

When you see it like this you're never the same:

A revolutionary understanding of work



by Geoff Shattock

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It's no accident that the Cross of Christ is called the work of Christ. Geoff Shattock takes a look at those remarkable six hours and relates them to the hours we spend at our own workplaces, where stress and struggle meet reality and meaning.

Starting to focus

It was reported by a man formerly in financial services that a man currently in the armed services was a witness to a series of events which shocked and surprised him. Even for a military man, used to assaults on the eyes as part of his chosen profession, this was an extraordinary scenario to observe.

The episode lasted six hours and the officer's conclusion was typically terse in true clipped, precise army language. "Surely" he exclaimed "he was the Son of God!"¹

Something else that was sure about this moment, was that the soldier had little grasp of the significance and the meaning of the drama he had just seen, nor the words he had used to respond to his experience. It is certain that when he used the phrase "Son of God" he would have had

little in common with the later understanding of the phrase nor even the thinking of the man who preserved his words in the first book of the New Testament.

But what had he seen? Over the previous six hours, or even eighteen hours, depending on how long he had been on duty, this unnamed soldier had witnessed a northern carpenter turned teacher tortured to death in the distinctive Italian style.

This episode, along with the accompanying astronomical and geological convulsions, had so moved and terrified him that he was inspired to pronounce his profound verdict on this remarkable day.

Hindsight and insight

With the luxury of a couple of millennia we can now look at these events and harness the benefits of hindsight to deepen

our levels of insight, applying our minds to their meaning and significance. The question we face, however, may be very similar to the soldier's challenge. What are we actually looking at here? What do we see?

I would suggest to you that he saw an extremely complex series of events but one of the central meanings and activities which he saw had to do with work.

In 1618 the Catholic priest and scholar Robert Bellarmine described the cross itself as "The pulpit of the preacher, the altar of the sacrificing priest, the arena of the competent and the workshop of the wonderworker".²

Applying our millennia of experiences to the same event we seem to have focused well on the pulpit, the altar and the arena but not seen the workshop very clearly. This is not to say that we

have neglected to use the words – the cross of Christ is widely referred to as the “Work of Christ” in literature throughout the theological libraries of the world. Like the centurion, however, we seem to have used the words without grasping their meanings and significances for a massive element of real life.

Work is work is work

Once the word “work” is used naturally we can understand that the centurion was witness to a real man doing a real job. It may have been an unusual job but Jesus himself spoke of bringing his Father’s glory on earth by completing the work he had been given to do.³ We don’t tend to think of death as work, though



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we sometimes describe work as death when the days go badly, but for Jesus of Nazareth this six hour period was literally a work “shift” which represented the climax of the work he was born

to do. It was this piece of work which changed the world and demonstrated the fulfilment of his vocation. Professor James Denney observes ‘[Christ’s] death is not an incident of his life; it is the aim of it. The laying down of his life is not an accident in his career; it is his vocation; it is that in which the purpose of his life is revealed’⁴.

What actually did Jesus do?

Armed with this understanding we can now ask: how did he handle this work? What were his methods? How did he set about doing what he did? If we can find answers to these questions we will see how he fulfilled his calling, purpose and mission, and discover a perfect model of work for us to adopt in fulfilling our calling, purpose and mission. We will see how his work can rescue ours. In short we can discover a Christology of work which we can take with us on a daily basis.

The answers to our questions lie in the fact that he tells us in his own words how he was handling these six hours. During that extraordinary time he spoke seven sentences, each of which is a window through which we can look into his workshop. Each sentence gives us profound insight into his working methods, and, if we have the wisdom to watch carefully, will show us all we need to know about how to handle the range of work challenges that come our way in the real world.

A midsummer night’s dream

To show you this magnificent tool-kit from the Carpenter’s

workshop let me tell you a very small part of my journey to this insight. For the last twelve years



since I founded WORKTALK, I have been working full-time on the questions surrounding faith and work. I started with “how can we take faith to work?” I moved on to “how can I work well?” Now I focus on “how can I work well by working spiritually?” Along the way I obtained a masters degree in stress management, writing a research thesis on the impact of faith on occupational stress. Harnessing my experience in missiology, I wrote a book on friendship and faith at work, focusing on the theme of being good news as a witness to friends and colleagues in the marketplace. In addition I became a consultant trainer for Reed Training, delivering courses on a variety of subjects including balancing home and work. I did some research on whistleblowing as well as the use of powerful questions in personal development. Together with some other consultants I founded Waverley Learning which offered courses to businesses as well as retreats for individuals. I now deliver one-to-one coaching for a wide range of clients as well as training days for churches, charities and businesses.

Through contact with numerous business leaders I learnt to understand and respect management and leadership practices and watched top-class business individuals hammer out contracts and high level deals.

I've also worked with numerous team members, clergy and lay leaders to understand and develop a spirituality at work which underpins a thoroughgoing integration between faith and work enabling any individual to merge work with worship.

During this time my work was clustering around several discrete yet overlapping areas. Then one night in the summer of 2002 I had a dream about the structure of a training course on faith and work. This was a Divine intervention in my work. Many were suggesting to me that they needed such a course and I was trying to design one. I believe in Divine interventions at work, in fact I had built my work on that

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belief. To be truthful I believed not only in intervention but integration, yet when I had the dream it was startling.

During the dream I saw how the seven sentences spoken on the Cross connected with the very issues which workers had been

raising time and time again with me. I later came to see how they connected with my work clusters as well.

I'm a physiologist, psychobiologist and theologian by training so I'm well aware of the various scepticisms there are surrounding dreams. Quite frankly, I don't care! The point is that this dream made sense and made more sense than anything I had seen or thought before and has done so to thousands of others since 2002. So now I can invite you to stand with me behind the centurion and see what I mean.

Stress

When Jesus said "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing"⁵ he was a man under extreme physical, psychological, mental and spiritual pressure and stress. Since seeing the cross this way I have used my training to do a stress audit on Jerusalem during Easter week,

analysing the key characters, their personalities and coping mechanisms.

During that week Jesus went from being the source of pressure in the Jerusalem cauldron to the one under pressure. In comparison to the political, legal, financial and personal posturing and corruption on display during that week, Jesus demonstrated a twin stress management skill.

First he prayed a complex Father prayer – in which is contained his default understanding of identity, security and values. Central to his use of the word "Father" is the truth that identity is not primarily

related to power, finance, status or qualification but creation and adoption. This truth, when taken into a stressful workplace becomes an impregnable shield against devaluing and anger-inducing action. Again, contained



in his use of the word "Father" is his understanding of his source of security as well as his framework of values.

So in his first word of his first sentence from the cross he opens a window into identity, security and values which instantly sheds light on how to handle personal stress and pressure.

This is just the beginning. Immediately he applies his reaction to the skill of forgiveness. Stress, anger and bitterness are intimately connected and create a toxic pollutant which can eat away at thoughts, feelings and bodies. Anyone who is stressed at work will know that anger and

frustration are at the core of this dynamic. So Jesus demonstrates forgiveness in the face of pressure and, combined with the word “Father” demonstrates that prayer and forgiveness are the key skills which need to merge.



When his enemies placed him in this unique workplace they had no idea what they were doing - hence the final phrase of his prayer.

Good news and encouragement

Now we have the idea of looking through these windows into his workshop we can see that when he said to the thief “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise”⁶ he was being good news to the person right next to him at work.

Each day millions of Christians scatter into workplaces across the world and carry in their hearts a desire to be good news. Here in this moment, Jesus gives clues as to how to do it. You can miss them as easily as missing

daily opportunities, but if you look and listen they are there to see and hear. Jesus’ presence on the adjacent cross creates the first clue to understanding.

There for a completely different reason to the thief, nevertheless he was there, and being there meant he was going through the same experiences (and more) as the thief himself. For undervalued Christians, there can be a tendency to wish they were not there, but it is in the being there that the climate of good news can be created.

This climate is characterised by encouragement, hope and acceptance. It is a climate devoid of condemnation and criticism. It is an atmosphere where nothing clouds the thief’s vision of the man next to him who is dealing with his own stress in a totally different way to anyone that thief had ever seen. So Jesus’ working methods provoked the thief to bet his future on a dying man. This second sentence from the cross provides a multi-purpose tool which, when taken to work, releases individuals to become whispers of paradise at work, creating a culture of encouragement and enabling others to bet their futures on a dying man who understands them at a radical level.

Balance

When Jesus said “Dear woman, here is your son” and to John “Here is your mother”⁷ he was involved in the momentous, yet present in the moment. It was in this moment that he demonstrated the skill of handling competing valid

priorities. Stretched out and in pain, striving to fulfil his purpose, he is concerned about his mother and best friend.

This skill of being present in moments was what made him so extraordinarily attractive to so many as well as enabling him to live, and therefore demonstrate, the balanced life. Underlying this powerful moment are numerous powerful life skills, such as: knowing a sense of mission; dealing with days one at a time; minimising worry; and careful delegation. Jesus dealt with the thieves of time during his life as skilfully as he dealt with the thief on the cross at the end of his life.



Here in this third saying the window into balance opens up.

Integrity, whistleblowing and taking a stand

“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”⁸ is a haunting question asked by a man who is totally alone – yet totally in the right. It’s a position which

carries with it a deep darkness as well as a powerful privilege. Here in this most intense of moments, Jesus draws on the bible for a question which is profoundly mysterious, yet full of meanings



for today's workers. How can I stand alone for what is right? How can I draw on the bible in my current struggle? Who will help me when I feel alone – right or wrong? How should I blow the whistle when I know something needs to be addressed? How do I face a sense of God's absence in my work? All these questions find responses in the understanding of this one spoken by a man – I repeat – at work doing a real job.

Being real

There is an irony about the workplace which hit me as I moved from working exclusively with churches to a wider range of clients. The workplace is described as “the real world” yet uses the language of the stage.

“What role do you play?” and “let's have a performance review” would be two examples of such language.

One of the biggest challenges individuals face on a daily basis is how to be themselves at work without breaking some code, rule or tradition. It is a real source of stress. Stress managers will speak of person-environment fit or job mismatch as workers try to find a meaningful place in the work culture. When Jesus said “I thirst”⁹ John explained that it was to fulfil scripture and was referring to the messianic psalms. The point that emerges is that a thirsty messiah is a human messiah. In this moment Jesus lets us look into his humanity and as you look, you learn about his embrace of the fantastic complexity that his Father designed, the congruence he demonstrated throughout his life between his self-understanding, his words and his actions, and the vulnerability he was prepared to show by admitting thirst and asking for help.

You may care to consider what your team would be like if there was a celebration of reality rather than posturing or acting, where each member worked out of their strengths and covered each others' weaknesses, where there was a transparent and disarming honesty in all dealings as ‘yes’ meant ‘yes’ and ‘no’ meant ‘no’. If you consider how refreshing it would be to be real and true to

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yourself at work you will begin to capture the power of this fifth sentence from the cross.

Crossing the finishing line

How do I finish a day, a life, a project, a career a placement or a task well? How do I learn to give and receive briefs so that the jobs get done? How do I learn to come to good agreements on a macro or micro scale? How do I combine high standards with healthy completion whilst avoiding unhealthy perfectionism? Here are a few of the questions resolved in the “it is finished”¹⁰ moment of our six hour epic. Jesus, in a clear report, announces he has done what he set out to do. There is an exquisite health in this paradoxical celebration – for celebration it is – as his life draws to a close. Part of the finish involves allowing others to do their job but this is the closing act of his drama.

Staying spiritual whilst busy

Finally he ends as he began with the word “Father” on his lips. His final prayer “Father into your hands I commit my spirit”¹¹ is a quote again from a psalm¹², but he adds “Father” to it. In the end this is what all his work has been about; his mission is to add Father to everything – literally everything. Every task, every project, meeting or event now becomes an act of worship as he concludes by showing us how to stay conscious of the Father whilst busy – not after the

business is over. Here is the skill which avoids the forgetting and the missing of the point.

Here is the skill which

enables everyone to worship all the time, even to find sacraments in screen savers.

What I am arguing here is both profound and practical. We need a clear Christology of work which does not ask the question



■ *Lord, into thy hands I commit my spirit* ■
 Peter Paul Rubens, *Christ on the Cross*, ca.1613
 ■ Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp ■

“what would Jesus do?” but deals in the realities of “what did Jesus do?” What he did was work and where his work climaxed was on the cross. His sentences speak

into our issues of stress, being good news, finding a balance, working with integrity, being real and true to ourselves, getting the job done and staying spiritually alert whilst busy. There are seven large skills on show here, but the more you look the more you will find hundreds of tools, a seven-part tool kit and endless supplies of raw materials.

Now you see it?

Once you see it you wonder why you hadn't seen it before but when you've seen it, you can never be the same again. It is exhilarating, terrifying and inspiring simultaneously. Having seen it you will understand what the centurion felt but may not have known when he said “surely He was the son of God!” ■

Geoff Shattock is founder of WORKTALK, a leading provider of spiritual resources for the workplace. He is a trained physiologist, stress psychobiologist and ordained minister and has worked with UK national government on employment projects, been mission advisor to the London Baptist Association as well as conference speaker and broadcaster on work-related issues.

The WORKTALK course referred to in this article is a combined DVD presentation and comprehensive handbook detailing in

an accessible format teaching based on the seven sayings from the cross. This course is being used by churches, groups and individuals in a wide variety of contexts in the UK, US and Europe.

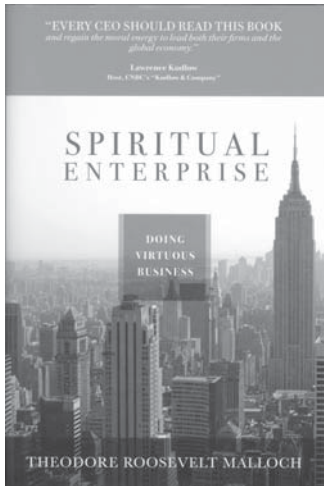
Jesus and the Racing Rat, Geoff's new book, also based on the seven sayings from the cross, will be published shortly showing how the Man who changed the world can change the way we work.

Details of the WORKTALK ministry can be found at www.worktalk.gs or by calling the WORKTALK office on 020 8764 8080 or emailing comms@worktalk.gs

Notes

- ¹ Matthew 27:54
- ² The Seven Words from the Cross - Robert Bellarmine 1618 (preface <http://www.cfpeople.org/Books/7Words/CFPtoc.htm>)
- ³ John 17:1-4
- ⁴ James Denney *The Death of Christ*, Eerdmans, 1911, p.121.
- ⁵ Luke 23:34
- ⁶ Luke 23:43
- ⁷ John 19:26-27
- ⁸ Matthew 27:46
- ⁹ John 19:28
- ¹⁰ John 19:30
- ¹¹ Luke 23:46
- ¹² Psalm 31:5

Readers who watch Songs of Praise will have noticed that the programme on Sunday May 17 was devoted to the subject of Christian Entrepreneurs - and that Richard Higginson was interviewed on it. He spoke about the history of Christian entrepreneurship with reference to the medieval monasteries, the great Quaker philanthropist entrepreneurs and John Wesley's famous sermon on money. The programme also featured Sir Tom Farmer, founder of Kwik-Fit, Jerry Marshall, who runs the Transformational Business Network, and Tom Sanderson, UK Director of Five Talents, the micro-finance organisation.



Spiritual Enterprise: Doing Virtuous Business

by Theodore Roosevelt Malloch

Encounter Books, New York, 2008, 168 pp. US\$21.95

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■ reviewed by Richard J. Goossen

Ted Malloch is chairman and CEO of the Roosevelt Group and founder of the Spiritual Enterprise Institute. His recent book is a valuable reflection on ethics in business and the pursuit of meaning and significance at work.

Malloch does this by presenting the uncommon notions of a 'spiritual enterprise' and doing 'virtuous business.' He writes his book as 'a committed Christian' but what he says 'does not reflect a narrow or specifically sectarian Christian theology' (p.xx). Malloch recognises the centrality of faith in business dealings and explains how business can, despite recent notorious examples to the contrary, be conducted in a virtuous manner by individuals; an organisation itself can be a spiritual enterprise. The bookshelf is relatively bare with respect to books dealing with the intersection of faith and business in terms of the philosophical underpinnings, so this is a welcome contribution.

Malloch approaches his topic in an ideologically balanced fashion. He advances arguments with careful

deliberation, taking into account the most frequent rebuttals to his position. Refreshingly, he does not engage in knocking down feeble straw men; instead he fairly summarises opposing perspectives and offers his own contrasting view. This contributes to, rather than detracts from, the overall credibility of his argument. *Spiritual Enterprise*, by its very structure, distinguishes itself from much overtly biased fare that is clearly preaching to the choir and misrepresenting opposing viewpoints.

Malloch, to his credit, has one foot in the world of mainstream business and the other in the world of mainstream academia and thus does not fall into the common disposition of caricaturing either perspective. He builds his arguments carefully, drawing on a depth of knowledge in economics and philosophy, citing thinkers from Adam Smith to Aristotle. The book has numerous (mainly American) examples to buttress his points, from oft-cited companies such as Chick-fil-A to lesser-known ones such as Providence Healthcare. In a primer such as this, his examples serve as practical evidence for

each argument, rather than being a conclusive position. Malloch also includes an appendix titled a 'gallery of virtuous companies' which will be helpful to readers.

Malloch adds to his credibility through developing his position by anticipating arguments. The book is written in the style of advancing an argument and offering responses to anticipated objections. In some instances, Malloch offers arguments in response to what he calls 'a Leftist view' of business which is very negative. In other cases he cites sceptics who require a response. Throughout the book Malloch's tone of discourse reflects the sensitivities of being a Christian who is an academic. The environments of the world's leading universities are at best arrogantly dismissive or patronisingly sceptical of any religiously-based claims; in their mind science decimated the value of faith long ago. As a result, Malloch is quite aware that he must argue for the relevance of his inquiry, which some readers would dismiss out of hand by virtue of the title of the book alone.

Spiritual Enterprise begins with a discussion of 'spiritual capital', which