The other 100,000 hours

How the church marginalizes itself from the working world

By Chris R. Armstrong

MOST CHURCHES ARE GOOD AT figuring out what to do with their congregations during the hours on Sunday morning in which they have a captive audience. But what about the rest of the week? What does the church have to say about the struggles and joys, trials and triumphs, and inherent worth of our working lives?

"The average person will work 100,000 hours in their lifetime," says Jeff Van Duzer, dean of the Seattle Pacific University School of Business and Economics. "This seems like an enormous waste if it's spent doing fundamentally meaningless things whose only value is a paycheck." To be sure, many Christians develop, at some point in their lives, a sense that daily work does indeed matter to God. And eventually, some come to understand that their own work complements God's work — the six days of creation, the redemptive love of Jesus, the ushering in of new heavens and new earth. God sustains the world, but God's creatures do their part in caring for it as well.

But does the church have anything more profound to say about the value of work? And how might theological schools prepare their graduates to help ordinary Christians do their work in light of their faith? Those are questions worth pondering.

Princeton scholar David Miller explores this topic in his 2006 book *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement*. As Miller explains, the 1980s saw an explosion of books, magazines, conferences, networks, and organizations focused on putting the two halves of life together: worship and "the other 100,000 hours."

Significantly, these efforts have been almost entirely led by lay people. Evidence of churches, denominations, or theological educators helping the laity see work as a daily calling is still thin on the ground. "Sermon topics, liturgical content, prayers, and pastoral care rarely address — much less recog-

nize — the spiritual questions, pastoral needs, ethical challenges, and vocational possibilities faced by those who work in the marketplace and world of business," Miller says.

William Messenger, the Harvard Business School–trained executive editor of the Theology of Work Project Inc., regularly counsels executives who are people of faith. He relates that most businesspeople, though they may otherwise love their church and their pastor, feel their pastor simply does not understand their working world and its issues. One businessman quoted by Miller puts the situation in stark terms:

> In the almost 30 years of my professional career, my church has never once suggested that there be any type of accounting of my on-the-job ministry to others. . . . There has never been an inquiry into the types of ethical decisions I must face, or whether I seek to communicate the faith to my co-workers. I have never been in a congregation where there was any type of public affirmation of a ministry in my career [as a sales manager]. In short, I must conclude that my church really doesn't have the least interest in whether or how I minister in my daily work.

Messenger admits that many pastors will never be attuned enough to the concerns of business people to offer really deep advice on knotty ethical issues. For these, the best form of support may be to facilitate small groups of like-minded people — for example, workers in similar jobs — to read Scripture, pray, and discuss matters touching their work. Miller agrees and says that pastors who are most distant from work-related concerns can take steps to bridge the divide between themselves and the working people in their pews. Some ways they might do so:

- Be present in the work sphere and listen carefully.
- Become workplace literate (for example, by reading the *Wall Street Journal*).
- Preach to work concerns.
- Use adult education, small groups, and retreats to address workers' sense of work-faith disjunction.
- Train laity in devotional disciplines linked to their work and daily lives.

This kind of engagement may not be possible if a pastor embodies anti-business biases. And researchers like David Miller of Princeton and Laura Nash of Harvard say that such biases are common — sometimes inherited from seminary professors. Messenger says that businesspeople tell him things like this:

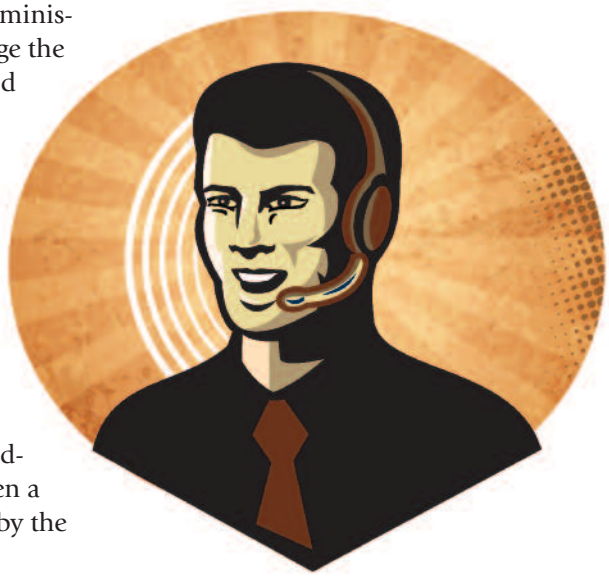
> My pastor always talks about profit as if it were greed. Well, that shows they know nothing at all about how the business world works. So when the pastor preaches sermons on this, he always tells me to do things that are useless in terms of the value I provide to society. If I started doing the things my pastor suggests, it would ruin my business, and then I couldn't provide jobs, good service for customers, and useful products, so the function I'm filling in society would cease to exist.

Of course, it's easy enough to point to prominent failures by business leaders over the past few decades. Human weakness is on display in the marketplace as in every other sphere, and that should make us wary of "sprinkling holy water over all of business," to borrow Van Duzer's words. He often pushes back on antibusiness attitude among clergy, but he also finds himself trying to rein in business leaders who are inappropriately sanguine, even smug, about what they do. "I sometimes want to say: 'You have bought into a world system which is in some ways antithetical to God, and I want you to rethink this.'"

There is potential for greed and corruption in any field, and thus clergy are rightly concerned not to become uncritical apologists for big business. But if they want to speak to the business world with credibility, they also need to engage in the hard work of understanding the morally complex, socially engaged world of the marketplace. To minister to the work lives of their people, pastors need not themselves be executives or economists, any more than they need to be doctors to visit the sick in hospitals. But some learning must happen: the church, by failing to learn even the basics of the marketplace, marginalizes itself from the lives of most of its people.

Seminaries and a theology of work

Any inquiry into the capabilities of clergy points back to theological education. And surely most ministers who want to engage the working world will find that their theological school left them unprepared. Miller argues that clergy suffer not only from a lack of direct business experience (and thus an insufficient awareness of the issues), but also from "a lack of ministry models to emulate, and even a sense of intimidation by the business world."



On the theological side, it is no wonder clergy are flummoxed by discussions of business and economics. Most 20th- and 21st- century theological reflection on work and business — what little there is — has tended to focus on the problems of the marketplace, ignoring its constructive and creative dimensions, according to Miller. This represents a clear break from earlier periods of Christian theology — most notably during the Lutheran Reformation — when questions of work and vocation were actively studied in light of Scripture and tradition.

As centers of theological reflection, theological schools today might consider their own responsibility to cultivate in future clergy a robust theological understanding of work. To begin at the beginning: What does God intend for human work and its economic organization? The simplest answer, which reappears in many forms among the lay people who write about the intersection of faith and work, is that God created work and uses it to benefit all people.

How work connects to God

1. Work as a graced activity benefiting all

Discussion of faith and work are often informed by the notion of common grace — the understanding that God bestows a measure of grace on all people, whether or not they are Christians. Although most often mentioned by Reformed theologians, common grace is rooted in the first chapters of Genesis: God creates everything from nothing. Made in God's image, mankind also creates — not from nothing, but things of greater value out of things of lesser value.

"Business is the primary institution in our society that creates economic value," says Van Duzer. "Many other institutions create mainly social, intellectual, spiritual capital — and business draws on those. But as it relates to economic capital, business is the only institution focused on creating that. Everyone else draws down on the value created by businesses: churches, universities, arts organizations, and so forth."

This role comes into focus in the third chapter of 1 Corinthians, which describes Christians laboring together with God as God metaphorically cultivates his grain and builds his temple. Bill Heatley, author of *The Gift of Work: Spiritual Disciplines for the Workplace,* asks of this passage, "What does it mean to be a field?" He says it means that Christians are to meet the needs of others and help the world flourish and prosper. "What does it mean to be God's building?" He replies, "In many ways, to live the embodiment of being part of the temple — a place of dwelling, peace, security; a place of family, of growth, of storage for future use, for difficult times."

Here is a theological principle of some power: The God-ordained use of work to create better things out of lesser things means that if a workplace is organized to extract rather than create value — and in the process actually destroys resources or harms human relationships or undermines the good of society — then that workplace is not operating according to the principle of value creation through work. So there are better and worse ways of organizing work, and it is possible to assess them theologically. To build and safeguard the flourishing of people on earth, the sphere of work desperately needs Christians to act according to Christian ethical lights (which in a given situation may or may not be consistent with the ethics of other religious or non-religious groups).

This is not an easy task. Many work-related situations are gray areas that call for judgment. In some cases, a line of business might increase value only incrementally while also very slightly and indirectly harming other human beings. Many work-related decisions are mitigated by government regulations, competition, and personal factors. The thing not to do, Van Duzer says, is to "talk about an arena of work such as business as if it was an immutable thing like gravity, and all we can do is bring our best selves to it." That is not true, he insists, because business is a social construct. "God cares about how it is constructed. And some of the paradigms, themes, value systems for business are in fact open to be reevaluated with Christian lenses."

2. Work as a place of self-expression

God has designed work in a way that allows individual and unique persons to use their abilities and indeed their very personalities to benefit others. Work is a mode of expressing who we are. Van Duzer puts it more strongly in the case of business:

"Business exists to give people opportunities to express aspects of their identity in meaningful and creative work," he says. But this can be said of other sorts of workplaces as well. As we work, we often find a special kind of fulfillment and affirmation not available to us in other spheres of life.

3. Work as a place of formation

Work carries a special benefit for people open to being shaped by God in the midst of it. Attentive workers can find that their labor—either with others or in solitude—can promote holiness. As people experience the stresses, strains, toils, and triumphs of working and seek God in the midst of it all, allowing their personalities to be shaped in ways that are sometimes painful, they can grow. The questions to ask, says Heatley, are these: "What does it mean for Christ to be in me when I am putting together my case file, my spreadsheet, conducting my board meeting? How can I become more like Christ? What steps must I take?"

Those steps may be difficult, requiring actions that rub against sinful inclinations. Or, they may lead to actions that open surprising vistas of grace. Heatley is both an information technology professional and a board member for the Theology of Work Project. As he began to consider his role at work through a theological lens, he says he began to consider the 19th chapter of Acts, which explains that God performed wonders through Paul "so that even his handkerchiefs and apron were taken to people and healed them." Heatley realized that since Paul was a tent-maker, his apron and kerchief were in essence his tools. "God filled the tools of his trade with goodness and holiness, to be means of blessing," he concludes. "My tools were e-mails, meetings, and project plans."

It wasn't immediately obvious how God could work in the midst of such mundane realities. At the time, Heatley was receiving 200 to 300 e-mail messages a day in his corporate setting, and they seemed an insurmountable burden, a pile of minutiae. But when he embraced the idea of being a co-laborer with God, he tested it on his inbox.

He read St. Francis de Sales, the early-16th-century bishop of Geneva who wrote *Introduction to the Devout Life* especially for lay people. De Sales, he says, "taught that the distaff, the spindle, the simple mundane things of life were actually great opportunities spread throughout our day to do good for God."

So Heatley decided to wrap each e-mail in prayer. "I prayed before I read, and before I responded to, each e-mail. Then I prayed God's blessing into the e-mail."

What happened next? There are always people in organizations who resent and envy those entrusted with more authority, more money to manage. These can become enemies, who wish others ill. Heatley observed that "those e-mails had the effect of turning many of these enemies into friends. There was nothing special in them. Just, in my mind, they had this effect on people purely because God had blessed them."

Heatley suggests that when we become intentional about co-laboring with God, we can watch his hand at work in us, seeing "how intensely he cares about me, and about other people, and how he cares about the good that can be done through me and other people."

Note that this is never merely a matter of individual growth. Christian discipleship in the work place requires ethical behavior for the common good. But ethical behavior is not always easy. He says, "We need to ask, 'How would Jesus work if he were me, in my job, my profession?'" IT

In the next issue: How theological schools, nonprofits, and foundations are helping people think through issues of faith and work.

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Theology for workers in the pews

By Chris R. Armstrong

In the last issue of In Trust, Chris R. Armstrong wrote that churches are good at helping people find meaning on Sunday morning, but during the "other 100,000 hours"—the lifetime that people spend earning their daily bread—pastors often have little to contribute. This is unfortunate, because when people labor, it's possible for them to be co-laborers with Christ who both build up the world, helping it flourish, and also grow in grace, learning new disciplines.

Read the full article at www.intrust.org/work.

In this companion article, Armstrong describes how schools and organizations are making connections between faith and work. In some cases, organizations are helping business leaders to think ethically and theologically. In other cases, they're helping clergy to engage more intelligently with business leaders in congregations.

Let's take as given that work matters—it matters to God, and it is most people's primary arena of discipleship. And let's agree that the primary role of seminaries and theological schools is to form pastors and scholars who teach and lead people in discipleship. Therefore, it makes sense that theological education should serve a vital role in making the connection between faith and work.

Yet most theological schools are not doing this well. Professors and administrators often lack a sense that pastors should equip their people to see their work as vitally important in the kingdom of God. The atmosphere in the seminary can promote a disconnection between theology and the issues facing working people. Professors often have little nonacademic work experience, and even those who desire to learn and teach in the area of faith–work integration hardly know where to start.

Harvard scholar Laura Nash, coauthor (with Scotty McLennan) of *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life,* finds in her research that across traditions and denominations, theological education has still barely begun to help ministers understand this topic. Nash argues that if pastors and other church leaders caricature business in hostile terms, failing to provide spiritual guidance for the work lives of people in the pews, they commit "one of the largest acts of self-marginalization since their support of national prohibition."

How to bridge the divide

What, then, should theological educators do? A first step is careful listening. This may mean paying attention to the lay-led faith-and-work movement, which has done an end-run around the religious establishment. This movement is developing a contextual theology among people who are actually doing "secular" work, seeking religiously informed answers to the existential sense of disconnection between the two halves of their lives. Professional teachers and preachers would do well to listen a bit to these people.

Indeed, theologians and pastors have begun to pay attention. And business people, in turn, have begun to take practical steps to initiate and fund change within theological schools. In a few cases, this has taken institutional form as significant centers on seminary campuses. **Fuller Seminary**'s Max De Pree Center for Leadership and **Gordon-Conwell**'s Mockler Center for Faith and Ethics in the Workplace were both founded and funded with lay resources. Other lay-initiated centers, such as the **National Center for the Laity** in Chicago and the **Theology of Work Project** in Massachusetts, are not housed on seminary campuses, but nevertheless sponsor or highlight scholarship in this field.

These examples, though still isolated, are instructive—perhaps even inspiring:

- Gordon-Conwell's **Mockler Center** opened in 1996 with funding from the widow of Colman Mockler, who had been CEO of Gillette from 1975 until his death in 1991. From 1999 to 2008, Will Messenger directed the Center, bringing both business and pastoral experience (along with business and divinity degrees), and under him, Gordon-Conwell initiated a concentration in workplace theology, ethics, and leadership that results in either an M.A. in religion or a D.Min. Led today by David Gill, the center is partnering with the Kern Oikonomia Network (more on that below) on a project in which students at Gordon-Conwell's downtown Boston extension site help mobilize congregations to fight poverty—by working with entrepreneurs to incubate new small businesses that create jobs.
- In 1999, Lilly Endowment Inc. launched its **Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation** (PTEV) initiative. The program has awarded grants to 88 church-related liberal arts colleges and universities to strengthen programs that help students examine career and life choices through eyes of faith—whether those choices lead to ordained ministry or to secular workplaces. (The Council of Independent College's new **Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education**, which involves 179 colleges, is now continuing the work of the PTEV initiative.)

  In 2008, a group of five theological schools approached Lilly and sought support for a **Christians' Callings in the World** project. Leaders at these five—**Luther**, **Duke**, **Catholic Theological Union**, **Fuller**, and **Princeton**—had noticed that graduates of PTEV schools were arriving on campus already deeply engaged in a vocational discernment process, but the seminaries were not well positioned to help these students move forward in their discernment. Moreover, they began to ask how they were preparing their students—future pastors—to help their future congregations think about their own vocations.

  Under the grant, the five schools have been working separately but collaboratively to teach future pastors how to engage members of their congregations in vocational discernment practices, helping them make deeper connections between their faith and work. Naturally, this has invited the participation of faculty and even trustees—not an easy or straight-line process.
- In 2009, the Kern Family Foundation of Waukesha, Wisconsin, which had been supporting seminary education through student scholarships for more than a decade, created a seminary initiative called the **Oikonomia Network**. Framed as a "learning community" for theological educators, its mission is to help its members aid churches in integrating theological truth and Christian discipleship with work and economic thinking. Through the network, the foundation now funds significant initiatives at 12 seminaries, including **Trinity Evangelical**, **Bethel**, **Southwestern Baptist**, Azusa Pacific's **Haggard School of Theology**, and Biola's **Talbot School of Theology**. All these initiatives seek to train pastors to affirm the basic goodness of work, business, and economic activity; to prepare people to discern their callings and pursue excellence in their work; to help communities respond in virtuous ways to the changes wrought by economic forces; and to cast a future-oriented vision for virtuous membership and participation in the civic community.

So far, the most challenging among these goals seems to be achieving economic literacy. The theological schools in the network are typically more comfortable teaching and

learning about *work* and *vocation* than about the moral world of the market and the nuts and bolts of business. Oikonomia Network program director Greg Forster says,

> Economics is not what most people think. The economy is just people exchanging their work with each other. It's not only in workplaces and markets; it's in homes and neighborhoods, and anywhere people do work that cultivates creation. Work takes up most of our lives, because God made us to cultivate blessings and make the world a better place. That means most of our lives take place in the economy. If most of our lives are played out on the economic stage, we need to know how the gospel applies to economics — and we need to know something about economics itself.

To help seminaries do that learning, Forster is leading a process to develop a set of "economic wisdom maxims" stressing the moral dimensions of economics.

The credibility gap and other challenges

What does this sort of theology of work integration look like in seminaries? In my own setting, Bethel's Work with Purpose initiative is presenting a slate of faculty- and student-centered activities during 2013, from reading groups and forums to public lectures and a conference in October. The seminary community will read, discuss, and above all listen together with laypeople in the marketplace.

A seminary course on the theology of work and vocation will be complemented by a pilot church-based course in theology of work, co-developed with church partners and refined for wider distribution in partnership with Christianity Today International (the publisher of *Christianity Today*, *Leadership Journal*, and other magazines). We are already seeing how we will need to build trust among people active in various ministry settings — seminary, church, and workplaces. We recognize that both church and seminary face a credibility gap as they address this topic.

Messenger offers an example of this gap:

> Most businesspeople would say, "I love my pastor, otherwise I'd quit the church. I'm upset with him, because he misunderstands what people like me do; he takes cheap shots at us. But he's a nice guy. It's not his fault — he just doesn't have the training he needs to understand the world where I work." What do we do with this? It tells us that the first thing working folks want to hear from the seminary is not all the things the seminary is going to do to fix the problem — there is no credibility in that! Businesspeople and other workers want to hear that the seminaries recognize what the problem is and are willing to change their cultures to address it.

In other words, seminaries have to recognize that their first impulse — to start programs that will output information to the working world — is backwards. Job one is to reverse the information flow. Of his Mockler Center experience, Messenger observes that "what we discovered is that the seminary doesn't have much expertise that is useful to the people in the pews. And in many ways, this institute has been more valuable to the seminary by bringing the concerns of lay Christians back to the seminary."

Any attempt to bring this emphasis into the central concerns of the church is likely to meet resistance, because the call here is for the church to divert some of its energy from programs internal to itself, supporting instead the Christian work people are already doing in the world. ("Missional" is the current buzzword for this emphasis.) But this feels scary in North America, where churches are supported not by the state but by individuals voluntarily giving of their time, talents, and treasure — and where, not insignificantly, people gravitate toward churches that serve their needs. Religious competition itself helps drive the multiplication of programs within the church.

We find something similar when we ask theological schools to address this area. Schools, too, are committed to sustaining their own programs, including the classic departments of theological education: biblical languages, theology, homiletics, and the like. Because there is not a department that cares about the non-church-related work of lay people, pastors never get trained in it, Messenger re-

minds us. "Seminaries too often act as if the central mission of the seminary is to equip pastors to spend all their time getting people to pour their own time and effort into church."

But to learn how to integrate faith and work, people in seminaries must visit laypeople in their places of business, listen hard to the needs expressed there, and *then* work out how to address them. That does not seem central to the mission of most seminaries — at least, not as they have classically been configured.

Even the Oikonomia Network seminaries, which are buying into this new focus, still face the reality of tight curriculums: Most seminaries simply have no space to add additional core courses to already bulging programs. Messenger likes to say, "If I could make the following promise, I could raise any amount of money: 'Give me X million dollars and I will guarantee that every graduate of our seminary will have one course that will give an accurate understanding of business and economics.'" But experience has shown him that this just won't happen in most seminaries.

Nevertheless, wonderful things start to happen once a theological school does start to teach this emphasis, whether in individual lectures and assignments within the theological disciplines, in electives, or in extracurricular learning modes. Gordon-Conwell discovered this once they launched a degree program concentration in "workplace leadership and business ethics." This program brought master's and D.Min. students together in the same classroom, and the dynamics, while initially uncomfortable, proved tremendously fruitful.

Messenger describes it:

> The D.Min. students are mostly (though not all) pastors. The masters of arts in religion students mostly work in business, but also some in academia, government, medicine, and the like. The first three days of class, they're skeptically scoping each other out. Businesspeople think of pastors as nice but not knowledgeable about the business world, and pastors see business people as sons and daughters of God but greedy, not knowing their Bibles.
>
> And eventually they find they want to dance together. Pastors start saying "Wow, so that's the kind of decision you have to make? I thought you were always deciding between doing good and making money. But now I see your decisions are about how to support people, how to do trade-offs." And businesspeople: "You pastors actually do care. You really do know the Bible — you're not just parroting it, you're helping me understand how the Bible works." Eighty percent of the time, you end up with wonderful conversations.

David Miller suggests other creative ways for seminaries to bring ministers-in-training on board with faith–work integration:

- **Rethink field education.** Expand the conception of clinical pastoral education (CPE) and field education programs from the traditional realms of hospitals, prisons, and psychiatric wards to include internships in local businesses and workplaces.
- **Create new institutes.** Develop faith-and-work centers or institutes that undertake joint ventures or research projects with professional schools (e.g., law, business, medicine), denominational bodies, and established faith-and-work leaders and groups.
- **Ship out the theologians.** Send some theologians on "externships" to work for a business for a semester or a year, undertaking research and gaining firsthand familiarity with marketplace issues.
- **Offer executive MBA-type courses.** Develop courses for people in the workplace, much as many business schools offer executive education courses and continuing education programs.

None of this is easy. It takes concerted time, money, and institutional will. But the alternative isn't appealing: continued marginalization of the church from daily life and continued confusion among Christians about the value and the spiritual, theological, and biblical dimensions of their work. And the theological schools that do this well may find an answer to one of the current crises in theological education: expensive seminary degree programs that often fail to meet the needs of would-be ministers and of the church.

The more a company listens to its customer base, the surer its path to success — what business leader doesn't already know that? Similarly, theological schools whose lay-responsive programs are grounded in listening will likely find themselves training students in more distributed ways, "out there" in churches and workplaces. Such forward-thinking seminaries can produce ministers who (1) are not drowning in the debt inevitably racked up in standard residential models and (2) are highly sought after and well supported by lay people who want both an affirmation of their daily work and the empowerment to labor "as unto God."

In other words, as theological schools discover how to affirm the work of ordinary people, they may well also discover how to do their own work in new and more effective ways. IT

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