

## **The Sunday-Monday Gap: Called to Pew or Profit?**

David Miller delivered this keynote presentation at the 2005 Mid-Winter Convocation, "Living Out Our Callings in the Workplace," at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, on January 5, 2005.

I often joke with Professor Rolf Jacobson, my friend from our days together at Princeton Theological Seminary, that if I had only read Luther earlier in my career — and I mean Luther himself, not commentators on Luther — I might have become a Lutheran instead of a Presbyterian! Particularly in light of our theme, who can resist the lure of a man who sees "insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties," such as changing diapers and laboring at a trade, so transformed in the Spirit that "they are all adorned with divine approval as the costliest gold and jewels"? [\[1\]](#)

As a former business executive, as an academic, and as clergyperson, I am consumed by the question you have asked me to address: "Living Out Our Callings in the Workplace" — or as I like to put it, seeking to integrate the claims of our faith with the demands of our work. I have chosen to reflect upon both the obstacles and the resources we face as followers of Jesus and members of his church in our life in the workplace.

"Pew" and "profit," of course, are metaphors for church and workplace, and the images capture well the potential tension between the two. In this first presentation I seek to describe and analyze the landscape we face, including the ecclesiastical, academic, cultural, and theological resistance to understanding the workplace as a Christian calling. In the second lecture I will seek to offer constructive models and resources for overcoming the Sunday-Monday gap. [\[2\]](#)

Let me first define some terms and presuppositions. Foremost is the question: What is work and where is the workplace? Work is somehow distinct from leisure, play, and hobbies, though to an observer they often may be hard to distinguish. Similarly, the boundary between the spaces in which we work and in which we rest — the workplace and the home — is increasingly blurred. For purposes of these addresses, I shall define work as paid employment. While paid work is of course done in many arenas — for example, in non-profit organizations and the so-called caring professions — and unpaid work is done everyday in households and voluntary associations, I shall focus my comments on those who work in the marketplace, which I broadly define to include all aspects (and all levels) of business and the professions.

In many ways, the titles of my two presentations stake out the issues. Most people, particularly those in the marketplace and world of work, feel a chasm between Sunday worship and Monday work — a gap — as if the two worlds had nothing to do

with each other. This experience raises some crucial questions: As Christians, can we be called to the workplace? What is a calling, after all? What is a workplace?

### **What Is a Calling?**

What is a calling? At a place like Luther Seminary, perhaps one need not spend much time defining *Beruf*, vocation, or calling. We can turn to Martin Luther for that, and later to Karl Holl and his students. However, many of our nation's most respected seminaries and churches have lost a Reformation conception of calling; they pay at best mere intellectual lip service to the term. For purposes of these addresses, I shall define call or calling theologically in this way: "to urgently invite someone to accept responsibilities for a particular task, implying a new relationship to the one who does the calling." [3]

In terms of a divine call, this definition suggests four dimensions: First, a divine call implies that there is a divine caller, one who does the calling. Second, a calling has a sense of urgency, a sense of insistence from God; yet at the same time it remains an invitation. God does not force us to accept our callings. Third, these callings often involve accepting responsibilities for a particular task or tasks, and, unready as we may feel, God equips us to fulfill these callings. Finally, a calling often brings the one who is called into a new relationship with the one who does the calling. This last move is perhaps one of the most extraordinary things about a Christian conception of calling — the task we are invited to undertake suddenly is more than a task. The humble task now becomes a holy offering. And in the process, not only are our tasks transformed, but our relationship to God is transformed.

I would like to suggest one minor — yet, I believe, significant — contribution to enhance this conception of calling. Most theologians and clergy tend to teach and speak of calling in the singular, as if we have just one divine calling or task in life. That is a gross distortion of many biblical calling narratives; furthermore, it is a denial of the living God who is ever active in creation and our lives. Indeed, biblical evidence and theological thinking support the idea of callings in the plural. It is the rare few who have one primary calling that lasts and defines their whole lives. Most of us have multiple callings. Some are sequential, while others are parallel. Some last a lifetime, others just for a season. Moreover, in a purely theological sense, we all have two callings. First, we have a general calling as baptized believers to be disciples and followers of the risen Christ. Second, we have our own particular callings, our own personal urgent invitations to particular tasks. And these tasks may change as our lives and circumstances change.

On that basis, then, how can we view the workplace in general and the marketplace in particular as a calling? Can we conceive of the idea that God might actually call us to accept responsibilities for particular tasks in the workplace? Or are we destined to construe God's calling as limited to those in ordained ministry, to those working in what are often called the caring professions, or to "full-time" Christian work, such as being a nurse or a director of Christian education? Reflecting for a moment on our ecclesiology — that is, our theological understanding of the church — and our theology of work may help us find some answers.

### **A New Understanding of Church**

In seminary, we study the marks of the church and develop a theology of the church that includes all its aspects. Yet in our lives as clergypersons and laypeople in many denominations, we tend to be less theological and shift to an operative ecclesiology. My research has led me to conclude that, despite what they were taught, most pastors have an operative Sunday-centered ecclesiology. The Sunday service is the apex of the week, and the church building is the primary locus for Christian life and community. In most churches, the preparation and planning for the liturgy, the sermon, the sacraments, the music, the bulletin, Sunday school, and other Sunday-related events consume the attention and theological focus of the pastor, the rest of the staff, and the congregation. While worshiping God on Sunday in a church service is, of course, necessary and valid, is it not theologically insufficient if one's Sunday focus comes at the expense of a Monday locus? Can we not praise and glorify God through our Monday work, where we honor God by serving our neighbor as part of the life of a disciple of Jesus? Shocking as it may sound, I propose that we reenvision our ecclesiology to be Monday-centered instead of Sunday-centered.

A healthy ecclesiology is not limited to a particular building, day, or time of the week. We gather as a community of believers to praise and honor God in the formal worship hour, yet that hour must be related to the rest of our lives. I propose that we develop an ecclesiology that is not static or Sunday-centered, but is fluid, moving between the church gathered and the church scattered. Sunday we gather, Monday we scatter — only to gather again on the next Sunday. This rhythm of gathering and scattering offers a healthy cycle in which Sunday enriches and equips us for Monday, just as weekdays enrich and equip us for Sunday. To be sure, some denominations, such as Episcopalians and Lutherans, have a strong liturgical rhythm and daily calendar that seek to make this move between the church gathered and the church scattered. Yet I would wager that the vast majority of even these parishioners do not follow the daily prayers and services, so that in practice they look much like other less liturgically oriented denominations.

## **A Theology of Work**

Our theology of work provides the other basis for viewing work as a Christian calling. A full treatment of a theology of work is outside the scope of this address, though, as Miroslav Volf, my friend and colleague at Yale Divinity School, wrote, “The number of pages theologians have devoted to the question of transubstantiation — which does or does not take place on Sunday — would, I suspect, far exceed the number of pages devoted to work that fills our lives Monday through Saturday.” [4] Work forms a central part of our lives; grounding it in the doctrine of creation and in a theological understanding of human anthropology will give it a greater sense of purpose. Both intrinsically and extrinsically, work is central to living out God’s purposes on earth. We are called to serve as stewards of creation, to tend the garden — forming and reforming it in ways that seek to approximate goodness in a fallen world.

## **The Root of the Problem**

But before we come up with a constructive response to the Sunday-Monday gap, we need to look at the causes and consequences of this false choice. I would say that the root of the gap lies in the training that clergy receive in seminary and divinity school. With a few notable exceptions, like here at Luther Seminary, clergy are trained to understand ministry in one of three modalities: the pew, the prophet, or the poor. For some, ministry is about the pew — the Sunday worship and the smooth administration of the church building, staff, and membership. For others, ministry is about speaking a prophetic voice to the larger issues of society. And for still others, ministry is understood as reaching out to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the disenfranchised. These are all laudable and valid aspects of ordained ministry. Yet conspicuously absent in seminary training is instruction for clergy on how to equip the saints for discovering and living out their own ministries in the workplace and in the rest of their daily lives.

Logically, we might think that the church would embrace this opportunity and seize the chance to equip the saints for the work of the kingdom. Yet empirical and anecdotal evidence reveals another story. Most businesspeople report a “Sunday-Monday gap,” in which their Sunday worship bears little to no relevance to their Monday workplace. [5] While notable exceptions exist, generally speaking, sermon topics, illustrations, liturgical content, prayers, and pastoral care seldom recognize, much less address, the spiritual questions, ethical challenges, pastoral needs, and vocational possibilities faced by those who work in business. Indeed, most active churchgoers surveyed cannot remember the last time their pastor preached a constructive sermon on work. [6] Thus, businesspeople often feel alone and unsup-

ported by the church in their marketplace vocations. Correctly or incorrectly, most businesspeople sense the clergy's broad unfamiliarity with, disinterest in, or generally pejorative attitude toward the business world — and, by association, toward those who work in it. [7]

Responsible theological and ethical criticism of immoral and unethical business is always in order, of course. Yet clergy seem often to exhibit a presumptive and prejudicial suspicion of capitalism and marketplace structures that prevents them from thinking — or talking — about the redemptive, creative, productive, ministerial, and transformative possibilities in the business world and in the lives of those called to live out their Christian vocations in the marketplace. This phenomenon is not necessarily the clergy's fault. Many of today's clergy were influenced by seminary faculty who are heirs of Christian socialism and advocates of liberation theology, both of which employ materialist categories of analysis and tend to presuppose that capitalist structures are de facto oppressive sources of injustice. Moreover, seminary training seldom addresses "faith at work" and workplace ministry as subjects for theological reflection or practical training, leaving most clergy unaware and ill-equipped to minister to the needs and callings of those in the workplace.

So the Sunday-Monday gap continues, and its effects are devastating, leaving parishioners feeling they have to make a choice between pew and profit. Faced with the message that their work is not important to the church (other than on Pledge Sunday), businesspeople respond in one of several ways. At one extreme, they reject God and stop coming to church. At the other extreme, they reject life in the marketplace and turn toward careers in the non-profit world. Between these extremes, the majority of people learn simply to compartmentalize their faith and their work. This schizophrenic alternative seeks to honor each area, but finds no way to integrate them. Businesspeople and others in the world of work often live a bifurcated life in which faith and work, the spiritual and the material, Sunday and Monday are unrelated. This is one of the great tragedies of the modern church. Perhaps the cruelest irony of this split is that it forces parishioners to choose between pew and profit, which then hurts the other aims of ministry, like nurturing the gathered life of a faith community, speaking with a prophetic voice, and helping the poor and disenfranchised. So ministry becomes isolated and idolized, stripped of its holistic vitality, as parishioners compartmentalize their ministries, their time, their treasure, their talents, and their vocations as Christians.

I may have painted a rather dismal view of the church and its misunderstanding of pew and profit, of Sunday worship and Monday work. But if we stay institutionally wedded to an incomplete ecclesiology, an insufficient theology of work, and an imbalanced curriculum at our seminaries, we are bound to continue to encourage the

compartmentalized and schizophrenic lives of the people of God. Fortunately, however, there is an alternative. My second presentation will offer some constructive responses to the Sunday-Monday gap.

## **Notes**

1. Martin Luther, "The Estate of Marriage" (1522), in Luther's Works, vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 39.

2. These addresses emerge out of a lifelong interest in these questions and draw in part on my prior research: see David Miller, "The Faith at Work Movement: Its Growth, Dynamics, and Future" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2003), and a forthcoming essay in the *Ethix* bulletin of the Institute for Business, Technology & Ethics.

3. I draw on and expand the meaning of the Greek *kaleo* in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida et al., vol. 1, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), paragraph 33.312, page 424.

4. Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69.