

# **REFLECTIONS ON FAITH AND WORK**

## ***Finding a Purpose for Our Work***

Let me tell you a story. My story. I have shared this narrative with others and it seemed to help them in their own struggle with issues related to their careers in the marketplace, so let me try it out on you.

### **A Testimonial**

When I was completing my education at the University of Maryland, I joined the ranks of many nervous graduates getting ready to enter the job market. My Ph.D. was in diplomatic history with a particular focus on Europe and the Soviet Union. I thought a college teaching job would be the best option for me, but in 1972 (a long time ago!) the market for college professors was a tough one, and there were few jobs available in my specialization.

Then, a job fell into my lap. The context was set for me by Daniel Ellsberg and his publication of the "Pentagon Papers" which described the reasons for the U.S.'s "disastrous involvement" in the Vietnam War. In response, President Richard Nixon decided to counter Ellsberg's publishing "coup" by ordering the Department of State to issue the "complete record" of this conflict through its Historical Office. The decision was then made to double the size of the Historical Office staff. My graduate school adviser was a former employee of this office and a well-known diplomatic historian with many "contacts" in the historical profession. Thanks to his connections, I was the first of fifteen new Ph.D.s to walk through the door.

Much to my surprise, I wound up in a great research position in the Department of State with access to highly classified records from the Department of State, the National Security Council and the various intelligence agencies. It was research "heaven" for a young historian like me. While working in the department, I was also active in my local church and was trying to be a good father to my two young children and a husband to my wife, Marge.

### **The Great Gap**

After three years of work at the Department of State, the first under Secretary of State Bill Rogers and the next two under the exciting leadership of Henry Kissinger, it gradually dawned on me that a huge gap had developed between my faith in Jesus Christ and my everyday work on foreign policy issues. Marge and I were active in our church, leading the young people's group, doing inner-city tutoring, and serving on various church committees, but I was hard-pressed to see how my faith related to my daily work.

Our pastor Dick Halverson's preaching gradually began to penetrate my thinking. He

challenged me to reconsider how my work related to the religious beliefs which I held to so fervently, but which seemed so disconnected to my work life. "You go nowhere by

accident," he said each Sunday morning; he also said, "Be a minister in the place where you are." When I thought about that, my first reaction was to be more aggressive in sharing my testimony with my colleagues. But then I realized the challenge was bigger than that. I had to gain a new understanding of how I could serve God through my work.

### **My Search for Help**

During my fourth year at the Department of State and the early years of my work with the American Studies Program, which began in September 1976, I began to seriously study the Bible for insights related to my work and my studies in foreign policy. I will spare you the details of this exciting time in my life, but what a revelation it was to discover that I could be of service to God, a co-creator with God, through my work in foreign policy! The Biblical concept of *Shalom* gave me a deepened understanding of peace and my responsibility as a follower of Jesus to be a peacemaker, a "reconciler" in a broken, fragmented world. The Apostle Paul wrote about the Christian's "ministry of reconciliation" (Ephesians 2:10-22; II Corinthians 5:11-21): I now understood those passages in the context of my work in foreign policy.

Working at the Department of State for the purpose of preserving, or hopefully enhancing, "America's self-interest" was of some value, but it begged the larger question of whether that goal would result in a more just world. Working in foreign policy as a reconciler, a healer, a person committed to making the world a better place for all peoples, was a much broader vision which I gained from my Biblical study. Now I could see more clearly how my work was related to my faith. Now I could see how my service to God involved everything I did, including my work from Monday through Friday. I will share more on this at a later time.

### **An Important Discovery**

For some of us, our work is more routine than mine turned out to be at the Department of State. Some of us, because of circumstances largely beyond our control, wind up in jobs that seem irrelevant or even boring. Yet the Bible teaches that all of our work has dignity and purpose, even the routine jobs. If we are helping the economy function by providing needed services, for example, we are co-creators with God in maintaining a world which works. Just by doing our jobs well we are expressing love toward our neighbors. All of us can play that role through our work, regardless of what we do. However, when we learn to see our work in the larger context of God's calling for us to be peacemakers and justice-doers in our world, that's when things really get exciting!

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