

Three and a half years ago I became a manual worker, on the understanding that I would work for at least a year in a factory. Beyond that my future was not clear. All I knew then was that the world of industry and commerce was far removed from the world I had known of vicarage, school, university and theological college. Therefore I think it will be worthwhile to begin by describing 4 ways in which I now see this difference.

The first difference comes from the nature of large scale industry. There is the noise of machinery and the smell of oil; but the pressure of production is the most devastating item. Whether the end product is worthwhile or not, production must go on; safety precautions, conditions of work, individual fatigue - all must give way to production. Instead of being an individual of the utmost value to God, to the family and to the community, I am one of 12,000 employees, each easily replaceable, my clock number being 261092. Then at school and in church we are taught that if a job is worth doing it is worth doing well. In the factory we find youngsters operating fly-presses, just pulling a handle all day, to pierce or bend a small bit of metal which may be part of one of those completely useless fins you see on the back of many new cars; only in the evenings and at week-ends can they use their energy and enthusiasm, and, having seen them at work, I have every sympathy with them if they go a little wild at night. Again in church we often learn something close to subservience, and to accept the word of the clergy and bishops without question; at work the man who does not stand up for himself, not only goes to the wall, but in failing to stand for his human rights he undermines the position of others. In church, as in much of political life, theories, ideas and beliefs occupy most of our time and thought; but when we are in the factory, facts and action seem to make all else irrelevant. It is a hard world in which the correct course is not easy to see and the cost of taking an active part can be high in terms of time, energy and unpopularity. It is perhaps closer in sentiment to "Fight the good fight" than to "Jesu, meek and gentle".

For my second point I will tell a brief story about a layman's attitude to this situation. While my vicar was on holiday, I did more church work than usual - 2 wedding interviews on 2 evenings, followed by a wedding on Saturday afternoon and 4 services on Sunday including 3 sermons. Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon were the only time left for my home and family, and I spent most of it cleaning and painting the outside of my house. A fellow driver at work, who is a sidesman at a country church was horrified. He summarised his view by saying "You can do what you like for 6 days in the week, but the 7th is for God". This attitude, which I believe to be contrary to the whole

doctrine of creation and redemption, could be put another way "Secular life is so complicated that we must give way to it for 6 days in the week, but we can justify ourselves by keeping the 7th day religious". My 4th point will bring us back to our attitude to religion, but now for my 3rd.

During my first months in Cowley I had deliberately little contact with any particular church. This opened my eyes. I had been used to inviting people to come to church, to telling people the importance of giving money to the church and the church missionary societies, to encouraging people to help run the church organisations, and to me these were the most important, almost the only important, things to do and the essence of a life dedicated to God. Then, as I looked more objectively from the factory, things seemed different. Not only the Church of England, but the R.C.s, Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists were saying exactly the same things. Other organisations, such as the community associations and political parties, were also appealing for money for really good causes and were calling for really dedicated people; there were also many sports clubs and other associations inviting supporters. In fact, instead of the church standing out as the one and only body of people dedicated to the service of God and neighbour, I saw the church as one of a number of rather self-centred organisations, which continually were appealing to outsiders to come to their functions and to give money for their support.

Fourthly, I think that the difficulty we all face in trying to show forth the Christian faith is due as much to the agreement we have with non-church people as to the disagreement.

The things that occupy most of the time of clergy are church services, preparation for the services of Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage, church clubs, church meetings, church schools and church missionary societies, church organisation and sick visiting, much of which is of church people. These are also the things which most of our lay people would consider to be the most necessary and worthwhile occupations that a man can have. They can all broadly be called religious matters, and I think it is quite reasonable to say that religious matters and religion in general are the most important elements in the life of our clergy and lay people.

Now let us turn to the factory, the office and the people outside the church. These people expect the clergy and church people to be interested in religious things; they expect the church people to spend most of their time in the church activities I have mentioned, to be against drink, bingo, football pools, sex, T.V., strikes and the extravagance of the workers, and to be in favour of getting people to church and using Sunday only for church things. What is more they expect the clergy and church people only to be interested in religion and religious things.

This agreement between church people and the rest that the church people are and should be only interested in religion and religious subjects in this sense is a great obstacle. It means that the Christian faith has become identified with such religious activities to those both inside and outside the church.

But surely this was the very reason for Christ's attacks on the devout and learned Scribes and Pharisees. He never accused them of being irreligious, but rather of being too narrow minded in their religious observance and religious instruction and of ignoring the major issues of justice. In this Christ followed the Old Testament prophets who attacked the Temple worship, not because it was *worship God but because it was* *way to* sheer hypocrisy to be a devout Temple worshipper while accepting and condoning the rank injustice of their society.

The salvation that our Lord taught was a real wholeness of living which involves treating every person, animal and material thing as God means them to be treated. Of course this involves attending church to say thank you and sorry to God, to worship Him and to receive His power to go forward in the world. But it also involves the social, mental and physical environment, so that we may find joy instead of frustration in living, and so that as individuals, communities and nations we may really love our neighbours as ourselves. It is the power to do this that was provided and made available in Christ's life, death and resurrection and which should be received by all through the sacraments of the church.

I have now outlined 4 ways in which those whose life is centred in church activities differs from those outside. Briefly they are (1) that those who are at home in church are confused by what they find in industry and commerce and so (2) they draw a distinction between religion which has precedence on one day a week, and the secular which is allowed to rule for the other 6. Thirdly, the church appears to many outsiders to be competing for money and members in the same way as other organisations, and so it appears as self-centred as the rest. Finally, both those within and those outside the church agree that religion and religious matters are the main or only concern of church people who are not expected to be seriously interested in anything else.

You may well be thinking now that if I am so bold as to make these sweeping criticisms, what am I doing to counter them. My answer is - "Very little", because one man cannot do much and even our whole Group of 5 worker-priests and their wives, one layman and his wife and one unmarried worker-priest cannot make a very large impression.

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I come from a church background, as my father was vicar of several country parishes before he moved to Stepney 10 years ago. Half way through my time at Oxford University I went to CACTM selection conference, and your present bishop was one of the team who then recommended me for ordination. However, after nearly two years at Cuddesdon theological college, I entered Pressed Steel Co. as a manual worker, instead of going into a parish as a curate. The personnel manager there agreed to employ me as a trucker for one year, with the proviso that if I wanted to stay longer I should see him again.

For the first 10 months I worked in a gang of 6 men loading and unloading roofs, doors, wings and other parts of car bodies, after they had been pressed into shape from sheet steel, and before they were trimmed, flanged and pierced ready for assembly. Being in the press shop, where this work was done I met the noise and dirt from the first day, as well as the danger from handling steel.

During that 10 months I persuaded the personnel manager to allow me to stay on as a trucker without any strings or special conditions, and I had two meetings with the Bishop of Oxford. My contact with a number of the industrial chaplains and the few worker-priests had convinced me that my place was in the factory as a workman, but that I should also be a priest. The principal of Cuddesdon theological college agreed to this and finally the Bishop was also convinced.

When I had been in the factory only 7 weeks I took my first and only union post, as a member of the factory canteen committee, of which I soon became secretary.

In February 1959 I left the gang of 6 and became driver of a small factory tractor and in the same month I became secretary of the Cowley Labour party. I married in October 1959 and we moved into a semi-detached house on a housing estate near the factory 3 months later. In the following June I was ordained deacon, and in September 1960 our baby daughter was born.

And so a year ago I was firmly based as a manual worker, buying my house on a housing estate. From this base I used my abilities as seemed best, partly in the church, partly as a trade unionist and as labour party secretary.

Then came the big upset. On New Year's eve my foreman told me that I would have to leave Pressed Steel within a fortnight. The recession in the car industry had caused the sacking of 1500 workers in my factory, including all those manual, unskilled and semi-skilled workers who had been with the firm for less than ~~23~~<sup>3 1/2</sup> years. I was fortunate and got a job as a driver with a laundry, although my pay dropped by £4 a week, and I stayed there for 3 months, when I was recalled to Pressed Steel being one of the most senior laid off.

But as ~~one of the first to be~~ <sup>only 500 have been</sup> recalled, I will be one of the first to get the sack if the recession becomes serious again this winter.

It was on Good Friday that I received the letter recalling me to Pressed Steel, and on the following Tuesday it was announced that one of the Conservatives who represent Cowley on the Oxford City Council had resigned. It is always difficult to get people to offer themselves for positions of responsibility, especially in Local Government, where they are not paid. And so it was that only 5 weeks before the Municipal Elections, I agreed to stand as a Labour party candidate. In the election in Cowley Labour held 2 seats and gained one, and so I became an Oxford City Councillor only a few weeks after returning to Pressed Steel. Then to bring the story up to date, I was ordained Priest by the Bishop of Oxford at the end of June.

As you may expect, my time is full, I say Mattins before breakfast each morning, except Wednesday when I celebrate the Holy Communion in church at 6.30 a.m. On Sunday I celebrate at least once and sometimes preach. Apart from an occasional baptism, wedding or church meeting, this is all the specifically religious activities I perform.

My hours of work are from 7.15 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. from Monday to Friday, but I am now away from work, on part pay, for City Council duties for about 30 hours a month. The Council duties involve not only actual Council meetings, but also the 4 committees that I serve on, including the Children's Committee, dealing with children in need of care and protection, and the Housing Committee, that controls Oxford's 7000 council houses and 3000 families on the waiting list. As the ward that I represent has over 18000 electors, I have quite a number of queries to deal with in the evenings, as well as community association meetings, correspondence and reading about 200 pages of council business each month. I also attend the monthly meetings of my branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Therefore although I am a priest, I spend very little of my time on religious activities, but with my roots in the church, I try to carry my Christian belief into the complex matters of secular affairs.

In a few minutes you will have the chance to ask questions, and so I will try to clear the way by answering two of the more obvious ones.

Firstly, why should I be a priest to do all these things? My answer is simply - "Why not?" I felt and still feel that it is right for me to be both a manual worker and a priest, I see nothing contradictory in this position, and I am sure that there is no theological necessity for a priest to be a professional religious man. Anyone who disagrees with this would, I think, have to show which functions of priesthood cannot be performed by a worker-priest, or what essentials of the priesthood are incompatible with the life of a manual worker.

The second question is this - "Why in addition to being a priest and a manual worker should I be a socialist politician?" The answer must come from my understanding of the Christian faith.

The world owes its existence to God, and it is the power of God that enables a new life to be formed, new discoveries to be made, and new things to be created. It is also the power of God that enables order to come out of chaos, and that provides a worthwhile purpose for all men, animals and materials that are created.

But the creative power provided by God has been misused by men, and now chaos is as obvious as order in the world. To put this right, God came to earth Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, and through His life, death and resurrection we again have the power to restore order in our lives and in the world. We are shown the way by Christ to work in His strength for the right ordering of our own lives, the right relationships with our fellow men, the right use of all the resources of the world and so the right relationship of the whole world with God himself. We pray for this whenever we say in the Lord's Prayer "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven", and we are instructed to carry this out when we hear Christ's summary of the commandments "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" ; and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".

This working for the Kingdom of God on earth is surely one of the fundamental tasks of the church, but it is one that the majority of Christians have neglected. To meet the resulting needs, various bodies have grown up, and among them I see the Labour Movement. To explain this I will mention three practical implications of the quest for the Kingdom of God "in earth as it is in heaven".

Firstly, no Christian can be non-political, for politics is concerned with the organisation of the societies and countries within the world, and every Christian must strive to see that his fellow men are treated as God means them to be treated, and that the materials created by His power are used in the service of God and our fellow men. What is more, it is impossible for anyone to be neutral or detached or above politics, because if we do nothing about conditions in the world today, we are showing by our inactivity that we accept the conditions as perfect or at least as good enough for our fellow men.

Secondly, as we aim to love our neighbour as ourselves and as all men are equal in the sight of God, we should strive to ensure that all men have an equal chance to live and to develop the gifts bestowed on them by God. Thus we have no option but to ensure that everyone else's standards of living, standards of education and standards of health are at least as good as ours. This is a vast

task in the world, where so many are starving and uneducated. It brings us up against those whose only aim is to increase their own standard of living, and those who control and live on a disproportionate amount of a country's or the world's resources. Even in this country those with higher incomes receive full pay when they are ill and high pensions on retirement, while millions of families have to drop to under £5 a week when the man is ill or retires. Similarly in education there is one scale for the rich and another for the rest. I wonder how many here would be prepared for their children to go to a Secondary Modern school; but what is good enough for other people's children should be good enough for ours, and if it is not good enough for ours, then we should see that it is improved for others.

Thirdly, as we seek to see that the resources of the world are used in God's way for the benefit of all, as opposed to the way that suits the immediate self-interest of the electorate <sup>or</sup> of those in power, we need to alter the present relationship between private and public expenditure. For it is generally accepted that public spending should be kept to a minimum so that everyone can be left with as much money as possible to spend individually. This means that as a country we spend as little as possible on hospitals, schools, roads, houses and health services, and we keep to a minimum the pay of public employees as teachers, social workers, firemen and railwaymen. But high priority is given to cars, T.V., washing machines, luxury foods, detergents and furnishings and to the pay of those who make them. Thus a child may have a bright new bicycle but have to spend 10 years at the same all-age school with no science teacher; great care is taken to see that no one who is ill is given too much medicine or too expensive treatment, but when we are fit we are encouraged to eat the most exotic foods; here in London - we see smart new office blocks reaching up to the skies, while around us thousands still have to live in disgraceful slums among derelict houses; the climax to this comes when we are told that public spending must be cut because of the economic situation, but about £500,000,000 a year continues to be spent on advertising, in addition to the fancy packaging, in order to persuade us to buy goods which cannot be very important or else they would not need advertising. As Christians we should surely see that the goods and services which are most important to the development of children and adults have the highest priority, and that the other, perhaps desirable, things take second place.

In these three points I have not mentioned such important issues as penal reform, capital punishment, the problem of colour and many others, but I hope that I have given you an idea of why I am a socialist.

And so to summarise; I have criticised a narrow interpretation of Christianity in which the interests of members are confined to Church activities and Church affairs and I have explained how my political outlook is inseparable from my beliefs as a Christian. My own conclusion is simply that to live out the Christian faith and to explain the Christian faith to others, we must put our faith into action in the life of the society, the country and the world in which we live. This is one reason why I, for one, have become a worker-priest.