

Faith Alive!

Selected Articles

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Section 10: Selected Articles

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Connecting Faith And Life

Gerald Foley and Timothy Schmaltz, "Connecting Faith and Life," Session 1 in *Connecting Faith and Life: Holiness in Ordinary Life* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward [Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group], 1987), pp. 7-9. Used with permission.

*"Mr. Business went to Mass, he never missed a Sunday.
But Mr. Business went to hell for what he did on Monday."*

ED WILLOCK

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 8 or Matthew 5:13-16

REFLECTION

Ed Marciniak: "...we laity have been ignored. Indifference has been our lot. Our workaday world has been slighted. Where in recent years have you heard the vocation of the rank-and-file Christians celebrated?"¹

Diedrich Bonhoeffer: "...it is only by living completely in the world that one learns to have faith...By this worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God."²

FOCUS

Our fathers were both active Catholics. One worked hard as a school janitor, the other as a farmer. They were busy with civic affairs in their local communities and good family men. Neither identified most of what he did in daily life as "ministry." They were not commissioned by their parishes for their Christian life of work, parenting, and public service.

Our mothers worked with our fathers to raise large families and manage households. They were able to give more volunteer time to their parishes and were recognized for these

services. In general, our parents' lives as "good Catholics" were defined by their attendance at Mass and the sacraments, their financial contributions to the church, and their help around the parish.

Cardinal Carter of Toronto says: "The Christian is something more than a recipient of grace. The Christian is also a dispenser of grace, which is the concept of the mediation of Christ. The Spirit, who resides in all the baptized and confirmed, is a communicable Spirit, and we are all called to promote the Gospel and to contribute to the sanctification of the world."³

The church is basically about a people striving to see God. The problem is that we almost think we have seen God and gone about as far as we can in knowing God. To see God more clearly and to be born in the new ways God wishes for us, we need to be vulnerable to and reflective about the experiences around us, to experience all of life as a central part of the Divine Mystery.

It is not easy to be a Christian in daily life. It is hard to find the holy or sacred in fighting freeways, boring jobs, dirty laundry, community tensions, advertising propaganda, and the complexities of modern life. Yet we have a right to expect our Sunday faith to connect with the world we live in all week long. Many complain that they hear little in the homilies and adult education at church relevant to their daily life. Our friend and committed Christian, Frank, says: "The agenda of my parish is not my agenda." If people fail to hear that their daily life has any significance, they are left with a schizophrenic view that separates faith from other areas of their lives. The church

contributes to people's thinking that 9:00 a.m. on Sunday is God's time, 9:00 a.m. on Monday is company time, and 9:00 p.m. on Monday is personal time.

For years pastoral leaders have assumed that if there are adequate programs for gathering, the faithful will naturally find effective means for relating faith to daily life. Pastoral leaders focus generally on getting people involved in parish activities, finances, religious education of children. But the church is a community of faithful who gather to be dispersed to bring Christ's presence to the factories, shops, homes, city council chambers; and parish halls of the community. To say that the people are the church means that they share in the mission to build God's kingdom, both in the internal church and in the world.

Laity are in the world as church. Their daily experience in work, politics, family, and community life is the setting for their Christian faith and spirituality. This experience of church must be drawn into the parish, affirmed, reflected upon, and celebrated. Decisions which determine the future of our children, the use of our finite resources, our relationship to other nations, and perhaps even the future of life on our planet are made in board rooms and government offices by Christians who are often embarrassed by their values and decisions. Sometimes they hear more about being Christian in the world from Time magazine than from the pulpit.

A businessman speaking at the National Consultation on the Vocation of the Laity in 1986 said: "For most of the thirty years that I have been in business, Catholic teaching seldom seemed to address the moral and ethical issues that I was faced with as a manager. On the negative side, I can recall only one homily that had anything relevant to say concerning the issues a manager faced"⁴ Smiling, he added that he shouldn't complain since most of his friends had never heard even one homily on work.

Faith Builds On Life

To connect faith and life, we may need to change our attitudes about both. Someone designed a graph showing the physical and faith

development of a person. Physical development happens rapidly after birth and peaks at about age twenty-four. Faith development does not look much different at age twenty-four than it does at age six. After thirty the faith development shows significant growth and after fifty it skyrockets.

Faith is not simply the knowledge of God that we learn as children or adults. It is a relationship which grows as we experience the movement of God at key moments of our lives. An old World War II axiom says: "There are no atheists in foxholes." Faith also grows as a couple fall in love and begin for the first time to believe in unconditional love. Parental love could be shrugged off by an attitude that parents have to love their children. To discover that someone really accepts us for who we are and loves us helps us to believe in God who is love. The moments of holding our newborn baby or of watching our parent die and questioning whether we will ever see that person again are moments of faith.

There is much talk in our society about Jesus Christ and about God. One would get the impression from our songs and our comments that we really want to see God, that our eyes are wide open striving to see the living God whom we believe is in our hearts. Yet, much of our time and energy are devoted to numbing ourselves to an openness and vulnerability to God. Why? Perhaps the answer comes in how we respond to our experiences of life.

Americans give the impression of loving life. Our songs say "I gotta be me," Pepsi ads tell us "you've got a lot to live and Pepsi's got a lot to give," and our banners tell us to "celebrate life." But are we realistic about life? Sometimes we deceive ourselves with a nice little fantasy about who we are or who we want to be. To really get in touch with the realities of our lives brings us to an experience of ourselves that wrenches us away from our fantasies and myths to experience ourselves in need. It is terribly threatening to be in need and we avoid it because it asks us to believe in love.

God would ask us to come to this consciousness of ourselves in need so that we

might have a deeper experience of faith and of love. Often we experience ourselves in sin, which is threatening and painful. However, this is also when we experience our need to grow. When the living God surges through reality and brings us to consciousness, it is a moment of hope and of possible change. Any birth is difficult. The Lord is asking us to be born through the frustrations, tears, joys, celebrations, laughter, feelings, and experiences of daily life. In faith we aren't certain what we really know and seek to get deeper into the reality around us. These moments of faith challenge us to believe in ourselves and love and God.

Life frequently appears cheap and void of God in a society which seems wholly secular. All the violence and inhumanity of the six o'clock news is a constant reminder, but our failure to appreciate life also appears in our attitudes toward work, family life, and relationships with others.

Jesus tells us: "I came that they might have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Note what happens when he touches people's lives. Jesus stops at a well at Samaria, where he meets a woman who comes at noon to avoid the morning crowd. Knowing that she is living with a man to whom she is not married after divorcing five husbands, Jesus still talks with the woman about life-giving waters. When he invites her to go and tell her townspeople about him, she now faces them and brings three thousand out to see him. Our call is to be similarly life-giving in our jobs, our homes; and Our city offices. A consistent ethic of life protects the quality of life for every person.

Although God continues to reveal divine presence in our daily lives, the church has been skeptical of personal experience. Laity can help the church to understand the sacred character of family life. The ordinary struggles of family life are invitations to holiness. The gentle hugs, forgiveness, talking things out, bandaging bruised egos, banging in there with teens, budget shortages, and hospitality are all occasions for holiness. Work calls us to holiness as we make good

cabinets, act friendly toward other workers and the boss, or live Christian values in our business.

To connect faith and life, we need a spirituality that is focused on this world and not otherworldly. What if I am on the parish council but fail to speak about an unjust situation at work? What if I am busy with parish activities but don't listen to my wife when she's really had a bad day, or to my child who's been ridiculed by classmates?

Bishop Kenneth Untener reminds us that "the church has never attempted to relate to the world as we are today...The shaping of this world is part of the process of shaping the kingdom...The further the church reaches outward, the more it must be true to its center, who is Christ. And the more it is true to its center, the more it reaches outward."⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. Ed Marciniak, "On the Condition of the Laity," a chapter in Russell Bark, Ed., *Challenge to the Laity* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), p. 35.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 169.
3. Pastoral letter of Cardinal Gerald Emmett Carter printed in *Origins*, Nov. 13, 1986, p. 386.
4. Joseph P. Sullivan in a speech at the National Consultation on the Vocation of the Laity held Sept. 12-14, 1986 in Chicago.
5. Bishop Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, address to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, St. Louis, Mo., reported in *Origins*, Sept 11, 1986, pp. 240-241.

Ministry of the Laity

Gerald Foley and Timothy Schmaltz, "Ministry of the Laity," Session 2 in *Connecting Faith and Life: Holiness in Ordinary Life* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward [Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group], 1987), pp. 10-12. Used with permission.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Cor. 12:4-11 or John 13:1-9.

REFLECTION

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: "Because of their special vocation, the laity seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God. They work for the sanctification of the world from within by fulfilling their own particular duties" (31).

John Paul II At Limerick, Ireland, Oct. 1, 1979: "It is their specific vocation and mission to express the gospel in their lives and to insert the gospel as a leaven into the reality of the world in which they live and work. The great forces which shape the world - politics, the mass media, science, technology, culture, education, industry and work - are precisely the areas where lay people are especially competent to exercise their mission."

FOCUS

What church ministries are you involved in? I asked that question of the top executive of a large corporation. He answered that he was a lector and Eucharistic minister in his parish. When I asked what he did for work, he said that at the moment he was trying to set up a retirement program for his employees because social security could not promise a secure future, that he stressed excellence in all company products and services, and that he tried to spend as much time as possible in the various plants getting to know the workers. When I you don't call that ministry?", he answered "I haven't!"

For a long time we thought of ministry in terms of persons whose life was dedicated to the church. As the laity began to read scriptures more frequently, they also began to claim their ministries. Until now we have paid most attention to ministry within the church community and failed to recognize and affirm the ministry of ordinary life. Little recognition has been given to parents, mayors, farmers, teachers, or janitors as ministers.

Today the church makes an important distinction in ministry. Lay ministry is that appointed or commissioned by the church, e.g. parish council or minister of hospitality. This is extraordinary ministry for the laity. It is fairly easily recognized as ministry by the minister and others. It has its own rewards and recognitions, which are often public, e.g. dinner for the choir, commissioning for catechists.

Ministry of the laity is the ministry of ordinary life flowing from our baptism (confirmation, Eucharist) and serving those with whom we live and work, e.g. our family, neighbors, community, friends, co-workers, the world at large. This is the ordinary ministry of the laity. It is often not seen as ministry (i.e., service in response to call), and has its own rewards and recognitions which are often not public.

In the early church, merchants, domestics, traders, all the baptized recognized their call. Peter talks about the priesthood of all the faithful (1 Pt 2:9). It was not long before a Greek philosophy, Gnostic dualism, changed the practice of the church. Gnosticism separated into opposites which were seen as good or bad. We had the sacred and secular (holy and unholy), church and world, spiritual and material, clergy and laity, male

and female. This dualism gave us a negative attitude toward matter, seeing work as punishment for the fall and woman as temptress. Laity living in the world could not be holy and the baptismal call to holiness was separated from the daily lives of ordinary folks. To be lay meant to be ordinary, not consecrated. Gradually we became a church of withdrawal from the world rather than of involvement and change.

Vocation-Mission-Ministry

Three somewhat unfamiliar terms are used today to describe the life of the laity as members of the church. Vocation refers to our primary call to serve the Lord. This call to cooperate in God's plan is generally worked out in the ordinary duties of lives. The call often becomes clear only gradually. It is easier to discern a vocation when someone is called to a caring profession such as a nurse or teacher than to see the call of a bus driver, cook, banker, or secretary. Yet the latter are often salt and light to those around them, doing holy work by serving others. Many of our parents prayed for a vocation in their family, hoping for a son in the priesthood or a daughter in the convent. Today the church speaks as readily about marriage as a vocation.

The church is a community gathered to be sent out to the world to proclaim the good news and to build the kingdom of God. It does not exist for itself but to continue God's work in the world. Mission implies an awareness of our being in the world and relating to it usually through our daily life and work. Mission implies that the church is active. The mission we share is that of Jesus. We sense that God is sending us for something specific in our work, our concern for the world, our family life. Thus we have vocation and mission, God consciousness and world consciousness, a person for God and a person for others, being called and sent.

The deeper our sense of call, the deeper our sense of mission. "It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit" (John 15:14). The

understanding of church as mission reminds us that we cannot be genuine Christians on Sunday unless we try to be true to Christ's spirit also in our work, our business dealings, our trade union meetings, and our concern for the world at large. For a long time we recognized the teacher and agricultural expert who went to Africa as missionaries but failed to see the mission of a doctor or agronomist called to a similar service at home.

Ministry is properly understood in the body of Christ image of St. Paul. Ministry belongs to the community and we minister as members of the community. The church is rich in potential because the Spirit gives a diversity of gifts to the members, although many members do not see their responsibility to the community. Ministry is a compassionate and generous response to other's needs. Jesus gave us his model for ministry when he washed the feet of his apostles and called his followers to serve each other in love. We should not overlook the footwashing ministry of our local garbage collector, the cook, the loving parent, the public servant, or the United Fund worker.

The mission is God's; the ministry is ours as God's people. We are called to minister in God's name so that God's ministry will come about. Our understanding of the church will always determine our understanding of ministry. When our understanding of the church was primarily communal in the the [sic] early church, our understanding of ministry was varied and almost democratic. God was seen as immanent in all baptized persons who continued the ministry of Jesus. Ministries arose out of the gifts given to all the people. When our understanding of the church became primarily hierarchical our understanding of ministry became clerical and institutional. God's transcendence was stressed. With our image from Vatican II of a people of God church, our understanding of ministry began to change accordingly.

The center of church ministry is the laity in the world. To live this ministry laity need a spirituality based on this world's concerns of work civic involvement, family, and other

daily activities. The liturgy is to prepare and nourish them to go out to their daily living. Ninety-nine percent of the church spends ninety-nine percent of its time apart from the gathered community, yet almost all of our attention is now focused on the gathering. The first step toward the ministry of the laity is to love the world. When you love something, you take it seriously. Laity realize that they very often discuss theological questions as they talk about how to treat their neighbors, how to educate their children, and how to face questions of chemical pollution or population control. They have reason to expect that they will have some help with these issues when the community is gathered.

There are three ways of looking at the laity in the church or theologies of the laity. Many of us grew up in a church where laity were seen as passive conformists to church teachings and recipients of church services, called to “pay, pray and obey” in a church that cared for its people. A second theology grew out of Catholic Action and looks at the laity as “Father’s helpers”, participating in the ministry of the institutional church. Concern here is with the spiritual apostolate and not with the church scattered throughout the community to do its work. The present development of lay ministry places greater value on ministry within the church and, by default, has devalued the work of men and women in the world.

Vatican II gave us a third way of looking at the place of the laity, popularized by the statement “the people are the church.” Here ministry belongs to all through baptism, where they are gifted by the Holy Spirit. Thus the laity are not “Father’s helpers” at all. Father is their helper. The role of the pastoral staffs is to affirm, nurture, and challenge all the people of God to take their ministry seriously. Whenever the role of the clergy is seen as central, the people exist to support them and the whole reason for the church is perverted from its true end. Actually, Vatican II did not discover a new vision but recovered the vision of the early Christian community.

Understanding the role of the laity in the church may well turn out to be the critical issue after Vatican II. We can no longer separate the laity when the church is seen as a community rather than as an organization with laity at the bottom of the hierarchical order. As columnist James Reston said: “Religion is too important a business to be left to the clergy.”

Work as Vocation or Career

Gerald Foley and Timothy Schmaltz, "Work as Vocation or Career," Session 3 in *Connecting Faith and Life: Holiness in Ordinary Life* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward [Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group], 1987), pp. 13-15. Used with permission.

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 10:38-42 or Proverbs 31:10-31

REFLECTION

Pope John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*: "Work is a good thing for man, a good thing for his humanity -- because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and becomes more a human being." (9)

Studs Terkel in *Working*: "This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence -- to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as about accidents, about shouting matches as well as about fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations."

FOCUS

Tom hauled freight most of his life His overalls reflected his manual labor as readily as the uniform of a nurse or the collar of a priest. Tom knew everyone in town and was always ready to help anyone in need. At his funeral, they read two readings along with the scriptures which summed up Tom's life. From Martin Luther King: "If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo carved marble. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote pictures. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven will have to say, 'Here lives a great sweeper who did his job well'."

The other reading was from Dorothy Sayers: "In nothing has the church so lost her hold on reality as in her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables."

People have a difficult time understanding the place of work in their call to be Christians. The church has no fully developed theology and spirituality of work even though it dominates the use of our time and energy. We have focused our theology on God while work is a human reality. Work was seen as servile, not part of the spiritual. The church's view of work has been seriously affected by St. Augustine's view of original sin. It is only after the fall of Adam and Eve that the natural act of work becomes drudgery because of our human sinfulness. The presence of sin alters the conditions of work and causes the pain and suffering associated with our laziness, greed, and competition, and failure to love.

The Old Testament recognizes work as God's purpose for people. The worker praises God through work. The Sabbath commandment presupposes labor as the normal routine for daily life.

Jesus gave dignity to work as a member of a carpenter's family and an itinerant rabbi. His parables remind us of his contact with working people. He uses illustrations from

the work of vinedressers, woodworkers, shepherds, fishermen, stewards and harvest hands. The apostles were laborers well accustomed to work and reflected this in their writings.

The early church Fathers assumed that work was a part of Christian life. At first the monasteries stressed the Christian meaning of work, manual labor was a form of prayer and a complement to prayer. St. Benedict's rule called for a balance of work, prayer, and leisure.

With the advent of Gnostic dualism contemplation was seen as superior to manual labor. Work was viewed as the result of sin and had a positive meaning as a punishment for sin. Several centuries ago this gave rise to the Jansenist praise for work which was difficult, weary, strenuous, and monotonous. Hard work became a way of being faithful to the Lord.

This mentality greatly affected our thinking about work. It led to the "Protestant Work Ethic" familiar in the U.S., which stressed activity, industry, frugality, and efficiency as religious ideals and portrayed poverty as sin. From this it was easy to infer that financial success indicated faithfulness and that affluence was the legitimate end of work. Work was reduced to a duty and became the criterion by which life was judged successful or unsuccessful, the measure of one's worth as a person.

We have a secularized version of the Protestant Work Ethic today. We glorify success, preach sacrifice to get ahead, and emphasize the accomplishments of the individual. . Work still the way for us to demonstrate our worth. Every day the radio and TV preachers identify God's blessings with success at work. This thinking promotes workaholism and worship of our work. Identifying our worth with our work makes it hard for many persons to accept retirement, unemployment and disability.

In the craft shop or on the farm, there was

a sense that work was God-given. Peoples' pride in their work is reflected in many of our names, such as Miller, Baker, Carpenter, Hufnagle (horseshoer) and Kowaiski (blacksmith). When most persons will change careers several times in their lifetime, it becomes more difficult to find our identity in work.

There are several ways of looking at our work. Some people view it merely as a job to support themselves and enjoy the good life. A popular bumper sticker, "I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go," reflects the sense of many that work is mere drudgery and a means of survival. People's description of their work as a "treadmill" suggests that machines are more important than persons and the worker is alienated from the results of labor. Today career planning and assessment centers are booming. Most of us have heard someone say, "I will take this job for three or four years because I will be good for my career." Pope John Paul II reminds us that work is part of our Christian vocation, a way that we serve the Lord. It is difficult to see work as a vocation on the production line or while

CAREER	VOCATION
1. Emphasis in schools, society	1. Emphasis of church, John Paul II
2. Marketing one's own talents for personal gain	2. Using one's gifts to create a better world and serve other
3. Striving to get ahead	3. Making a difference through personal dedication
4. Focus on self, self-interest	4. Focus on community, common good
5. Virtues are competition, power	5. Virtues are compassion and cooperation
6. Success oriented	6. Dignity of worker important
7. Efficiency as goal	7. Goal of excellence

sitting eight hours a day at a word processor. Yet even jobs that are dull and dehumanizing may be an active response to God. It truly makes a difference whether we look at our work as vocation or career.

Some would claim that the real vocation crisis in the church today lies in how we look at the laity's call to be church in the world. We have difficulty communicating this sense of vocation when we deny God's presence and action in everyday events. If we view career and vocation as opposite ends of a continuum, most Christians do not live totally in either but are called to the vocational end in their search for holiness and the common good.

Mass production diminishes the sense of individual contributions as value is assigned to work output rather than to the dignity of every worker. Of course, we can become too romantic about work as a creative participation with God. Cleaning a cafeteria or making a weld on the assembly line can be an active response to God when done consistently and effectively. "You know that your toil is not in vain when it is done for the Lord" (1 Cor.15:58). Yet it is foolish to identify such occupations with the most creative element in a Christian vocation.

A Christian understanding of work must consider three points:

1) Self-expression: How does work help us to achieve our full potential? Allow us to use our gifts? When work does not allow for human respect or individual fulfillment, humans are dehumanized and even destroyed. Pope John Paul II says: "Work is a service in which man grows to the degree that he gives himself to others."

2) Relatedness to society and to other workers career mentality alienates. Work should bring us together to build the kingdom. Love motivates the worker to use his or her talents in faithful and loving service within the community. Workers can work together to achieve justice. Work

makes this world a better place for the people of God. Work is not a punishment for our sinfulness, but because of sinfulness there are inadequate wages, inhuman working conditions, mass unemployment, and destruction of the environment.

A theology of work must look at how the private pursuit of profit and the economic dislocation affect the common good. More than ever we see the need for a balanced participation in decision-making by all those affected -- workers, community, government, and management. It must also reflect on how our production and distribution of resources affect Third World peoples, who increasingly are prevented from making a living as the First World stresses the production of costly technology.

3) Work continues creation. Work takes raw nature and shapes it to meet human needs, e.g., ugh medicine. We are co-workers in God's design. Dorothy Day said: "We are co-creators with God by our responsible acts, whether bringing forth children, producing food, furniture or clothing" Work belongs to our very nature as God entrusts us with the work of finishing the unfinished universe. We are neither over nor apart from nature. The world is our home, but we have not been very good stewards.

Frank sold his business because he felt its soft drink was not really needed or healthy. From a good income and community status, he went to an extremely limited income for a family of eight. He now runs a program to help released convicts learn the restaurant business. Frank and Sue live a simplified lifestyle, work hard to teach their children a stance of justice and peace, and help a lot of folks look at work as a vocation. When we take our vocation seriously we are often called to challenging changes.

FOOTNOTES

1. Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Avon, 1972).