

Redundancy - A Personal Reflection

by Justin Manley-Cooper



■ CitiGroup building, Canary Wharf, where Justin worked

I describe my redundancy, not as a surprise, but still a huge shock. How can something that's not a surprise be a shock? I guess that's down to the feeling that, whilst you see redundancies happening, somehow you believe you're immune. This makes redundancy sound like a disease. In some respects, in today's economy it is. It's certainly something you do not want to catch. Others I've spoken to, talk of losing one's job as a bereavement, which once again has resonance, but one has to be careful not to over-dramatise: no one has died.

Like all shocks, the body's defence mechanism springs to life and protects the conscious self for a limited period of time. This initially fools you into thinking that you can cope, that somehow you've taken it very well. You can meet life head on, take the knocks with a sense of humour and not be downcast. The interesting thing for me is that I've had no real reason to be downcast: we have no mortgage to speak of and the school fee fund is paid up, so the major liabilities have been met. Also, I've been telling anyone that would care to

listen, that I would have been looking for a change at some stage anyway in the next couple of years.

However, once the shock started to wear off, and despite financial stability, I stepped on to what I can only describe as an emotional oscillator. The highs were ok, but the lows were very low. Whilst the volatility of the rollercoaster is less intense, four weeks after having left my job and fully eight weeks since I found out, the ride still continues.

It's difficult to know exactly why this is. If I were ten years younger saddled with a large mortgage and a young family, the oscillator would at least be understandable. In reflection, I think it comes down to issues of self worth and identity, as well as those of financial security. We're conditioned in society that if you're a certain age you work. The first question on meeting someone new is "what do you do?" What you do accompanies who you are, as surely as your shadow. Let me give two examples of this. Despite telling my bank that I'm redundant, they still ask me, as one of their

security questions, what my work telephone number is. Well-meaning friends, momentarily forgetting my position, would ask me when was I going back to work after the Christmas holidays. You consistently choke back the obvious reply, but somewhere deep down another chip is knocked off the self-confidence block.

At this point I must emphasise that I've been doubly blessed, not only by having the financial security behind me, but by having the family security there as well. All the family near and far have been supportive, but the amazing and humbling fact is that when I was sitting at the low points of my oscillator and unable and unwilling to talk about it, the one who really loves me noticed, cared and loved me more. A debt of love, freely given and desperately grasped. In this respect "redundancy is like a bereavement": without the emotional family support, it would be particularly hard to bear. Therefore, I am very lucky and I believe as a family unit we're stronger than perhaps we were before, but once again it's worth reflecting on the strains that

other families, with impossible financial burdens, may be under at this time.

Whilst some of the emotions associated with redundancy are obvious and revolve around confidence and identity, it's worth touching on guilt. Guilt may or may not be appropriate. One's redundancy may be totally out of one's control. Alternatively, looking back one might see that there were things that could have been done to avoid the experience. The maelstrom of office politics can mean that one moment you feel safe, only to find that you're on the wrong side of the fence two seconds later. Hence guilt can arise in being at the wrong place at the wrong time and wondering if it could have been avoided.

However, it's not just the guilt of losing the job, but guilt about putting the family into the situation. Think of the sole bread winner who has continued to re-mortgage out of confidence, or possibly on the advice given by 'astute' financial planners, who now faces ruinous debt and the stares of recrimination over the breakfast table. Obviously guilt and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin and the one needs to be understood before the other can be applied.

For the Christian, one has to ask where is faith in all of this: indeed where is God? For me faith and prayer have been an enormous help, but I won't shy away from saying that at times I've felt

that God is not close at hand. As Christians, we're always asking ourselves the purpose of what we're doing. Are we on the right road as far as our journey in faith goes? Therefore, it's only natural to look for purpose in the current situation. For me, the only purpose I can find has to be a humbling one, another 'bloody nose', so that I have a better understanding of all those recently knocked down, and so that I am in a better position to offer help and sympathy. Like any Father, sometimes God has to let us learn some tough lessons, but as with any good Father these lessons – tough though the learning process is – are wrapped in love. However, whilst the harsh lesson might be to teach me to better understand others, the glorious one, as mentioned above, has been to trust in the love that's given to me by others.

Nevertheless, if 'faith' were just a series of lessons it would be hard to keep faith by one's side. Faith, by its very nature is a trust in the outcome, a trust that no matter what the knocks are, one will end up on the road that God has earmarked for us. Christ's passion has been at the forefront of my mind, not because my situation is (thankfully) in any way comparable, but because of His total faith in the outcome. I don't know if I'll be able to go back into the same industry, or whether I should change professions or geographies, before all this is through, but hopefully by putting everything before God in prayer, the right outcome will present itself and I'll find myself on the right road.

So where should the Church be? Firstly, not behind closed doors waiting for Sunday mornings.

The obvious areas are support groups for those who have been made redundant. Prayer is vital and has played a major part in the flattening of my oscillator. Practical help should be offered, in terms of networking, how to cope with those financial commitments and how to cope with the guilt and help others to forgive. Understanding the emotional swings is important, as well as helping people to keep perspective and develop the ability to take one step at a time and prioritise. Support groups too, are needed for partners or other members of the family, on what to expect and how best they may help. Most importantly though, help with all those feelings that are associated with redundancy, to help all those involved to bring these feelings and lay them before Christ's cross. All the pressures of redundancy can be a mighty cross to bear and shouldn't be borne alone, Christ's cross is here to help and all should be encouraged to unburden themselves before Him.

As mentioned above, some talk of the loss of a job, as a bereavement. Perhaps it should be marked as such, in a service. Mourned, as a death would be, but with the uplifting sense provided by the Christian faith of a new life to come – allowing all to leave forgiven and forgiving. I think it's been proven that in times of a downturn, people tend to turn towards the Church, but in return it's the responsibility of the Church to be outward-facing and be ready with spiritual and practical help. ■

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*"My God, why have you forsaken me?"
Rembrandt, Jesus on the Cross, 1631
Le Mas d'Agenais parish church*