

# The Church in the Workplace

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## The Church in the Workplace, Chapter 1

This is a book on the church in the workplace. I hope it will help you understand that the true church of Jesus Christ does not only take the form that usually comes to mind when we hear the word "church," namely, congregations of believers that meet together for worship on Sundays (as well as for other congregational activities), but this same true church also takes the form of the dispersion of believers out in the workplace the other six days of the week.

### The Church: Both a Bride and an Army

Understanding those two forms of one church is a necessary starting point, but not the finishing point, of this book. The finishing point is much broader. I hope that it will bring us to the place where we will be doing our part to glorify God through the actual transformation of society itself. True, there are legitimate ways of thinking of the church as an end in itself, such as seeing the church as the Bride of Christ. But there are other equally legitimate ways of thinking of the church. One of them, for example, is characterizing the church as the army of God. In this scenario, the church becomes a means toward an end, not an end in itself. The church moves out on the battlefield, marshaled against the forces of the enemy, with the divine assignment to retake the dominion of society, which Satan usurped from Adam.

This book leans toward the battlefield approach. By saying this, I don't want to be misunderstood as trivializing the fact that the church is also a bride. It certainly is, and as such, the church's relationship with God materializes in the bedroom, so to speak. Intimacy is the key here. However, the same church also functions as an army, and the church's relationship to God in this case materializes not in the bedroom but in the throne room. There the divine Commander-in-Chief gives out the assignments for war. The cover of the book *Worship Warrior*, by Chuck Pierce and John Dickson, puts the two concepts together quite tersely "Ascending in Worship, Descending in War."

Every commander-in-chief expects that his or her army will not only fight the war but also go on to win it. If God gives us orders to transform the communities in which we live, we can legitimately expect that He will also give us the tools we need to accomplish His purpose. I believe that one of these tools is a clear understanding of the church in the workplace, and that is where we need to begin in this first chapter.

### The Big Picture

The book of Revelation says several times, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). While Christ spoke this during His revelation to the apostle John, I believe that its truth is applicable today as well.

In order to understand the significance of this Scripture, there are a couple of things to notice about it. First, the tense of the verb "says" is present, not past. There are

many important things that the Holy Spirit *said* (past tense) to the churches, starting with the Bible itself.

At the same time, I believe just as strongly that the Holy Spirit did not stop speaking after the Bible was written and the canon of Scripture was established. The Spirit continues to speak, and God's people need to listen attentively. Parents need to know what the Spirit is saying to their families; teachers need to know what the Spirit is saying to their pupils; corporate executives need to know what the Spirit is saying to their companies; pastors need to know what the Spirit is saying to their church; believers on the city council need to know what the Spirit is saying to their community; and so on.

Contrary to what some people might think, however, it is not the responsibility of all believers, nor even of church pastors, to hear directly what the Spirit is saying to the *churches* (plural). Apostles are the ones who have been given the primary responsibility of hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Those who provide apostolic leadership to a number of churches need to hear what the Spirit is saying to those churches under their apostolic covering. Likewise, those who have more of a horizontal jurisdiction need to hear what the Spirit is saying on an even broader basis.

True to my personal apostolic calling over the years, I have found myself developing the boldness (I hope it's not arrogance) to say that I am quite sure that I am hearing a major global word from the Spirit. I would be less bold if I imagined that I were the only one hearing this, but fortunately I am not the only one. Numbers of other leaders who also hear from God are now saying the same or similar things, providing further confirmation.

What is this word from the Spirit? "*Social transformation!*"

In a later chapter I explain the biblical rationale for the church, in all of its forms, to aggressively seek to take dominion of the society in which we live. Meanwhile, in order to see the big picture, consider the following graphic.

Social transformation is standing on two pillars: the church in the workplace and the transfer of wealth. Without both of them, we will not see our cities transformed. The pillar of the church in the workplace arises from the foundation of the biblical government of the church, and the pillar of the transfer of wealth arises from the foundation of breaking the spirit of poverty. Finally, the ongoing, dynamic linkage between the two pillars is provided by workplace apostles.

I am fully aware that the preceding paragraph contains much terminology that will be unfamiliar to many readers. However, my objective is to explain every one of the components of this graphic in such detail as we move through this book that it will end up making good sense. If I accomplish this purpose, I believe that we will all be hearing a very important thing that the Spirit is saying to the churches in this hour.

### **A Major Paradigm Shift**

What I am suggesting is not some minor fine-tuning of what we have traditionally assumed. It is a major change. I can testify, for example, that it demanded a radical change in my own thinking. For years I had been aware of the teaching on marketplace ministry that was emerging, and I had a favourable disposition toward it.

But I had planned on keeping it at arm's length, letting others carry this particular ball, while I continued going about doing what I considered to be more important things. The change began when my friends Dennis and Megan Doyle of Minneapolis invited me to speak on marketplace ministry at a gathering of Nehemiah Partners in June 2001. My first inclination was to politely decline the invitation, until God surprised me with as clear a word as I have received from Him: "My son, I want you to pay strict attention to the church in the workplace."<sup>1</sup>

From that point on, it was no longer a matter of preference on my part; it was a matter of obedience. So I prepared a talk for Nehemiah Partners. The content of the talk was not particularly memorable, but the occasion was. It marked the beginning of my paradigm shift. At that point, I began to see things about believers in the marketplace that I had never seen before.

Not knowing much about this new assignment that God had given me, I, being a professional scholar, did what scholars usually do. I began to purchase and read all the books I could find on the subject at hand. At this writing, I now have purchased and read over 100 books on the faith-at-work movement. I am amazed at how much the Holy Spirit has been revealing to so many people the tremendous power for social transformation that has been locked up in the church in the workplace.

What is a paradigm shift? A paradigm is simply a mental grid through which we interpret certain aspects of reality that come to our attention. We all know that two people can arrive at vastly different conclusions after processing exactly the same facts. That is because they have different paradigms. So a paradigm shift involves making changes in our mental grids. This will be necessary for most of us when we begin to hear what the Spirit is saying about the different components of the social-transformation graphic.

Notice that, because a paradigm is a mental grid, the central issue is how we *think*. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Some important things in life require a change of heart. But a paradigm shift requires a renewing of the mind. We can be transformed if we begin to think properly.

### **What Happens in a Paradigm Shift?**

What happens in a paradigm shift? Inevitably, we get pulled out of our comfort zones. We begin to realize that we need to make some adjustments to the way we had been thinking for a long time. This is easier for some than for others. Social science has studied this and has concluded that whenever a new innovation is introduced, some individuals are early adopters, some are middle adopters, some late adopters, and some are laggards who refuse to accept the innovation at all. To put it in plainer language, some people frequently find themselves ahead of the curve, while others settle for ending up behind the curve.

When the notion arises that the people of God in the workplace are, in fact, a legitimate form of the church, it proposes a significant innovation for most people. Consequently we should not be surprised if we find ourselves entering seasons of dialogue, debate and even heated disagreements. We are seeing a certain amount

of conflict these days because leaders are being pushed to the boundaries of their comfort zones.

Even though this is true, a major shift in thinking concerning the church in the workplace will eventually occur. Why do I say this? Because as I have already suggested, it is one of the things that the Spirit is currently saying to the churches. How long will the shift take? Who knows? It took the Sunday School movement (an equally radical paradigm shift some 200 years ago) at least a whole generation to become acceptable to the church at large. I don't think it will take quite that long for the church in the workplace to be accepted, but it won't happen overnight.

### **The Kingdom of God**

In order to develop a mind-set that is receptive to the fact that the church exists in the marketplace, just as it also exists in the congregations that meet on Sundays, it is essential to understand the practical meaning of the term "the kingdom of God." True, every Bible reader is familiar with the phrase, but many have not yet grasped its broader implications. Consider Myles Monroe's testimony:

I went to college and have a degree in theology, but there was not one class on the Kingdom. I read the four Gospels and it was the only thing that Jesus preached. That was a very strange contradiction to me. The Spirit of God has been speaking about the Kingdom for years, but we are finally listening and that's exciting to me. We will see the true impact of the Kingdom if we keep preaching it.<sup>2</sup>

One reason that some have not been listening, as Myles Monroe laments, is that they have imagined that the church and the kingdom of God are the same thing. Others have thought that the church is here now, while the kingdom of God is something that will come when the Lord returns. Both of these ideas are very common among believers today, but both are erroneous. If we hang on to either one, we will not be able to shift our paradigm and move with the current flow of the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom of God is not confined to the four walls of the local church. It never has been. It is much broader than that. Where, then, is the kingdom of God? How do we identify it? For a starter, the kingdom of God is not a kingdom of this world. It has no territorial boundaries. It does not issue passports. It cannot join the United Nations.

Still, the kingdom of God is not simply a metaphor or a figure of speech. It is tangible. It is not something that we are waiting for. It exists here on the earth right now. The kingdom of God is to be found wherever there are individuals who exalt Jesus Christ as their King. They recognize that Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords and that all loyalty and obedience are due Him. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

### **"Your Kingdom Come"**

It is God's desire that the values, the blessings and the prosperity of the kingdom of God penetrate all areas of society. This was foremost in Jesus' mind when He was on Earth. For example, think of what He said to His disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray. He responded with what we now call the Lord's Prayer. It is interesting to note that Jesus gave His disciples this prayer not once, but twice. The two instances, as recorded in Matthew and Luke, occurred a

year and a half apart. Both times Jesus taught them to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).

The only way that our society and the communities in which we live are going to become characterized by the values of the kingdom of God is through believers like you and me. The kingdom of God is within us, and we are the ones responsible for advancing it wherever we live and minister. As I have said, the church's divine assignment is nothing short of transforming society. We, of course, cannot do it alone. We need each other, just as every member of a body needs every other member to function at the optimum level. That's why we are called the Body of Christ.

As the Body of Christ, we've connected with each other fairly well in our local congregations. We've also made considerable progress in promoting unity among the pastors and churches in our cities. But we have been weak in connecting with the church, our fellow believers, in the workplace.

### **The Church Versus the World**

One of the reasons for this weakness has been a common mind-set of the old paradigm, namely, the notion that the world is our enemy. True, Satan uses the world, the flesh and the devil to combat us in every way. However we should not allow this to be an excuse to abandon the world. Jesus said that we are to be *in* the world, but not *of* it (see John 17:13-14). That is why we must renew our minds and no longer think of the local church as something over against the marketplace.

Fortunately, this is changing. Much of the literature that I referred to previously is teaching how we should relate to the world positively, and increasing numbers of believers are agreeing with their responsibility to minister in the workplace. I like the way that Jack Graham of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, puts it: "Revival will come when we get the walls down between the Church and the community."<sup>3</sup>

In the 1990s many church leaders applied this axiom to the global-prayer movement with notable success. But now I see that it is equally important to apply it to apostolic ministry in the 2000s. The obvious reason for this is that God's people are out in the community most of the time. Think of it this way: Believers *live* in the marketplace; they *visit* their local congregations only once or twice a week.

I realize that some people will have difficulty with a thought like that. And I think that I can identify the major reason why. It is because we, particularly those of us in the Western world, live with a mind-set that has been moulded by Greek (or Greco-Roman) thinking. This is extremely important, so let me try to explain what I mean.

### **The Greek Mind-set of Dualism**

Most of us who were born in the United States and who can trace our lineage back to Western Europe or the British Isles have had our minds moulded, to a large extent, by Greek philosophy. We may not have studied much philosophy in school, but the name Plato, and the fact that he had a great deal to do with the way we think, is common knowledge. Of course Plato was not the only Greek philosopher who influenced subsequent Western civilization, but he was arguably the most famous.

Plato has gone down in history as a chief protagonist of what is called dualism. According to him, the world is divided into two levels. John Beckett, a businessman and one of the chief leaders of today's church in the workplace, describes these levels in his book *Loving Monday*:

[Plato] sought to identify unchanging universal truths, placing them in the higher of two distinct realms. The upper level he called "form," consisting of eternal ideas. The lower level he called "matter." The lower realm was temporal and physical. Plato's primary interest lay in the higher form. He deemed it superior to the temporary and imperfect world of matter.<sup>4</sup>

Beckett, whose purpose in his book is to help us see that the work that most believers do between Sundays is a valid form of Christian ministry, goes on to write, "The rub comes when we see where Plato placed work and occupations. Where, indeed? In the lower realm."<sup>5</sup>

Why has this been a major obstacle to our appreciating the true validity of the church in the workplace? Here is the way one of our most respected marketplace leaders, Dennis Peacocke, explains it:

Dualism has polluted evangelical Christianity in grievous ways. The marketplace was "carnal" because it dealt with "earthly things" like business and money. Adultery was properly viewed as sinful, but the worldly realm of economics was viewed, like politics, as some kind of "neutral zone" where Christianity had no real place trying to affect the system of economics, production, management, or distribution. Hence, no Christian ministry was possible in that realm.<sup>6</sup>

Where did the Greek philosophers get their information? From human ideas. They believed that humankind was supreme. That is why their philosophy is also called humanism or secular humanism.

### **The Hebrew Mind-set of Unity**

The biblical way, the Hebrew way, of understanding life is quite different from Plato's. Humans are not the centre of the Hebrew world view; God is. Truth does not come from human reason; it comes from divine revelation. For the Hebrews, the only upper level of the world is God; all the rest, visible or invisible, is under God. James Thwaites explains it in this way:

Platonic thought believes there is a spiritual realm that is separate and distinct from the natural/created realm. The Hebrews, on the other hand, saw the divine presence and word in, through, and over all things of the present creation. The Hebrews saw the heaven of God, his throne, existing over all of their life and work in the present age.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, while Plato saw work as something separate from and inferior to the purity of the spiritual realm, Hebrews see both the spiritual and the natural (including work) realms as one entity under the hand of God.

The conclusion that can be derived from the Hebrew perspective is that our work is a form of ministry. It is as sacred as singing in the choir. I know that this can be hard to agree with at first, because we have been programmed with the Greek mind-set. But the more we can switch our paradigm to the Hebrew mind-set, the better we will understand the church in the workplace.

## **The Nuclear Church and the Extended Church**

Until this point I have frequently affirmed that there is a church in the workplace, but I have not as yet addressed the issue from a biblical perspective. The biblical word translated as "church" is *ekklesia* (sometimes spelled *ecclesia*). The root meaning of "ekklesia" in the original Greek is simply "the people of God." The New Testament uses this word in two different ways. Sometimes it refers to the people of God gathered together in congregations. That is our traditional idea of the local church. But other times it means believers in general, wherever they might find themselves. Both are the true church.

David Oliver and James Thwaites, in their book *Church That Works*, provide a helpful description of the different forms that the church takes. They write,

Our theology of the church has caused us to emphasize this gathering aspect over every other element the word *ekklesia* might contain. For example, in Ephesians the word *ekklesia* is never used in relation to the gathering. . . . Certainly, the household gatherings of the saints are gatherings of the church, but we need to understand that it is not the gathering that makes them the church. They are the church and so when they gather they gather as that church.<sup>8</sup>

We must agree that the church takes on two forms. One is the gathering of believers in local church congregations each Sunday. The other is the scattered body of believers throughout the workplace the other six days of the week. They are the same people, namely, the people of God. From the Hebrew perspective, they are one church, living in harmony, not opposing or competing with each other. However, the way the church functions when it is gathered is quite different from the way it functions when it is scattered. It is like a football team that behaves one way out on the playing field and another way in the locker room. But I'll discuss the church's differences in function in later chapters.

What is the best terminology to describe these two forms of the church? In my opinion, the terms "church and world," "church and marketplace," "priests and kings," "church and Kingdom" and "pulpit and marketplace" all reflect to one degree or another the Greek way of thinking. They maintain the distinction between the sacred and the secular, though both forms are actually the church. I like "gathered church and scattered church" better, because the term signifies that both forms are the church. However, I have concluded that the best terminology of all is "nuclear church and extended church," which builds on the commonly accepted sociological concepts of the nuclear family and the extended family.

Sociologically, the nuclear family consists of mother and father and children and those who live under the same roof. The extended family consists of the nuclear family along with grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on. Both are family, but they are two different forms of the same family.

To follow this analogy, I have chosen "extended church" to refer to the church in the workplace.

## **Ministry in the Extended Church**

Until recently I was so much of a traditionalist that I wrote in some of my books that all true ministry needed to be congregationally based. I thought that the whole

church was only the nuclear church. It had not entered my mind that another form of the true church could be the extended church. I even went so far as to teach that spiritual gifts were given to use only in the nuclear church.

I mention this because I want to empathize with those who have not yet gone through the paradigm shift that I am advocating in this book. If you are one of them, be assured that I understand where you are coming from. But I also want to encourage you to begin to stretch your ideas of church and ministry. Let's live in the present, not in the past.

What God's people (the *ekklesia*) do in the extended church can be considered ministry just as much as leading a small group, teaching Sunday School, greeting those who come to church on Sunday, praying for the sick after church services and even pastoring the church. I will go into this in a lot more detail later on in the book, but for now, let me help ease some readers through the paradigm shift by ending with a thought that will be new to many, namely, that *work is sacred*.

### **Work Is Sacred**

Once again, let's try to think more like Hebrews. Work is part of God's original design for the human race. According to Genesis 2:15, when God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He put them there to work the garden. This is a far cry from Plato's teaching that work was part of a physical realm that was inferior to a spiritual realm. Work is of God; it is just as spiritual or as sacred as any other part of God's original creation.

I like the way that Robert Tamasy puts it:

Work is sacred. It was ordained by God from the beginning, before the fall of man. After the fall, it just got rougher, frustrating, exhausting, sometimes even boring. But work pursued with excellence and integrity is still pleasing to God, a way of honouring Him by serving in the unique ways He has equipped us.<sup>9</sup>

Now, to use a vernacular, let's kick this up another notch. Work can even be regarded as a form of worship. I know that some who read this will suspect that I may be going too far, but first consider what Mark Green says about this:

Work is ordained by God. And it should be dedicated to God. . . . The Hebrew word for work is *avodah*, the same as the word for worship. "Service" captures the flavour best. Work is a seven-letter word-service-to God and people. And though I would lose my job if I built a theology on the basis of that observation alone, we can see elsewhere in scripture that work is a part of "everything" we do "to the glory of God." For God, work is part of our worship. It is part of our service to him.<sup>10</sup>

The other day in church I was singing Matt Redman's song "Let Everything That Has Breath," when we came to the line "I will worship You with every breath." I got to thinking about the premise behind that line. Part of worship is obviously singing songs like this one in church on Sunday, no question. However, that is not all worship is, if we really believe that we can worship God with every breath. Wouldn't we be worshiping God with every breath at work? I can remember how relieved I was when the Holy Spirit gave me this thought. Why? Because, to be honest, I enjoy working even more than I enjoy singing. And it gives me hope that there will be work

in heaven as well as times of singing new songs as we gather around the throne of the Lamb. The thought of sitting around and playing a harp for all of eternity has never been that appealing.

I love the way that Gregory Pierce sums it up in his book *Spirituality @ Work*. The spirituality of work is a disciplined attempt to align ourselves and our environment with God and to incarnate God's spirit in the world through all the effort (paid and unpaid) we exert to make the world a better place, a little closer to the way God would have things.<sup>11</sup>

Yes, there is a church in the workplace-we are that church-and what we do in the workplace is just as much ministry, service to God and even worship as what we do on Sunday in our local church.