “better” alternative! How different to the comment of the mother of a young Salvation Army Officer I knew. When I asked her about her daughter she smiled and said, “She’s enjoying life immensely. She can’t tell the difference between business and pleasure”. So different to the “I love work so much I could watch it for hours” philosophy. A Christian’s rest is meant to be recreation, not escape. Not escaping from work, but being renewed for it. Recreation, biblically speaking, is spelt “re-creation”.

God intends that even our rest has purpose. And it will have purpose if it is a means of being renewed, re-created so that we may honour the Lord more effectively in our work. Serving the Lord is not done well by being workaholics. As some wise person observed, “Life is far too important to be taken too seriously!” There is no fun in having nothing to do, the fun is in having something to do but sometimes not doing it! In God’s economy it is not important to be ‘busy’ but to be in the right place at the right time. Each one of us must consider the kinds of rest and recreation most suited to our situation, personality and needs. No-one else can do that for us. And if we don’t do it, we will suffer the consequences.

Being stewards of our mental, emotional and physical capacities is a sobering responsibility, but as we do so we will greatly benefit and will encourage others to do likewise. But never “retire”. ‘Early retirement’, a phenomena of modern times, can be the beginning of a new era of active service. As long as life and breath last there is Kingdom work to be done. Our assignments may change, but our calling never changes – to seek God’s kingdom first, and to honour Him in all things.

One of my ‘older brothers’ is a man of whom you may have never heard, the Rev George Harris. Now 96 years-of-age, this lifelong missionary, minister, and trainer and encourager of pastors now lives in Melbourne, and has no public ministry. But he is praying daily for the work of the Kingdom and especially for revival. This particular assignment, which God gave him in his 40th year, he continues to fulfil 55 years later! Rest and be ‘re-created’ by all means, but don’t retire from the work of the Kingdom.

Finally, **we have much to learn about our workplaces from the businessmen who are our evangelical mentors.** These men were enterprising and successful in business, though not without times of economic difficulty. Their workplaces were venues of fellowship, witness and prayer. For example, one such showroom and office was a place of prayer for these men in their concern about the need for evangelism during the 1940’s. At one of these meetings they had a strong sense of the Lord’s direction and all present agreed that God had led them to form “Campaigners for Christ”. They were ‘not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit serving the Lord’ as Paul said in Romans 12:11. Furthermore, they did not see their businesses as ends in themselves, as the be-all and end-all of their lives, yet neither

did they see them simply as means to an end as some Christians do today. Like the old black Christian man in the cotton plantation who said, “I’m just pickin’ cotton to pay expenses”! No, they sought to honour the Lord in the way they conducted their businesses, not only to make money to support Christian ministries. Their business life was a witness in itself. This is important for us today – they honoured the Lord by their work as well as by their words and as well as with the money they made from their work.

On the other hand, their businesses were only part of their lives. At the same time as being in business they invested time, energy, thought, prayer and finance in Christian ministries. And it didn’t end there, they were not only supporters but visionaries. They lived for bigger goals than success in their businesses, foregoing the prospects of greater business achievements, if necessary, in order to further God’s Kingdom. When they saw a need to evangelise and serve that was not being met they created a means to do it. They did not hesitate, when necessary, to create new forms of ministry appropriate to the needs of the times. Through their vision and pioneering hundreds of thousands heard the Gospel, - unreached tribespeople in the mountains of Papua New Guinea and the then Borneo, people in all walks of life in Australia, members of the armed forces involved in World War 2, and more recently prisoners in gaols throughout this country. These men were key founders and leaders of large Bible-teaching conventions, helped plan and support the huge Billy Graham Crusades of 1959 and ’69, and were key figures in the founding and leadership of Melbourne Bible Institute/Bible College of Victoria itself.

Many of them were also passionate preachers of the Gospel. Many thousands more found Christ, and hundreds of Christians heard God’s call to serve Him all around the world, through the preaching and testimony of these ‘businessmen’ whose theology, character and insights were forged in the workplace. These men and their wives chose to live simply, give sacrificially, and invest unreservedly their time and energies to further God’s Kingdom. And all this while active in the workplace. They did not see their businesses as preventing them from serving the Lord but as enabling them to do so!

Australia itself is now a missionary situation. We are no longer “chaplains to Christendom” but “missionaries to paganism”. The essence of paganism is not savagery, but idolatry. Idolatry is Australia’s predominant faith. There are large numbers of unchurched people, both Australian-born and newly arrived from other countries, living in our towns and cities. Some local churches and denominations are attempting to reach these people, but there is a great need for new forms of church operating in ‘missionary mode’ in our own country. God wants to use today’s ‘workplace people’, today’s business people, to lead, support or fund these new ventures, according to the gifts He has given them. One of Australia’s churches most effective in reaching unchurched people is founded and led by a young businessman working full-time in the market place.

I have noticed that affluence does not produce generosity. A lot of support for Christian ministries comes from low-income earners. Generosity springs from the heart, not the bank balance. Our workplace mentors were in some cases prosperous and in all cases generous. God’s Kingdom was their priority. My last conversation

with Leonard Buck was, in retrospect, a moving example of these people's priorities. I visited him about five weeks before he died. After his death I recalled our conversation and was amazed to see how that brief hour typified his life. The things he said and did, symbolised his whole approach to life. Though frail and in pain he welcomed me warmly as a brother; insisted on making me a cup of tea; gave me half the cake he had in his cupboard; enquired after my wife and family; gave me one of his shirts; encouraged me in my ministry; urged me to depend on the Holy Spirit's enabling; prayed for me; recommended a book and gave it to me; gave me a cheque for a hundred dollars towards my family's needs; and, despite the difficulty he had in moving about, walked with me to my car. In that hour he extended to me welcome, hospitality, interest, concern, encouragement, exhortation, practical help, prayer, he made sacrifices on my behalf; invested time in me; and showed me great love and respect.

We have much to learn from our older evangelical brothers and sisters who honoured God in their workplaces, and led His people in vision, mission and ministry of so many kinds. We are greatly privileged to be their successors. Let us "stand on their shoulders" and by the grace of God reach even higher.