

4. SUPPLEMENTARY PAPERS FROM SUB-ISSUE GROUPS

4.1. Spirituality in the World of Work

Spirituality is about discovering and responding to the presence and purposes of God in every context, every task, every relationship and every moment of every day.

The dominant models of spirituality in today's evangelical community depend heavily upon 'monastic' practices of withdrawal and disengagement. Consequently, they do little to enable the Christian to connect the presence of God with the realities and contexts of daily life, especially life in the marketplace. Words and images that commonly dominate this spiritual landscape include *withdrawal, relinquishment, silence, solitude, meditation, serenity* and *stillness*. Words and images dominating life in the marketplace are almost the antithesis of these. Tragically, this sets up an unfortunate dichotomy between the so called 'spiritual' realm and the world of work.

The 'Spiritual' Realm

Withdrawal
Solitude
Silence
Stillness
Serenity
Simplicity
Meditation
Order
Centred
Focused
Seriousness
Quietness

The Marketplace/World of Work

Engagement
Community
Noise
Movement
Chaos
Complexity
Multi-tasking
Interruption
Scattered
Busyness
Humorous
Raised voices

In order for those Christians who spend a large part of daily life in the marketplace to discern and respond to the presence of God 'in every moment of every day', we need models of spirituality that engage with the realities and challenges of daily life *in* the marketplace and not only *away* from it.

(a) *Finding God at the Centre*

Ernest Boyer Jr., in his book *Finding God at Home*, speaks of two legitimate and interdependent models of spirituality. One he calls a *spirituality of the edge*, or desert spirituality. It is this model of spirituality that was pioneered by the ascetics and early monastic communities, those who withdrew from the routine commitments of domestic, marketplace and civic life to places and lifestyles of solitude to nurture their intimacy with and submission to God.

The second model is what Boyer calls a *spirituality of the centre*, a spirituality that pursues the presence of God not *away* from the stuff of daily life, but *at the very heart of it*. This spirituality of the centre is a spirituality for the marketplace, one that presses into the demands, joys and challenges of work as a place to encounter the presence and purposes of God. It is a spirituality that arises out of the certainty that God is as profoundly present at the work bench as God is at the communion table. It flourishes in the knowledge that the Spirit is as present in the gifts expressed in the workplace on Monday as in those expressed in the worship space on Sunday.

Of course, we are not suggesting that these two models of spiritual pursuit are mutually exclusive. All Christians need time at the edge, time to withdraw and to focus in an

uninterrupted way on relationship with God - time for solitude, retreat and the practices of meditation and prayer. To suggest otherwise is to ignore the testimony of scripture and the experience of the Christian church through history. Even Jesus sought time alone with his father, time in the desert or on the mountainside. How can we do anything less? Equally, all Christians - even those who live the majority of life in monastic or desert communities - must engage routinely at the most rudimentary level with the ordinary and mundane aspect of life at the centre. The question to be asked of all Christians is: to which realm of spirituality are you primarily called, to the edge or the centre?

Still today, there are those primarily called to the edge, those who commit to a way of life involving vows of solitude and silence and the daily, disciplined routines of intercessory prayer. For example, we know of a small community of Carmelite nuns living in a walled community in suburban Los Angeles who live by a daily rule of silence and prayer, a community of women committed to spending large parts of each day in uninterrupted prayer for the city of Los Angeles. Such a calling is to be esteemed. However, for the majority of ordinary Christians, this is not what daily life looks like. For these Christians, the call of God is primarily to the centre of life, to the routines, challenges and places of the everyday, including the marketplace. While times at the edge will still need to be sought and planned for, they will always be occasional, accounting for only a small portion of daily life. For these Christians, the challenge is to find ways to discern and respond to the presence of God in the midst of the marketplace and not only away from it. If these Christians are not equipped for such discernment and response, then they are doomed to living the majority of their lives feeling as though they are sitting on the spiritual sidelines while others take centre stage with God.

It is worth saying that those who seek the presence of God in the marketplace are in good company. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels remind us that Jesus spent a large part of his time in the marketplaces, neighbourhoods and domestic spaces of everyday life. While we find him occasionally in the 'sacred' spaces of temple and synagogue or the 'edge' places of desert and mountainside, more routinely Jesus is found in the ordinary and mundane 'centre' places of life. While there, He inevitably tells stories about the nature of the Christian life or the kingdom of God using the most everyday objects, professions, places and tasks: a woman kneading bread, a father grieving for an absent son, a man hosting neighbourhood party, a farmer planting seed. In the most everyday tasks, the wonders of the kingdom of God are revealed.

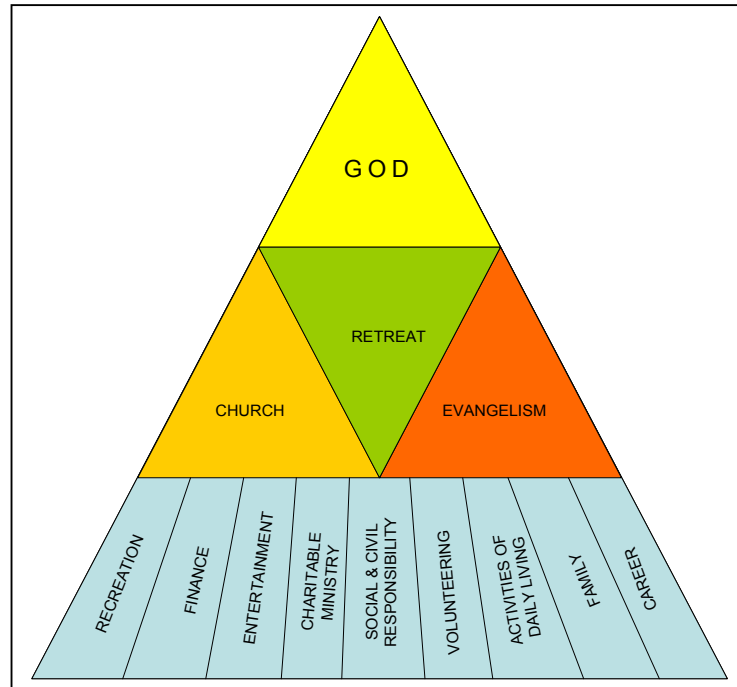
(b) An Incarnational Spirituality

In the evangelical tradition where conversion is such an integral starting point for spirituality, the beginning of the Christian journey is commonly marked by three 'indicators' of spiritual health. This is exemplified in the post-conversion counselling commonly given to a new convert: (i) begin daily bible reading and prayer; (ii) find a Bible-believing Church to attend; and (iii) tell someone about your decision. We will call these *retreat*, *church* and *evangelism*. Commonly, as a convert grows into maturity, these three indicators remain determinative in the Evangelical's diagnosis of the believer's spirituality. While we confidently affirm these three activities as integral to a healthy spirituality, we believe such a model is fundamentally inadequate as a full description of spiritual pursuit for it fails to embrace the many aspects of daily life that do not have an immediate connection to one of these three activities. What do the daily activities of work, recreation, sleep, shopping, friendship, family life, eating, commuting - activities that take up so much of the average Christian's day - have to do with living in the presence of God?

As illustrated in the diagram below, such a model of spirituality places God at the top and designates the three activities of *church*, *retreat* and *evangelism* as the primary mediating activities for nurturing relationship with God. All the other activities can only have connection to spirituality in a derivative sense.

Diagram I: Hierarchical Model

The inadequacy of this model is four fold: *firstly*, it gives emphasis to the transcendence or ‘otherness’ of God - God at the edge - while failing to name the presence of God at the centre of life; *secondly*, it locates spirituality too much in the activities and programmes of the church; *thirdly*, it is only able to affirm the activities of daily life as relevant to spirituality if they provide a context for one of the three main indicators of spirituality (for example, recreation can be claimed as a part of the spiritual life only



if it is playing on a *church* volleyball team; time at the family dinner table can only be named a part of the spiritual life if we engage in *retreat* style activities there such as Bible reading and prayer); and *fourthly*, it infers that spirituality is a process of moving progressively *out of* and *beyond* the human-realm into the God-realm.

A model of spirituality for the marketplace must look different in several respects:

Firstly, it must issue much more out of an *incarnational* understanding of the presence of God. We worship a God who is, in Christ, enfleshed at the centre of human experience, not one removed and distant from the physical world.

Secondly, while it must be a spirituality nurtured by the gathered life of the church, it cannot be confined or contained by it. Certainly the Spirit is profoundly present in the life of the gathered people of God, but the Spirit is not the possession of the church.

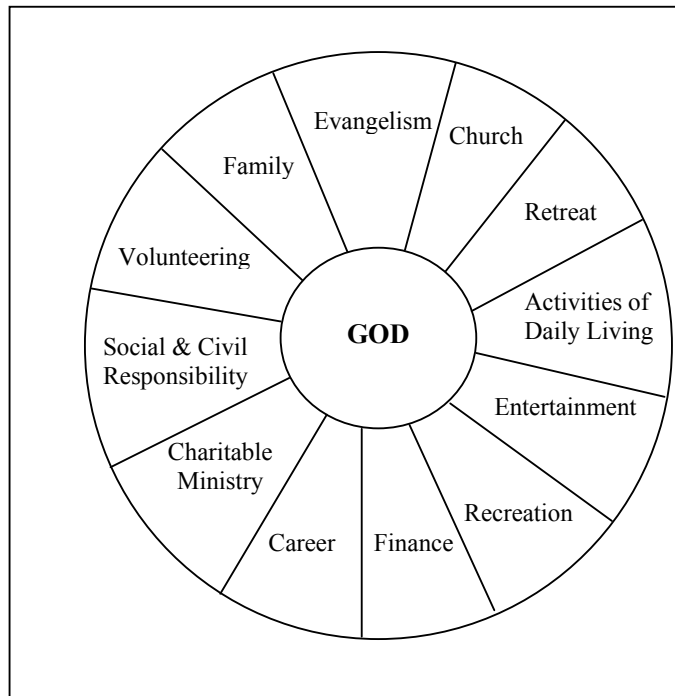
Thirdly, it must be one that allows response to the presence of God equally in every aspect of daily experience. Though we must guard against the errors of pantheism, we can affirm confidently that through the work of the Father in creation, the Son in incarnation and the Spirit in transformation, every aspect of life is a potential revelation of God's presence.

Fourthly, it must be one that does not call for progressive movement *upward* and *out of* the human realm, but one that presses ever deeper *into* the centre of life in the belief that God is profoundly present there.

We can illustrate this more incarnational model of spirituality in this way:

Diagram II: Incarnational Model

Such a model does several things: (i) it affirms the presence of God at the very centre of life; (ii) it gives renewed dignity to the many tasks, roles and contexts of life previously ignored as expressions of spirituality; (iii) it maintains the importance of church, retreat and evangelism as expressions of spirituality; (iv) it reminds us that it is only as we look for God in every aspect of life will we begin to see God more fully.



(c) Practical Suggestions

With this model of spirituality in mind, we now want to suggest some practical ways to nurture a spirituality of the marketplace in both the *gathered* and *scattered* life of the people of God.

A. The Scattered Life of the People of God

Typically, Christians go to gatherings of God's people with an expectation that they are going to meet with God. We evangelicals have been encouraged and nurtured to see and respond to the presence of God in the practices of worship, Bible reading and preaching. What's more, we approach daily quiet times and periods of spiritual retreat with clear expectations of encounter with God. However, it is unusual to approach the computer terminal, the workbench, the classroom or the household chores with such a clear expectation. The title of Michael Frost's book, *Eyes Wide Open*, is a reminder that to see and experience the presence of God in the marketplace requires a new set of glasses, a new set of skills and language that allow us to name the presence of God in places and tasks not normally associated with the sacred.

1. Marketplace Christians can expand their understanding of spiritual disciplines - typically understood as 'edge' activities - to include activities more often associated with the everyday. If a spiritual discipline is broadly understood as any activity undertaken intentionally and routinely that nurtures us into the likeness of Christ, then such activities as nurturing friendship, acts of service, perseverance, providing for one's family, community building, the sharing of meals, attentive listening, careful attention to detail, etc., can be embraced in a new and liberating way.
2. Marketplace Christians can reclaim aspect of their work as spiritually significant when they see what they do as a reflection of the work of God. A simple exercise of listing some of the working roles of God - Creator, Provider, Redeemer, Judge, Architect, Gardner, Healer, Teacher, Reconciler, Administrator - and then to reflect on what aspects of his or her daily work connect with the work of God.
3. Marketplace Christians can find support and fellowship in naming and responding to the presence of God in their work by linking up with other Christians in similar professions or fields of work. Spirituality in the marketplace is not an exercise in solitude but one pursued in community.

B. The Gathered Life of the People of God

The gathered people of God can enable a reclamation of marketplace as a place of God's presence in any number of ways:

1. *By bringing everyday life experiences into the Sunday worship experience.* Through creative liturgy, testimonies, music, banners, and communal prayer, we can encourage Christians to offer their working life to God in worship rather than leave their working life at the door when they enter the sanctuary.
2. *By celebrating the skills and gifts of the marketplace.* Through acts of commissioning or the placement of symbols of our working life on an altar or communion table, we can affirm the working life of the people of God as ministry ordained by God.
3. *By providing places and relationships of accountability.* As Christians in the marketplace face significant ethical, moral and relational challenges in their workplaces, so the gathered community has the opportunity and responsibility to provide relational support and communal discernment.
4. *By providing preaching and teaching relevant to life in the marketplace.* The Bible is full to the brim of stories and teaching relevant to the working life of God's people. Yet too few sermons apply biblical teaching in ways that are directly helpful. This needs to change.
5. *By providing pastoral support in the workplace.* By taking time to visit Christians in their work environment and being genuinely interested in what Christians do and achieve there, pastoral leaders can empower Christians in the marketplace in significant ways.
6. *By taking 'church' to the workplace.* House churches and small groups are ideally placed to take the gathered life of the church to the workplaces of those involved. By meeting after hours in the classroom of a school teacher, the laboratory of a research scientist, or the office of a sales representative, the gathered community can affirm together the work of Christians as significant to the Kingdom of God.

No doubt there are other ways spirituality of the marketplace can be encouraged and affirmed. However this is done, it must be done for the wellbeing of ordinary Christians, for the sake of the church and for the sake of the gospel.