

What is happening in the library profession? What ideologies underpin current management theory and practice? Is there a "Christian response" to downgrading, de-skilling, consumerism and other changes in working life? How can we develop an "inner life" in an increasingly demanding working environment?

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## ***ISSUES IN LIBRARY MANAGEMENT A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE***

### **Introduction**

A chance remark at the Twentieth Anniversary Conference of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship revealed the deep sense of unease over some current management practices (1) - members are concerned about what is happening in their workplace, what is happening in the wider profession, and why. Can the needs and rights of the individual be held in balance with the interests of the whole organisation? Can the cost of career progression in a competitive working environment be equated with a Biblical model of calling and service? What are the ideologies underpinning both management theories and practices?

The remit for the working party was initially to identify and analyse these issues in modern management, good and bad, from a Christian perspective. However it became clear that a positive and compassionate response is needed, with answers as well as problems. The Christian is called to live in the world as it is, challenging not only its ideologies, but also entrenched attitudes and ideas, which do not represent justice and accountability to the people who use our services. As Christians we are committed to change and power. We are the 'Easter People' and are reminded that the change experienced by Jesus' disciples between Good Friday and Easter Day was both terrifying and life changing on a scale totally outside anything we may experience in the workplace. Here is our encouragement: Jesus' words "I will be with you always" (Matthew 28:20) may also be read as "all ways", as library managers or library staff, at all times and for all situations.

The length of time that has elapsed between the initial thinking and the production of this paper, illustrates the pace of change and increasing pressures. This then is a response born out of living with the issues discussed.

## **Cause for Concern**

'Macho managers aren't working', screamed a recent news headline. Findings presented to the British Psychological Society had revealed that the 'do as you are told' culture is to be blamed for high absenteeism, low staff morale and poor performances at work. (2) Anyone who is working, or has worked in library or information service will have had some experience of these symptoms of a disease within our profession. But what are the underlying causes? Is it simply a reflection of the move from service ethos to a business culture? It is easy to blame specific and damaging management practices, but a more complex causal model will consider the interaction between changes in working conditions, and changes in expectation - our own, our customers and the authorities to whom we are responsible.

We are not alone within the library and information sector in experiencing this level of change. In a short discussion paper written for the Black Country Urban Industrial Mission, Olwen Smith states:

The modern world is very diverse and complex. It is a competitive world in which individuals and companies have to struggle to survive and make progress. The mood of fight, which dominates it, often seems very alien to the spirit of Christianity. Those in paid employment are conscious that they are working under orders. They often feel helpless, unable to influence their situation in any significant way. These people are under considerable pressure, whilst those without paid work feel undervalued and have time on their hands. (3)

One of the most significant changes of recent years is that both local authorities and academic institutions are also facing the same pressures to survive, and experiencing many of the same changes in employment patterns as the private sector. Our shared experience of these concerns is a great challenge and an even greater opportunity to consider how we may develop a distinctively Christian concern for justice and care for the individual.

## **The Background of Cuts**

The last decade or so in public libraries has demonstrated the reality of increasingly devastating effects of cuts in revenue spending, affecting book stock, opening hours and staffing numbers. The statistics are stark: 88 per cent of public library authorities in England and Wales were forced to close libraries, and/or reduce opening hours over the previous ten years. (4) In 1999, libraries held 98.4m books and employed 53,103 staff compared with 108.6m books and 7,324 staff twenty years earlier. (5) Around three quarters of all authorities suffered a reduction in real terms in the amount spent on resources.

Library closures are always a last resort and every effort to reduce funding by other means, including reducing staffing costs, will have been tried first. The pressures to deliver budget cuts, through rationalisation, restructures, removing layers of management, reducing specialist services, not filling vacancies, has inevitably led to battles between staff and management. (See, for example the disputes in Lambeth, Bristol, Library Association Record, October 1997).

The academic sector too is experiencing many of the same trends. Convergence - as libraries have been subsumed within other departments under one management - and the consequent rationalisation of posts and loss of funding has led to potential and actual job losses. Such mergers often result in the downgrading of traditional library roles within new structures, and the disestablishment of senior posts. Gradings are not equally applied, and the filling of some merged posts without consultation, or advertisement may follow.

### **Jobs for Life?**

Librarianship is no different from other areas of work, particularly service industries, in experiencing this sort of change. Most people in employment now have to be much more flexible in the course of their working life, and prepared to learn new skills, or change direction. The level of adaptability in terms of re-skilling, demanded of a worker in a traditional industry, whose whole way of life had disappeared cannot be underestimated. It may be an oversimplification to say that the survival of libraries into the future, in the brave new digitised world, will depend on adaptability and the ability to demonstrate old skills and values in a new setting.

In common with many other professions, the assumption of a full time job for life is fast disappearing. An individual entering the profession now is likely to change roles, train and retrain throughout their working life. As Raven reports, many of the members of the Library Association Career Development Group will be 'on temporary contracts and will want the flexibility to fit them for a range of new posts as they progress through a varied career' (Raven, 'Easing the Balancing Act', p. 57). Flexible working, is increasingly the norm as both academic and public libraries recruit part time workers to provide cover as needed for specific hours or times of the year. This can be an opportunity (allowing the worker to accommodate caring responsibilities, or other commitments) or a threat, reflecting the deliberate avoidance by the employer, of permanent responsibilities. This is summarised by the comments of Kate Purcell, Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Employment Research:

“In expanding markets where highly skilled employees are in great demand, individuals are often happy with the economic and career

advantages that come with flexibility. But in very many cases, flexibility for employees means unpredictable or insecure employment, low -pay and few opportunities for training and promotion.” (6)

However, it also allows us to provide services when users need them rather than dictated by traditional staffing patterns.

If adequate core funding is declining, service development can only be achieved by seeking short term funding. At worst, this provides a rationale for the deliberate policy of cuts:

The public sector employer's agenda is clear - more of the same - downsizing, salary reductions, downgrading, voluntary and compulsory redundancies. Their excuse is that there is less money available for public services. (7)

A year later, a further comment was that:

Most of us who are employed in the public sector have never felt more vulnerable in our lives. The reward for this service is to place more demands on those employees who survive budget cuts. (8)

Short-term contracts can mean reduced career prospects, lack of stability and continuity. Although they have their place in project management, and partnership funding, they can restrict longer-term staff and service development. However, time limited posts can also test the usefulness of service developments, or allow staff to use secondments to try new roles and gain wider experience. In a time of rapid change, they offer a more acceptable way of managing limited resources, than a hire and fire culture.

The responsibility for continuing staff development then moves to the individual, who must balance what is available, with their own longer term development needs. However, employers need to recognise and safeguard the development needs of short term or part time staff.

## **Changes in Opening Hours**

Weekend opening (including Sundays) in the case of public libraries, or twenty-four hour opening in the case of academic libraries is fast becoming the norm. The LCF has made its concerns known on Sunday working, and on the pressures created on workers who may have no choice but to work if they wish to keep their jobs (see LCF Newsletter, No. 73, Winter 1999, and Christian Librarian, No. 23, 1999). Whatever the decision by the authority on Sunday opening, it is not good management practice to require staff to work who were not originally employed to work on Sundays. But there is a balance to be maintained between witnessing to the specialness of Sunday for celebration and worship, and the responsibility to recognise that changes in

people's lifestyles may well require different availability.

Public Library Standards mean a public library authority must declare its policy of opening outside the 9-5 day. Extended availability for public services is driven by the government's modernising agenda. Tony Blair, in the introduction to Open All Hours, a report on extended service hours, states that the aim is to 'modernise government and raise the quality and accessibility of all our public services' . (9)

Higher and further education must also consider the needs of students, who almost certainly have to work to fund their study, and who need the availability of library facilities and study space to fit round these complex pressures. There are important management issues if staff, recruited to work one set of hours, are then required to work Sundays. There is no simplistic solution. We may feel we are led according to our conscience to fight these trends, and to direct our energies to lobbying for change. Or we may equally feel called to tread the difficult path of balancing our responsibilities to the communities of interest we serve with protecting the fundamental rights of all members of staff to worship.

### **Downgrading, De-skilling, Undermining Professionalism**

A more serious issue for both academic and public libraries is the perceived erosion of professionalism, and the need for traditional professional skills. Reviews of services have led to the deletion of specialist services, and to fewer professional posts particularly within smaller libraries. If there is no longer a need for a professional qualification, are we giving the message that the profession no longer has any value in a digital age? How can we fulfill our role as information providers without expert and qualified staff as gatekeepers and navigators through the vast range of information?

De-skilling may take the form of deciding a post or level of work was over-professionalised in the past, of having to justify the requirements for certain specific qualifications as essential in advertising jobs, or as a response to increasing mechanisation of tasks.

But is this change in the skills and competencies required in today's libraries a different skill mix, rather than a lesser one? What determines the change in skills? Most obviously, the growth of Information and Communications Technology means staff and users alike need to be computer literate. The expansion of electronic information sources, the increasing sophistication of computerised library management systems, and the government's policies and targets for 'e government' and Internet enabled services will all generate radical change.

Many future users will never visit our buildings, and we will find ourselves called to serve virtual communities. The growth of automation and opportunities for out of hours transactions in the banking and finance sector show the speed of change toward adopting this as the preferred way of using services. On the other hand, information technology actually highlights the desire most of us have to be served by a real person, able to understand and respond to complex needs. As professionals, we know the virtual library can never completely replace the warmth of human interaction with caring staff, or the real experience of the library as a place in its community. This is reflected in the growing demand for advice and support for users, both for quality assured electronic information, and the expectation of guidance over leisure reading.

Working in partnership, across sectors and regions, brings new demands. Mediation and negotiation skills, the ability to work co-operatively within a local political context are becoming essential requirements in all sectors. We have no choice in moving away from the stereotypical approach of providing the service we consider appropriate, to that articulated by the user.

It is hard not to feel our professionalism is threatened. Bringing library staff out from behind the desk, from traditional roles into real consultation and dialogue with users and communities requires very different managerial skills. Increasing commercial competition, with alternative providers for whole services, or areas of services is fast challenging the need for in house specialist staff. The outsourcing of the whole range of traditional library support services will increasingly affect the range of jobs at all levels.

The understanding of what is reasonable to expect from non-professionally qualified staff is also changing. The perspective on this issue varies from welcoming such a move as removing the restrictions and devaluing of the skills and experience of library assistants to feeling that this is simply a way of getting more for less pay. We need to be clear in terms of equal opportunities in justifying the skills, which mean a Chartered Librarian must fill a particular post. We must ask whether a qualified librarian, a graduate from other disciplines or a trained technician is more appropriate. In this context it is interesting that the Public Library Standards relating to staff are for the number of staff with appropriate managerial qualifications, and the number of staff with ICT skills, rather than the earlier assumption that percentage of Chartered Librarians would be the criteria.

## **Training for the Future**

There is a complex model of cause and effect at work in the interaction between changes in the job market and the training courses on offer. The growth areas for jobs are in specialised information services, in the private

sector offering better pay and career opportunities than in the public/educational sector. Uncompetitive pay and career structures make it difficult to recruit students for courses in 'librarianship'. If there is little take up, then the course becomes no longer viable. The ability of the public sector in particular to recruit qualified staff of the right calibre is giving cause for concern nationally. A new report, Recruit, Retain and Lead, is openly 'fearful for the future'. Public libraries may have 'a wonderful image and a wonderful future technically', but will fail if they 'do not have the people to deliver. It is becoming increasingly difficult to retain staff of the right calibre - there is the flat organisational structure, there is low pay ... so people leave the profession after two or three years and go to another sector'. There is also the problem of professional stagnation:

When you compare [those] who say "Because I qualified x years ago, I'm alright" to the technology rich energetic frontline workers ... then I'm sorry, they don't stack up. (10)

The 'crucial question' is the need for leadership and succession planning. It is encouraging to see the emphasis on the importance of leadership rather than the processes - recruitment, training, marketing of opportunities. As Christians we are uniquely placed to affirm the value of leadership, and to model 'servant' leadership to the wider profession - as long as we 'live the talk'.

## **Management Practices**

People are generally less worried about the changes in the context for our working life, and in the conditions under which we work than in the management practices which determine how change is handled. Libraries are 'caring' institutions, attracting a deep level of commitment from their staff. If libraries are largely repositioned into a business rather than service ethos, must this inevitably mean staff are treated less humanely, and levels of morale drop? Performance management, unrealistic pressures, expecting more for less, the long day syndrome and workaholism are all symptoms of the new more competitive work environment.

When staff face uncertainty, whether through downsizing, rationalisation or just simply through changes in roles and expectations, all the latent hostilities surface. Heightened stress, fear of losing the job, unhealthy competitiveness, self-protection and isolation from colleagues are all common reactions. Increasing pressure and unrealistic demands can mean that those 'caught up in the vortex of overwork' may feel that there is:

No time to sit back and review what I have done. I feel I am being crushed by unrealistic demands which stifle my creativity. No one ever says: 'thanks, you did a great job'. (Manager interviewed as part of survey of 1,000 employees for Institute of Personnel Management, 'This

Working Life', Bookseller, 28.11.1997).

This surely is a situation in which we as Christians at every level within our profession can model a way of reacting to these situations, and demonstrate compassionate support for staff and colleagues who are experiencing unacceptable change.

## **Business Ethos**

The library of today exists in a competitive marketplace where the pressure for cost effective performance is only one of the consequences of economic pressure. We cannot remain unaffected by the moves in other sectors, such as health and education, towards greater public accountability. We too will experience the need to compete to deliver a service 'in house', working to targets, league tables, and the threat of intervention if we fail. The government Best Value regime is driving change in local government, but library services in other sectors are equally affected by the need for quality, cost effectiveness and efficiency. Managers must deliver services within this framework of performance, undergo inspection, meet targets, and continuously improve. To continue inherited patterns of services is no longer an option.

Organisationally, client/contractor splits, outsourcing of all or part of services, operating within business units, being publicly accountable through published plans are changing the way we work. We are right to be concerned if services are evaluated solely in monetary terms, but we also recognise this approach prompts greater clarity of thought over how and why services are provided. The key question is how is this new perspective being managed? It is difficult for staff to accept performance management, if the pressure for quick results is driving the service.

It helps if staff have some understanding both of the bigger picture, and the level of the change as early as possible and are listened to, enabled and encouraged to develop ideas, and feel valued. It may not make difficult change any easier to bear but will encourage creative thinking about the options for dealing with it and how inevitable change might benefit the service. The immediate reactions to radical change are shock, anger and betrayal. Understanding the drivers for change, and openness about the effects begins to counter the sense of helplessness. However, this is not an easy position to take, given that the personal immediate reaction is usually one of self-preservation. Here again, as Christians, there is an opportunity to demonstrate our calling to follow the One who gave Himself for others.

## **Consumerism**

Where do the drivers for change in expectations of the way we provide services come from? There is a clear link between some aspects of change in our society, reflected in attitudes in library management, and current worldviews. David Pullinger, writing in 1988, identifies one such shift:

... one of the values accepted by librarianship has been one dominating society in the last decade - consumerism ...

He raises concerns that staff no longer know the stock of their library in depth with the result that:

No longer do we expect the person who takes our money to know anything about the product being sold. (11)

In the twelve years since his comments were written, consumerism has continued to flourish and often subconsciously dominates our own thinking as service users. Increasingly, we expect our rights and are less tolerant of poor or slow service, lack of helpfulness, or lack of competent advice or help when we need it. However, one of the swings of the pendulum to our benefit is that users want approachable staff, able to offer help and advice. In the climate of commercial competition, with the latest bestsellers easily available with the groceries, or the growth of commercial Internet information providers, the intermediary role of well-trained library staff is one of our areas of competitive advantage. We can see this in the growth of reader development, and reading groups in the public library sector as the success of the Branching Out initiative demonstrates. Equally, as service providers in whatever sector, we can no longer hide behind a kind of professional arrogance, which gives users the level of service we determine is appropriate.

## **The Long Day Syndrome**

Equally, we cannot remain unaffected by changes in the wider world of work. The long day syndrome, or workaholicism generate pressures on the family as well as individuals. Recent research suggests that as many as half of all full time workers are concerned about having too little time with their families, a quarter do not believe it is possible to combine a good family life and career success, and a fifth are so worried about the work/life balance that they would be willing to take a pay cut in exchange for more free time. (12) As Christians, we will always approach the work/life balance from a different perspective, but there is evidence within the business sector that a high salary and a dazzling career is no longer the primary goal of many new graduates. The striving for balance seems to have a quasi-spiritual dimension:

Work is about daily meaning as well as daily bread ... in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying ... we have a right

to ask of work that it includes meaning, recognition, astonishment and life ... When we say 'get a life', we really mean 'get an inner life'. (13)

As librarians, we are unlikely to have the high-flying opportunities of the business world. But we have the opportunity through the quality of our work and our attitudes to it, to live out what happens when there is an inner life. It will show itself to our colleagues through the way we react to the pressures within the workplace. The need to achieve at work will not be our main driver. But there is a tricky balance between resisting the long day culture, where the length of time we work can be taken as a measure of our commitment, and avoiding being known as the first one out of the door because of our church commitments. The growth of 'downshifting', opting out of the rat race, is one way open to declare that we do not live for work, but follow a different Master.

### **Underlying Ideologies**

So far, we have outlined some of the issues that cause concern, and explored how our profession reflects the wider social and economic context. But is there an underlying ideological shift driving change?

At the LCF annual conference in March 1997, Graham Cray introduced his paper on post-modernism (14), by identifying the key transformation of our age. Most people now live in a world where there is no objective truth, no unbiased knowledge systems, but only 'raw material out of which you can make your own meaning'. We each have our own stories, the little narratives ('petit recits') by which we communicate with each other - there is no longer any overarching 'grand narrative'. What matters is what works. As Christians we must challenge this relativism over our faith. But as Christian librarians we will also recognise the way it questions inherited beliefs about our profession.

As Geoff Warren went on to demonstrate in his paper, *Beauty for Ashes*, the practical outcomes are that no area of our stock is privileged or valued over any other, no one area of service over another. (15) The focus is on an inclusive menu of services from which an individual can choose. It follows that the ordering of knowledge through a classification system if it is other than a value judgement, open to question as much as any other, becomes a pragmatic act rather than a reflection of a hierarchy of knowledge. (In this context we note the growth of 'knowledge management'!) Librarians are themselves becoming divided into 'traditionalists or progressives', with the choice of regretting the moving away from past standards and practices, or adopting a pragmatic and market orientated approach to our services.

What post-modernism helpfully does, is unmask the basis for some of our expert opinion and expose the flaws in some of the professional judgements of

the past. But what post-modernity cannot do is supply goals, or values which allow us to plan and evaluate. And without a vision, without stretching goals and shared values, our services fragment and stagnate. Post-modernism underlies much of the way we live our everyday lives, and our consumer society, with its basis on individual rights. It is inevitable that this will also shape the context in which we work.

How can we then respond? We cannot try and bring back the past - for that too was based on a confident humanism, on a belief in progress and improvement which was also flawed. In an age where human knowledge is exposed as partial and transient, we must stand firm on morality and truth, but in relation to our profession, be absolutely clear that it is truth, and not tradition, to which we cling.

### **How Should We Then Live? Reactions to Change**

A prayer written by Chris Warner for the Industrial Mission Association warns us of the need not to be surprised by change, or afraid to move away from familiar ways and the security of the known:

God of history you challenge our ways of doing things. You turn the world upside down and present us with impossible alternatives. (IMAgenda, Industrial Mission Association, 1997).

Leading and supporting people through ongoing change demand leadership skills of a very high order to face 'impossible alternatives'. "Empowerment" of local staff, if it is reality not buzz word, works on both sides. Managers must have a commitment to developing and supporting staff, based on understanding and managing the need to make things happen. Staff must accept the accountability that goes with delegated opportunity.

At worst this is a very uncomfortable level of change, which brings staff out from their professional ghettos into greater interaction with service users and other providers. There will inevitably be difficulties and differences in the expectations brought to the workplace by those who have been in the job for some time and who now find their job is no longer what they were trained to do.

The range of responsibilities included in managerial jobs is diversifying. Alan Watkins points out that if librarians want to 'retain responsibility for information services, we need to be able to demonstrate appropriate managerial, communication, financial, marketing and 'political' experience beyond our own particular world' (16) (2.7.1999). But given the current high profile of libraries, information and communications technology, and knowledge management this is an immense opportunity to make a difference through influence and leadership at all levels.

In a paper published in 1993, Maurice Line asserts that 'managing change is not a one off activity, something to be done once and got out of the way ... we have to accept that change is now the norm'. (17) Since that was written the pace of change has increased exponentially. However, his conditions for managing change as still as valid.

Good change management recognises the feelings. It is hard for staff who: probably came into librarianship expecting to carry out traditional duties ... it is understandable if they feel like mice forced to take part in a rat race. (p.10)

The key factors that help staff to accept change are explanation, understanding, confidence in its achievability and above all, owning the change. It has to be 'their' change. The most crucial factor is the quality of leadership. As Higginson notes, change must be driven by vision:

First of all the leader must decide what change is appropriate. What I have in mind here are not minor adjustments, but significant changes linked to the fundamental direction in which the organisation is heading. These changes should be consistent with the leader's overall vision for the organisation. (18)

The good leader has the depth of vision, the ability to communicate this to staff, and the energy and commitment to make it happen. Proverbs 29:18: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' is as true in the workplace as the church. Change is never an easy process. No change is comfortable, however much it is necessary. There will be losers as well as winners. There will be disaffected and antagonistic staff, as well as the 'early adopters' of change. There will be opposition, resentment, hostility and criticism. The good leader will have the right blend of toughness and tenderness to carry it through.

## **Leadership - a Biblical Model**

What then is the answer and opportunity to make a difference to ourselves and those we work with, or manage? The more recent books on management and work, Christian or secular, focus on the value of leadership. On the one hand, it is easy to feel that unless we are at a high level within an organisation, leadership has nothing to do with us. On the other hand we may be openly critical of people who are capable and competent delivering aspects of a service but when promoted to directing and managing others lack the skills to lead. Real leadership can and does emerge at all levels. But what is leadership? Jim Kouzes in an article, 'Keep Hope Alive' (1992), based on the search for credibility, sees the only way out of 'worker cynicism' and 'citizen alienation' is through the leader who inspires hope for the future. (19) He identifies the qualities of the credible leader in a way that begins to

suggest something of the concept of servant leadership.

The credible leader will 'take charge' - rising to the challenge, refusing to accept defeat, resisting self-pity. There is an element of risk taking (something not traditionally encouraged within our profession) and a courageous honesty in communicating reality to those led. Credible leaders 'set goals and make plans' - and not just for others; they themselves 'work hard'. They give support. They give help. They recognise and affirm others. But Kouzes also believes that such leaders must be prepared to suffer first: To be truly inspirational, leaders must be the first to step out into the unknown, to confront self doubt, to suffer defeat and disappointment, and return to hope from the learnings ... Someone who sits by in comfort while ordering others to suffer is no leader.

It is interesting to compare this list with that of Greene. He refers to some of the desirable qualities of a Christian boss, based partly on a survey of his colleagues. (20) They include courtesy, the ability to communicate with colleagues (especially about changes that are being made), to listen, and to bring out the best in staff. The Christian leader or manager has vision and direction, integrity, competence, enthusiasm. They will respect colleagues, be concerned for them as people, know their names, worries and needs.

Michael Schulter, director of the Jubilee Centre also highlights the importance of relationships:

If as a manager you commit your work to the Lord but do nothing to make your staff happy then you have missed the boat. (Quote from talk given at one day consultation organised by London Bible College.)

The biblical model of leadership found in Matthew 20: 25-28 is that of the authoritative leader who does not lord it over others. Higginson points out that New Testament concepts of leadership seem light years away from secular models of a macho style of leadership. However, the talk of 'servant leadership' is 'cropping up in the business literature to an increasing extent'. The servant leader will not be motivated by the desire for status, power or reward, but by the desire to serve the organisation, their people, the customers. Such service will be costly, demanding humility and self-denial. 'Genuine servant leaders are happy for others to get the credit rather than themselves'. (Higginson, *Transforming Leadership*, pp. 46-7, 1996). Coupled with this is the courage to accept the responsibility for the hard decision.

## **The Christian in the Workplace**

However, not all managers are Christian, and not all Christian managers behave like Christians. How does the Christian employee handle an

unreasonable manager? First, as Greene points out (Greene, pp. 132-134), the manager's authority is from God (Romans 13:1) and God is our real boss (Colossians 3:23-24). God is in control of our careers, promotions, success and failure (Psalm 75:6-7). The conviction that God is the boss can be liberating. Faced with an irritating or unreasonable line manager, we can ask ourselves 'how is the real boss treating me?'

Greene gives examples of the desirable relationships of a Christian employee with their boss (Greene, p.128). It should be creative and dynamic. We should love our boss as we love ourselves. We should support them and try to deal constructively with the things that bother them. We should recognise our responsibility to submit to authority even though we may have to challenge some decisions. We should actively seek to develop good working relationships. This is not to suggest that there should be compromise over Christian faith, or moral principles. We may be called to stand up for our convictions, or take a costly stand against an ethically dubious decision. However, we must be quite clear before God over the issues, be sure that we are not covering up a reluctance to change, and that there is no other way.

Clearly, we must demonstrate biblical standards - working as if serving the Lord will mean working wholeheartedly and to the utmost of our ability. It will mean living out the Christian qualities of love, self-control, humility, and willingness to help others. But we are not alone. Whatever our circumstances, the Holy Spirit is still alive, well and active, and we do not leave Him behind in church on Monday morning. One of his many gifts is the gift of perseverance.

Most of us have some opportunity to organise our own work, and to apply some degree of self-management, to plan the use of our time, to prioritise.

We must ask ourselves searching questions such as:

- Am I indifferent, or helpful to library users?
- Have I done my best to keep up to date professionally?
- Am I a good communicator?
- Do I work well with my peers, with those above, or below me?
- How do I deal with change, or react to a crisis, or work under pressure?
- Can I accept justified criticism?
- Do I have a strategy for my job?
- Am I making the best use of my time?
- When did I last review my effectiveness?

We can also support our colleagues through active listening, mentoring and praying for and with them. It is hard to overestimate the power of the life when rhetoric and reality coincide. The influence we can bring as 'salt' and 'light' in the workplace is incalculable.

## **The Church and Work**

As Christians we often find it difficult to make real connections between our secular job and our spiritual work. Often we leave the person we are - qualifications, skills, experience, ability - outside the church door. Alternatively we find the automatic assumption that anyone in the financial world will become treasurer, the teacher will work in the Sunday School, the librarian run the church library. If the place where we may spend up to 70% of our waking time is considered irrelevant within the church, how far does this contribute to wider perceptions of the irrelevance of the church as a whole? Greene points out that Christians in work spend more time in the workplace than in any other place, and the workplace is the one place where Christians cannot avoid contact with non-Christians (Greene, p. 15-16).

How realistic are the expectations of how much we will be involved in Church life? Many of us struggle with a sense of guilt as we try to keep life in balance, and find it difficult to add to the pressure of the working day by following on with an equally hectic round of church activities. Some of us will feel rightly called to limit the demands of working life in order to have the time and energy to give to our Church work. We may equally feel our main calling is within our profession.

Christians need to take their churches with them, into the work place. This is more easily said than done. It is not always easy to persuade ministers what they should include in their prayers or teaching. We need to find ways to encourage the church to bring work into its worship - to teach the theology of work and vocation, to use opportunities to pray for work issues, to give pastoral support to those in work or out of it, to see each other within our churches as whole people.

Higginson suggests the possibility of an occasional 'Festival of work' at church, similar to a harvest festival. (21) This could provide opportunities for celebrating, for work related testimonies, for sharing and praying about the work situation individually, locally, nationally and globally.

The church has a responsibility to support people who are overworked and under resourced; who carry the responsibility of management. It should care for core staff stressed out by the burdens of responsibility; for those whose short term contracts offer little security. We have a responsibility in our turn to make sure these issues are on the agenda.

## **Conclusion**

Library management in the twenty-first century - an unparalleled opportunity, or wrong direction? There are often no easy answers. The only constant is

change itself. In common with the early church we will not all be called to overthrow empires. But we can, within our workplace, make a difference by the quality of our life and work, and our support for those we work for, and who work for us. The result can literally be 'beyond our imaginings'.

### **A Prayer:**

'We wait before you, Lord,  
Asking that our hands and gifts,  
Offered in your service,  
Will make a difference to your world  
Beyond all our imaginings.'

(Prayer, Order of Service for Christian Aid Week, 2001)

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