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SPEAKING OF FAITH AT WORK:
TOWARDS A TRINITARIAN HERMENEUTIC

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a theological exploration of the problems and potentialities of speaking about Christian faith in the context of working life. It is based on a qualitative investigation of the experience of Christians working in secular institutions. The argument is that the discursive interface between work and worship raises critical questions of *identity*, of *power* and of *language* which challenge the integrity of Christian discipleship. The practice of articulating faith-talk in the working context is analysed in the light of a trinitarian hermeneutic.

The thesis addresses the practical theological question: *How may a Christian speak adequately and appropriately of their faith at work?* This question is explored through an integration of qualitative-representational analysis and theological-evaluative critique. An ethnographic method is developed, based on extended immersion in the field of secular work, and focused in a series of research conversations and reflective meetings. Analysed from the perspective of a Christian woman who has struggled and continues to struggle to forge an adequate and contextual articulation of faith in workplace settings, the problematic is described through the metaphor of 'a life in two languages'. A faithful resolution of the problem is approached through the contextual discovery of three trinitarian practices: of *engagement*, *fluency* and *communion*.

The thesis makes a contribution to academic knowledge in the practical theology of working life. By addressing the communicative dimension of working life, and exploring the experience of Christians in the workplace using the resources of cultural theory and discourse analysis, the thesis presents a contemporary and practical perspective on work. In a field which attracts a large volume of popular and motivational writing, the study contributes a sustained and critical reflection and offers a creative map for interpreting the challenge of Christian witness at work in the light of a trinitarian understanding of faithful practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Howard

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CHRISM	Christians in Secular Ministry
IM	Industrial Mission
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NHS	National Health Service
RJN	Research Journal
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WCC	World Council of Churches
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

BIBLE REFERENCES

Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (2001).

PART I

ENGAGING THE PROBLEM

Part I of the thesis introduces the problem of 'a life in two languages', setting out (in Chapter 1) the agenda and scope of the project and contextualizing the study within the field of practical theology. In this chapter the conceptual framework for the study is drawn, and the outline of a trinitarian hermeneutic is introduced. The approach to the study is then discussed (in Chapter 2) through a critical discussion of the research methodology.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A LIFE IN TWO LANGUAGES

> Like everyone, I am the sum of my languages – [...] though perhaps I tend to be more aware than most of the fractures between them. (Eva Hoffman)[1]

This study is a theological exploration of the problems and potentialities of speaking about Christian faith in the context of working life. It is presented as a piece of practical theological research which is earthed in an interdisciplinary conversation between everyday experience and critical reflection, using fresh resources from contemporary cultural theory and critical discourse analysis.

In this chapter I explain, first, how my own experience of the world of work has set the broad context for the research and, secondly, how the aims and scope of the research are intended to address the concerns of ordinary Christian people in their daily discipleship. I will then locate the study within a wider academic context before introducing the trinitarian perspective which has permeated my reflections. Finally, I will give an overview of the thesis.

1.1   Personal and professional context

I approach this study from the standpoint of a Christian woman who has struggled, and continues to struggle, to give adequate expression to my faith commitments in ways which are appropriate to the secular settings of my working life. In asserting from the outset the personal importance of this project, I wish to honour the necessary and creative intersubjectivity which has informed throughout the process of this qualitative research study (see Section 2.3 below, p.19f.). More importantly, I intend to celebrate the extent to which an academic grappling with the issues of language, identity and power has engaged holistically with the practical and spiritual development of my own 'self, voice and mind' (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997). The resultant process of interpersonal discovery is offered as an extended theological reflection on human integration in the grace of the holy and undivided Trinity.

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[1] (Hoffman 1998, p.273).

The core context in which the study is rooted is my own adult experience of straddling the two worlds of worshipping life within the church community and working life within a secular institution. As a lay Christian woman, I worked for over ten years as a clinical oncologist in NHS hospitals. I continued in this medical work (in a greater than half-time capacity) for a further fifteen years after I was ordained within the Church of England.[2] When I retired from active clinical work four years ago, I took up a role in a modern institution of Higher Education as a university chaplain. Throughout thirty years of employment in a variety of secular institutions, my place of work has been the context for some of the most significant and enriching relationships and responsibilities in my life.

Yet my place of work has also been the site of arduous struggle as I have encountered the difficulties and dangers of giving voice to a Christian faith commitment which is deemed 'out of place' in anything but the most private corners of the working environment. I have become increasingly aware of the myriad ways in which secularizing interests, operating at many levels of economic life, create huge discursive pressures against the articulation of faith-talk which most lay Christians are ill-equipped to withstand. In conversation with many other Christian workers I have also come to realize how little practical theological interest can be found within the churches to support a more fruitful Christian witness at work.

The discursive struggle which I problematize as that of 'a life in two languages' is not unfamiliar to people who have tried to forge a cross-cultural identity. Eva Hoffman's autobiography, '*Lost in Translation*' (1998), offers a wonderfully rich reflection, through the eyes of a young Jewish woman, on the complex ways in which language shapes and determines human identity. Emigrating from Krakow as a child of holocaust survivors, Hoffman's struggle to assimilate into an alien culture in Canada throws up all kinds of questions about her identity, her religion, and – most of all – her language. As she reflects on her journey from childhood to adulthood, with all the ensuing changes and renegotiations of identity, her coming of age is powerfully expressed in the achievement of a new and poetic fluency in a new way of life and language which she learns to make authentically her own.

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[2] This pattern of work is often described by the churches as 'ministry in secular employment', although it is rare for such 'ministry' to be acknowledged in any formal or contractual manner by the secular employing agency. See Francis and Francis (1998) for a critical discussion of this pattern of ministry.

The problematic for my own research is the daily cross-cultural experience of inhabiting two different language worlds: the world of the Christian church, and the world of the secular workplace. I am interested in the questions which this cultural switchback throws up for an authentically Christian identity, for an adequate and appropriate engagement with cultural, economic and institutional power, and – most of all – for a faithful and creative use of language.

Perhaps, like Hoffman, I tend to be more aware than most people of the 'fractures' between different discourses (1998, p.273). There may be a number of biographical reasons for this sensitivity; but in the course of my career I have tried to embrace a critical curiosity towards language as a basis for reflective practice in both ecclesiastical and medical contexts. As one of the earliest women to be ordained a priest in the Church of England, I found myself struggling to craft an identity and a voice in a world of public ministry which has been overwhelmingly shaped by masculinity, and I have reflected especially long and hard on the particular communicative challenges of 'preaching like a woman' (Durber 2007). In my medical practice, I similarly identified a particular educational interest in the discursive aspects of the doctor-patient relationship, studying and teaching the subtle interplay of communicative skills and sensitivities which young practitioners needed to acquire in order to bridge the powerful sociolinguistic divide between the professional and the patient.[3] I have found a degree of liberation in both these spheres of work in the discovery that fresh and authentic forms of communication can be learned and, indeed, shared. It is in the hope of a similarly creative process of discovery that I approach the topic of this current research.

1.2   Practical agenda

1.2.1 The research question

How may a Christian speak adequately and appropriately of their faith at work? My concern for a well-placed and authentic Christian witness in the working community embraces many practical theological aspects of behaviour and belonging but is focused especially in the issues of communicative practice. What practical skills and hermeneutic sensitivities are required to bridge the powerful

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[3] See Lloyd and Bor (1996) and Silverman, Kurtz et al (1999).

sociolinguistic divide between the religious world of worship and the secular world of work? The aim of pursuing this question in some depth and detail is to begin to articulate an integrative and sufficiently 'workable' theology which might inform the practical support and education of lay Christians for a more faithful daily apostolate beyond the bounds of the gathered church community.

1.2.2 The scope of the research

The scope of my study is thus the discursive practice of ordinary working Christians. I am not primarily interested in the issues facing ordained ministers although, clearly, my own experience as a priest working in secular employment and in chaplaincy has significantly coloured my reading of the problem. Some of my informants have also been ordinands in training who have reflected with me on their acute perceptions of the negotiations of language and identity on the interface between continuing secular employment and prospective ministry in the church. Although I have found the insights of those with some theological training to be helpful in forging an analysis, it is nonetheless the missionary situation of the ordinary 'lay' Christian which remains my primary concern.

It is the ordinariness of this experience of working life which I judge to be of especial importance for practical theology. For this reason, I have not restricted my explorations to any particular level or sector of occupational responsibility. I am as interested in the witness and experience of Christians in quite humble and junior positions as in the seemingly more serious challenges faced by those in positions of professional and/or managerial authority. I have, similarly, not restricted my focus to the world of 'business' (which holds such fascination for Christians influenced by the culture of North American evangelicalism), but have maintained a wider purview to include the experiences and concerns arising from other occupational sectors and discursive domains.

In order to concentrate on this discursive dimension of working life I have chosen to limit the scope of my research in some other respects. I do not directly address the ethical practices and decision-making challenges which face Christians in their daily work. Nor do I engage in any sustained critique of the underlying capitalistic foundations which shape the economic structures of the

contemporary workplace.[4] My concern is rather to reflect on the subtle and significant ways in which the language of the workplace, not merely as an incidental cultural epiphenomenon but as an intentional and powerful socio-economic practice in itself, might critically and creatively engage with an integrated vision of faithful Christian discipleship. At a time when effective communication is prized as an invaluable skill for almost every occupational field (Blundell 2004), I judge that theological reflection on the discursive practices of the contemporary workplace is a vitally important Christian agenda.

1.2.3 A note about definitions

I am aware that my own discursive decisions will not be without prejudice. The notion of 'work' is not a clearly bounded concept, and any useable definition will impose limits which may be felt to exclude.[5] A broad typology of work, following Handy (1984) and Robertson (1985), will include the categories of paid employment, self employment, imposed obligations (carers, home workers etc.), self-imposed work (voluntary work, helping) and own work (hobbies, personal objectives). For the practical purposes of this study, however, I restrict my considerations to those areas of commercial, professional and occupational life which take place within an institution or cultural milieu other than the home (or the church). Whether or not such pursuits are directly remunerated, they share in a family resemblance of activities undertaken within a contractual (or quasi-contractual) culture and frame of reference which lies beyond the intimate domain.

From this perspective, my understanding of the 'workplace' is more cultural-linguistic than spatial-institutional. Within the flexible working patterns which allow for high mobility and an element of home-based working for many contemporary professionals, the experience of being 'at work' is delineated less by temporal or geographical location and more by adherence to the disciplines and practices of the working role – many of which, significantly, are intensely communicative in character.

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[4] For a recent theological treatment of business ethics, see Wright (2004). For a critical review of the experience of work under late capitalism, see Hughes (2007).

[5] I give no consideration to the question of women's work in the home. For a theological treatment of this important issue, see Borrowdale (1989). Neither do I address the issues raised by unemployment. For recent ecumenical discussion, see Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (1997).

I use the term 'faith' to describe the intellectual and moral convictions and emotional and spiritual dispositions which reflect an individual's relationship to a religious community. Although many of the challenges of speaking of 'faith' at work will apply to believers from a wide range of religious backgrounds,[6] I limit my theological reflection to the experience and practice of Christian believers for the purposes of this study.

By adopting such broad phenomenological definitions of 'work' and 'workplace', and of the 'faith' to which Christians seek to bear witness, I do not mean to suggest that there is some abstract, general experience of speaking of faith at work which is independent of any concrete situation. Against such an impractical presumption, I will argue that the appropriateness and adequacy of any expression of faith-talk is necessarily contextual; and the qualitative analysis which I present will be read against the working background of some highly specific individual and institutional narratives.

1.2.4 The aims of the research

The overarching purpose of this study is to explore theologically the discursive interface between the world of worship in the church and the world of secular work. The direction of my research is towards the resolution and integration of the 'compartmentalization' or 'gap' between these two discursive domains. In other words, I hope to suggest how the problem of 'a life in two languages' might be resolved through the contextually appropriate practices of a trinitarian faith.

With this aim in view, I have identified in the course of the research three subsidiary areas of inquiry which together open up a 'thicker' delineation of the problematic and a richer hermeneutical approach towards its resolution. Relating to these themes of *identity*, *power* and *language*, I examine three practices of Christian faithfulness in terms of *engagement*, *fluency* and *communion*. Each of these areas is of practical importance in relation to the everyday pastoral and missionary concerns of ordinary working Christians. By reflecting theologically on their significance, I hope to produce a map for reflective practice (see Figure 1.1 overleaf) and to develop a distinctively Christian understanding of the nature and purpose of communication at work as a faithful hermeneutic of the love of the holy Trinity.

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[6] See Lips-Wiersma and Mills (2002) for a discussion of spiritual expression from a multi-faithed perspective.
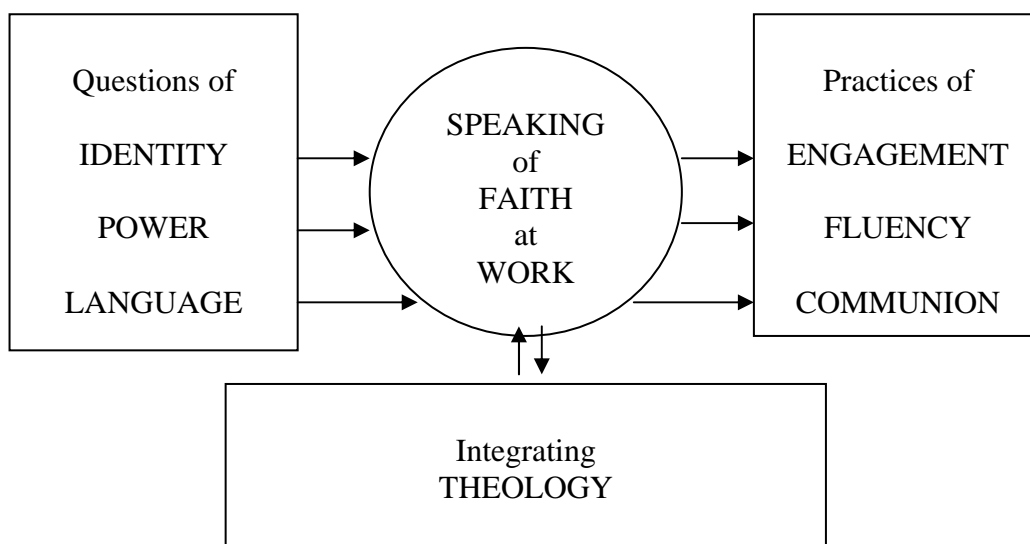
Figure 1.1   Conceptual framework for the study

1.3   Academic context

1.3.1 A study in practical theology

This study is contextualized within the field of practical theology. Following current British understandings of the methods, scope and practice of this discipline, I have been guided by Pattison and Woodward's dialogical definition of the locus of practical theology as 'a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical and practically transforming' (1994, p.9).

I will discuss more fully in the next chapter the methodological implications of this dialogical model for the conception and outworking of the research (see Chapter 2 below). In this introduction to the focus of the study, I locate the wider academic context of my research in relation to Christian thinking on work,[7] indicating the need for fresh resources to engage with the practical theological questions raised by the contemporary emphasis on communicative practices in the workplace.

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[7] In considering at this point the appropriately academic context of this study, I pass over the large body of 'lite' and largely exhortational literature on Christian witness at work which is discussed in the context of a wider evangelical movement in Chapter 6 (see below, pp.106-108).

1.3.2 A fresh slant on work

The communicative question at the heart of my study is not one which has been addressed by traditional systematic theologies of work. Since the notion of a 'theology of work' was first promoted by Chenu (1963) in the 1950s, the task of academic reflection on the social and economic problems of labour has been pursued with some vigour by both Catholic and Protestant theologians. Subsequent theologies have typically examined the nature and processes of production in the light of doctrinal understandings of creation[8] and of new creation,[9] seeking to give Christian meaning to the modern labour experience through a critical articulation of the analogical relationship between human and divine work.

My agenda is both more practical and more contemporary. It is more practical in that I do not set out to construct a general or systematic theology of work as a tool for academic reflection primarily within the ecclesial community. My attention is focused, rather, in the specific and contextual articulation of Christian meaning within the practical constraints of working life as it is experienced outside the realm of ecclesiastical order and control. From this missionary orientation I engage in a purposefully 'unsystematic' way (Forrester 2005), discovering themes and fragments which might serve to express a theological vision 'in' and 'for' work, rather than attempting a more ambitious, yet unavoidably abstracted, theology 'of' work.

My agenda is also more contemporary in that I pay close attention to the discursive contexts which have become such a significant feature of the post-industrial workplace,[10] where, in many of the growing commercial and service sectors of our economy, communicative skills may be prized more highly than technical skills. This 'communicative turn' in the contemporary experience of work invites an approach to theological reflection which is less preoccupied with production, alienation and reward, and more interested in identity, culture and relationship.

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[8] For this broadly Catholic approach, see especially Chenu (1963), John Paul II (1981), Soelle and Cloyes (1984) and Larive (2004).

[9] For this more typically Protestant approach, see especially Volf (1991), Hefner (2003), Cosden (2004) and Hughes (2007).

[10] See Casey (1995) for a critical examination of the production of the self through the discursive practices of work in post-industrial society.

Here I am aided by some fresh resources from the fields of identity and cultural studies (see Chapter 3 below), and from the critical tools and perspectives drawn from the disciplines of discourse analysis (see Chapters 5 and 7 below). With these academic conversation partners I set out to explore the problem of 'a life in two languages' and, through a practical and contemporary analysis of faith-talk at work, to expand the terms of a theological understanding of work as a participation in the expressive love of God in Trinity.

1.4   Towards a trinitarian hermeneutic

My problem, crudely stated, is that it is immensely difficult to build a communicative bridge between the two language worlds of work and worship. I name the resulting compartmentalization as a sin of broken relationship and failed communion. This sinful compartmentalization is experienced by sensitive Christians as though living 'a life in two languages'.

At this point I introduce the trinitarian theological perspective which will guide a resolution of this brokenness and fragmentation towards an adequate and appropriate integration. To address my pastoral and missionary problem, to inform the questions of identity, power and language, and to inspire the practices of engagement, fluency and communion so that what is broken may be healed, and what is unspoken may be given voice, I look to the rich resources of trinitarian theology.

The renaissance of trinitarian theology in recent years has furnished a wealth of fresh reflection on identity and relationship which has yet to be fully embraced in relation to theologies of work.[11]   It is these resources, promising a richly dialogical participation in the holy workplace of the Three-in-One, that I draw upon as I begin to explore the profoundly theological dimensions of my problem.

First, I recognize the problem of 'living at ease' with the multiple roles that we assume in relation to others (Fiddes 2000, p.51). As Sayers has pointed out (1941, p.x) the slightly schizophrenic way in which a person might speak or

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[11] For recent practical treatments of trinitarian theology, see especially Zizioulas (1985), LaCugna (1991), Gunton (1993), Cunningham (1998) and Fiddes (2000). In theologies of work, some exploration of trinitarian themes can be found in Sayers (1941), Schumacher (1987), Larive (2004) and, to a lesser extent, Stevens (1999), although each author tends in different ways towards a modalist treatment of the work of the individual persons of the Trinity, and none develops a fully interrelational theology of human participation in the work of the Three-in-One.

write in one context 'as a Christian' and in another 'as a professional' betrays a common kind of implicit Sabellianism. Against this denial of God's involvement in all human arenas of work, both sacred and secular, a triune understanding of God's nature and action encourages us to discover each of our roles as a participation in the one, eternal movement of God's mission of grace. Rather than finding ourselves facing different ways in different roles, we are drawn into the 'interweaving currents' of the *missio Dei* as we discover the essential unity between 'person' and 'personage' (Fiddes 2000, p.51). Beyond the tension between the particularities of our alternating commitments to church and to work, we are called to participate in a harmony of truth between each sphere of God's involvement in the world.

The second problem is the daily interrelational tension between the 'integrity of the self and openness to others' (Fiddes 2000, p.52) which is encountered as Christian people share in a secular culture with their working neighbours. In Chapter 3 below I take up resources from the post-modern 'turn towards intersubjectivity'[12] to examine how an authentically working self might be most fully expressed, not through the pursuit of an introspective exclusiveness, but through a subtle and demanding openness which lives and works on the borderlands of the cultural other. What we learn from contemporary trinitarian insights is that the fundamental category of reality is relationship, and that to be an authentic self is to participate in a communion of relationality with others. As we participate in this reality and communion with and in the triune God, so we embrace 'the ever-present opportunity to be aligned with a movement of communication beyond ourselves' in which the possibility of genuine love can be known in experience (Fiddes 2000, pp.52f.).

The third problem which is engaged by a trinitarian vision is the tension between unity and diversity which is encountered as Christians seek to express a distinctive identity whilst sharing a common purpose with others (Fiddes 2000, p.54). Against the modernist assumption that oneness and difference are mutually exclusive categories, the trinitarian mystery offers a 'polyphonic' understanding of God in which difference 'provides an alternative to a monolithic homogeneity, yet without becoming a source of exclusion' (Cunningham 1998, p.129). On this understanding, the expression of power need not be construed as a zero-sum game in which the articulation of different voices must necessarily be regarded as

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[12] Key theorists in this movement include Levinas (1969; 1978) and Kristeva (1991).

contrastive or conflictual. Instead, adopting the Bakhtinian analogy of non-contrastive difference in the expression of musical polyphony, Cunningham develops an 'ecclesial' model in which the full beauty of trinitarian grace can only be discerned when human beings live and work together in community (Bakhtin 1984; in Cunningham 1998, pp.155-164).[13]

As an exercise in practical theology, my thesis does not set out to present a comprehensive or systematic theological account of the discursive interface between work and worship. My theological agenda in this study is rather to turn a series of trinitarian lenses on specific questions of identity and relationship, language and power which arise in the everyday Christian experience of communication at work. These lenses, which I present in terms of the trinitarian practices of *engagement*, *fluency* and *communion*, help to delineate the first outlines of a trinitarian hermeneutic which is suggestive for further development and research (see Section 9.2 below, pp.193f.). In this way, I seek to resolve the intrinsic dualism of 'a life in two languages' and to indicate how the resources of a renewed trinitarian theology might furnish some practical pointers towards the gracious possibility of a life in a new language for all the people of God. With Eva Hoffman I still remain, like everyone, 'the sum of my languages', though I hope to become more open to a trinitarian healing and transcendence of the fractures between them.[14]

1.5   Overview of the thesis

This thesis is organized into three parts. In **Part One** (Chapters 1 and 2), I engage the problem through an introductory chapter and a discussion of the research methodology. In **Part Two** (Chapters 3 to 5), I present different perspectives on the problem through theoretical and literary explorations of key themes. In **Part Three** (Chapters 6 to 8), the main findings of the study are presented as I explore the problem contextually through a detailed examination of Christian practices of speaking of faith at work. The study is concluded in Chapter 9.

Chapter 1 – A Life in Two Languages – explains the background to the study and introduces the agenda in terms of the research question, the scope and aims of the study and the academic context in which it is be read, offering a fresh

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[13] See Chapter 3 below (p.44) and Chapter 7 (p.155f.) for a fuller discussion of the Bakhtinian vision of a dialogical self.
[14] See Footnote 1 above.

slant on work through a focus on identity, culture and relationship. The main lines of a trinitarian hermeneutic are introduced, through which the problem of a compartmentalization of discursive worlds might be resolved through the practices of engagement, fluency and communion. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.

Chapter 2 – Holding a Conversation – provides an account of the methodological approach which combines a thematic engagement with the literature relating to three subsidiary areas of identity, power and language with an ethnographic study of the practical experience of Christians involved in speaking of faith in the context of secular working institutions. This chapter addresses the weaknesses of the qualitative research method, and aims to present a coherent and dialogical model of practical theological research with which to identify and engage the research question.

Chapter 3 – The Working Self – examines the experience of working life from the perspective of identity. The situation of the self at work is considered in the light of current thinking, and the particular challenges for intercultural identity are examined using analyses from contemporary post-modern, feminist and post-colonial cultural theory. The intersubjective challenge of 'a life in two languages' is then approached through a trinitarian hermeneutic of the movement towards communion.

Chapter 4 – The Economy of Secularism – presents a critical account of the secularity of work, preparing the ground for a missionary understanding of Christian witness through an examination of the political-economic forces which combine to marginalize the expression of Christian discourse in the contemporary workplace.

Chapter 5 – How Discourse Works – focuses specifically on the question of language, using the Foucauldian concept of 'discourse' to explore how language intersects with the enactment of power in the roles and responsibilities of the workplace. In this chapter, the critical tools of discourse analysis are introduced, and a constructive theological reflection on the non-dominating and interrelational possibilities of interdiscursivity is developed.

Chapter 6 – Missionary Positions – displays the analysis of my data in relation to the missionary styles of implicit, explicit and dialogical Christian witness. Using a typological analysis of different 'missionary positions' as a

heuristic device, I examine the outworkings of underlying power dynamics and operative theologies in a range of practical workplace contexts.

Chapter 7 – Speaking in Tongues – develops the data analysis through a specific focus on the use of language. Reflecting on two extended case studies, I show how the tools of critical discourse analysis can be used to examine the sociolinguistic depth and detail of Christian witness in the secular workplace setting. The creative possibilities for cross-cultural expression are then analysed in the light of hermeneutical and dialogical philosophy, and a theological model of discursive fluency is developed on the basis of a trinitarian vision of good news.

Chapter 8 – Only Connect? – picks up the corporate dimension of the problem, arguing the need for a critically adequate and contextually appropriate ecclesiological model of support for Christian identity and witness in the daily apostolate of working life.

Chapter 9 – Keeping the Conversation Going – gathers together the strands of my analysis of the trinitarian practices of engagement, fluency and communion. I review critically the methodological process of the study and suggest how it might be further strengthened and extended, offering a summary of the academic contribution of the thesis and some pointers towards the potential for practical development.

CHAPTER 2

APPROACH: HOLDING A CONVERSATION

> Conversation is a game of circles. In conversation we pluck up the *termini* which bound the common of silence on every side. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)[1]

> Research is not the linear activity in time which most texts suggest. It is at least cyclic. (Judi Marshall)[2]

This chapter describes the methodological background to the study which was grounded in many conversations undertaken in a wide range of settings over a period of more than six years. In it I set out, first, the dialogical principles of a practical theological approach to my subject (Section 2.1). Secondly, I explain the interdisciplinary nature of, and multi-method approach to, the study through an integration of theological-evaluative critique and qualitative-representational analysis (2.2). Thirdly, I give a reflexive account of the development of my own research voice (2.3). Next, I describe the ethnographic aspect of the research (2.4), and discuss critically the interplay between data and theory in an ongoing cycle of reflexive interpretation (2.5). Finally, I offer a theological evaluation of the research method with some pointers toward continuing study (2.6).

2.1 A strategic conversation

In developing a research strategy, it was important for me to reflect on the expression of faith at work as a serious practical theologian. For this reason I was committed not only to a question and a focus, but also to a method and a process which aimed to participate faithfully in the outworking of God's mission in the world of everyday life (Swinton and Mowat 2006, p.25).

I would like to claim that my research methods were always clearly principled and theologically accountable. In reality, however, much of the research process felt messy and compromised, and such methods that I developed

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[1] (Emerson 1982, p.231).
[2] (Marshall 1986, p.206).

seemed disappointingly piecemeal and pragmatic. I found it realistically impossible to pursue a linear and systematic course as if on the trail of some remote, but clearly identifiable, 'research findings'. Instead I found myself engaged in a long-running iterative conversation with perspectives which appeared, by turn, both fruitful and fragmentary, both irreconcilable and irresistible.

In the face of such untidy realities, it seems to me that the chief discipline for the practical theologian is never to abandon the conversation. This means remaining congruent to the practical theological purpose of the research in at least six considerations.[3] (1) *Missiological intent*: How can I enable a faithful expression of Christian identity in the discursive dominion of the secular workplace? (2) *Sociological analysis:* How can I relate the challenges of Christian witness to contemporary patterns of belonging and behaviour at church and at work? (3) *Theological evaluation*: How can I critique the understandings which shape current patterns of expression and how might I contribute to the development of new models of faithful practice? (4) *Contextual seriousness*: How can I engage reflexively and, at the same time, remain grounded in concrete situations and realistic experience? (5) *Hermeneutic creativity*: How can I interpret the good news of Christ amidst the discursive disciplines of working relationships and responsibilities? (6) *Eschatological dynamic*: How can I anticipate and welcome the transformative possibility of grace-filled exchanges in the mundane transactions of everyday working and research encounters? It is in the light of these criteria that I will reflect on the adequacy and appropriateness of the conversations that I have tried to sustain in the process of an ongoing cycle of active and reflexive research (see Section 2.6 below, p.31).

2.2 An interdisciplinary conversation

> Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). [...] Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one. (Roland Barthes)[4]

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[3] I have developed these criteria in relation to the task of practical theology as discussed in Swinton and Mowat (2006, pp.25f.).
[4] Cited in Clifford and Marcus (1986, p.1).

The interpretative nature of my task drove me towards an eclectic, interdisciplinary, qualitative approach with an emphasis on a research discipline which was predominantly hermeneutic in its understanding of rigour. I have embraced the definition of qualitative research proposed by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.2), which states:

> Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

To make sense of the problem of expressing faith at work I needed to combine the resources of both social sciences and theology. Whilst I recognize the force of the argument that these disciplines are far from natural allies (Milbank 1990), I cannot accept that any seriously contextual reading of the realities of human social relationships will be achieved without recourse to the tools of social science. Yet there remains a tension between the ostensibly non-foundational stance of qualitative research and a theological commitment to the revelation of truth in Jesus Christ as the Word of God.

My practical theological method, therefore, must entail a theological-critical approach as well as a qualitative-representational approach. The uneasy correlation between these modes of study has been compared analogously to the relationship between the two natures of Christ in which, it is argued, there is an ultimate asymmetry which gives logical priority to the theological aspect (Van Deusen-Hunsinger 1995). Such Christologically based arguments go some way towards overcoming the Milbankian stand-off between theology and the social sciences, but in developing a more purposefully dialogical approach I will try to reflect a trinitarian basis for a conversation whose potential for fruitfulness does not rest ultimately on asserting the critical priority of any one particular methodology (Williams 1986, and see Section 2.6 below, p.31).

On this basis I decided to adopt an ethnographic strategy to engage the contemporary workplace based on attentive conversation and lengthy immersion (see Section 2.4 below), together with a theoretical strategy based on purposeful reading in relevant areas of social theory (see Section 2.5 below), and to draw these strategies into critical correlation within a contextually articulated trinitarian hermeneutic. As a Christian maintaining a personal stake in both secular work

and practical theology, I have been determined to hold both aspects of this conversation together, in order to construct a reflexive reading of the possibilities for faithful voicing of Christian good news within the realistic settings of contemporary work.

2.3 In my own voice

> What we had not anticipated was that "voice" was more than an academic shorthand for a person's point of view. [...] We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined. (Belenky et al)[5]

The topic of this research is one that I care about deeply and personally. I approach the topic from the standpoint of a Christian woman who has struggled, and continues to struggle, to give voice to my faith in ways which are adequate and appropriate to the contexts of secular work. It is important, therefore, that my research accounting should be transparent in relation to my own, sometimes passionate, participative and interpretative practices. A certain critical self-consciousness is required, not so much that I should agonize over issues of subjectivity and power (Burman and Parker 1993, p.168), but rather that I might make a 'virtue of subjectivity' (Peshkin 1988) by giving an honest and reflexive account of my roles as a researcher.[6] In the inevitable interweavings between my own biography and the process of this research, I have learned that my authorial commitments and choices need not therefore be shamefully concealed, but might rather be affirmed and even celebrated.

A significant vehicle for developing my own voice as a practical theologian and researcher was the decision early on in the project to keep a research journal. Five years on, this reflexive journal has covered some 30,000 words in over 76 pages. The hopes which I set out at the beginning of this venture have held up remarkably well:

- To keep in touch with my motivation. I want to journal about people and ideas and problems that excite me, to capture them live, so that I don't lose the impact and the meaning that they might retain.

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[5] (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997, p.18).
[6] For a critical discussion of reflexivity in qualitative research, see Hertz (1997) and Coffey (1999).

- To follow the development, which I feel confident will flow, as possibilities and inspirations are followed and blind alleys honestly acknowledged.
- To hold onto loose threads, which shouldn't be tidied away in a forgotten file, but kept in a more historical account where they can be retrieved and re-categorized later.
- To try out concepts, frameworks, analyses, to seize on vivid images and stories as they cross my path.
- To celebrate the project! (RJN May 2002)

What I had not anticipated was the extent to which this reflexive exploration of my own 'voice' as a working researcher would mirror a growth in understanding of the process of 'voicing' a Christian identity in the research context of working relationships (see Chapter 3 below). As I have discovered throughout the progress of this research, the articulation of our identities must always be locally negotiated, whether as a research interviewer seeking privileged access to the thoughts and experiences of informants, or as a working Christian searching for an authentic voice in the secular workplace. The great surprise in all this, which I interpret in pneumatological terms (see Chapter 7 below, pp.155ff.), is to find that a reflexive openness to those who are our conversation partners in research as in ordinary working life leads to a discovery of new possibilities for identity and a richly poetic emancipation of a truly personal 'voice'.

2.4   Partners in conversation

My field of study throughout this project has been everyday working life: my own, and that of a wide range of informants. To explore this field I developed a broadly ethnographic approach, aiming to observe and participate in, to analyse and reflect on the issues which arise for Christian people as they speak of and from a faith-perspective in this predominantly secular milieu. This flexible and collaborative approach has proved reasonably well suited to the task of gaining a deeper or 'thicker' understanding of my research subject which could inform my reading of its socio-cultural dimensions and earth my evaluation of its theological significance. As a qualitative method, integrated with careful theoretical study, it has provided sufficient shape and accountability for my longstanding exploration of the field such that I could attempt to sketch out some fresh and useful perspectives with a degree of confidence and authority.

2.4.1 An ethnographic project

The social-scientific tradition of ethnography grew out of the early twentieth century efforts of cultural anthropologists who explored the lives of exotic tribes through extended fieldwork. Engaging as participant-observers in naturalistic settings, they developed some of the classic techniques of social scientific research such as direct, detailed observation of everyday talk and behaviour, identification of key informants, case studies, conversations and interviews of varying levels of formality, and the disciplines of note taking, analysis and reflexive writing (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983).

In the century or so since its inception, the tradition of ethnography has undergone major upheavals. The 'new ethnography', sensitive to post-colonial critiques and attuned to post-modern philosophies, is acutely aware of the roles and interests which the ethnographer brings to the field and the ways in which her own identity is implicated in the construction and representation of narratives about cultural 'others' (Clifford 1988). A more modest ethnographic stance is now typically presented in which both the professional researcher and the respondent are regarded as co-informants, and the interpretative choices of the author are candidly exposed. The positivistic ideal of detached scientific objectivity is abandoned in favour of a more reflexive and dialogical reading of social situations in which the researcher's sensitivities and skills are put to work collaboratively 'to refashion the other and the other's self-understanding and, in the process, themselves and their own' (Brown, Davaney et al. 2001, p.49).

It is within this more critical, reflexive and hermeneutic school of ethnography that I have located my own research which has been grounded, not in heroic fieldwork amongst far-off tribes, but predominantly amidst my own social groups and working institutions. Unlike exotic ethnographers who enter a field as 'outsiders' needing to negotiate an 'insider' role sufficient for their studies, I began as an 'insider' within my own social field, needing to learn the disciplines of 'outside' perspectives through constant dialogue with critical theoretical readings and attentive engagement with collegial conversation partners. This cyclical shift of perspective from 'inside' to 'outside' and back again has helped me to set the details of specific experiences and interactions within wider theoretical frameworks of understanding. In this way I have learned to value the 'participant-observer' position which, taken literally, must be 'a misleading

formula, but [which] may be taken seriously if reformulated in hermeneutic terms as a dialectic of experience and meaning' (Clifford 1988, p.34).

Throughout the course of this research (and, indeed, for most of my adult life) I have remained immersed in the working life of secular institutions. I have worked in small and large organizations, in the public, private and voluntary sectors, as a clinician, a lecturer, a manager and a chaplain. With the exception of the latter role as an ecumenical chaplain, my occupational roles have been non-religious, and I have always been a full participant in the secular work of the non-religious institutions in which I have been employed.

This extended immersion in the field of study has enabled a detailed and holistic reading of what is going on, and the opportunity to use what Janesick calls 'crystallisation' – selecting different facets to deepen my understanding of the problem. This has allowed 'multiple ways of framing the problem, selecting research strategies, and extending discourse across several fields of study' (Janesick, in Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.395). Looking back over this protracted period of study and reflection, 'I have no regrets at the length of time that has been spent mulling over the questions' (RJN April 2003).

2.4.2 Research conversations

Among the hundreds of conversations which I have held concerning my research topic, some of the most intentionally research-focussed conversations took the form of in-depth interviews with eighteen selected informants from a range of occupational backgrounds and theological perspectives.[7] Wherever possible these interviews were combined with a workplace visit so that I could observe more directly the context of my informant's occupational life and commitments. In the early interviews I attempted to follow a series of loosely structured questions prepared in advance, but in later interviews I pursued a more open-ended approach to the agenda, often eliciting new insights and areas of reflection which I could not have predicted in advance. Our conversations lasted on average about one and a half hours.

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[7] All informants gave their written consent to the recording and use of interview material in this research project. Individual details were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms, and identifiable data relating to specific businesses was removed. See Appendix I below (p.198) for the letter of consent signed by interviewees.

I tape recorded all the interviews and later subjected them to complete or selective transcription and multiple playbacks. I also made contemporaneous notes during the interviews, writing up these notes with some initial reflections within a few days. Quite often these notes captured valuable material which had been shared after the tape recorder had been switched off, during the closing intimacies of a conversation which were prefixed with a silent or explicit, 'but if you *really* want to know what I think...' (Parker 2000, p.236).

Very often these research conversations took on a therapeutic aspect, as my co-informants shared with me something of their struggle for authentic living both in working life and in the church. I did not wholly discourage this therapeutic role. Not only did it provide me with considerable insights into the seriousness and complexity of my research problem but it also provided my informants with some rare catharsis which I learned was considerably appreciated.

2.4.3 Other voices

Above and beyond the formal interviews which were pre-planned with selected informants, I have benefited from hundreds of more informal and occasional conversations with colleagues, friends, students and fellow church members who have shown an interest in, and expressed their opinions about, the topic of my research. Some of their comments, reflections and critical stories were recorded in my research journal. Others I saved in a growing file of 'snippets and stories' in which I also collected a miscellany of published narratives in which individual Christians reflected on the challenges of their working life.[8]

I negotiated over a dozen workplace visits, encountering environments as diverse as bus depots and nurseries, small retail outlets and large multi-national corporations. I was shown mission statements, promotional literature and glossy publicity, external websites and in-house intranet materials, and a bewildering variety of corporate responsibility reports.

Of particular value was my participation in a number of training events and meetings designed to support Christians in their work. These meetings included a series of lay training events shared with the Industrial Mission in South Yorkshire ('Faith in Working Life'), lay training days in the Diocese of Durham

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[8] Included in this material were some formal collections commissioned by particular churches (Quaker Social Responsibility and Education 1992; Diocese of Worcester 1997; Diocese of Coventry 2001).

('Your Kingdom Come') and the Diocese of Oxford ('Linking the Parish with the Working Community'), a national gathering of ministers in secular employment ('How is it for you?') and a day conference organized by the evangelical network, Reading@Work ('Being a Christian@Work'). I was also fortunate enough to take part in a study tour to Arras in northern France, where we were introduced to the life and work of the *prêtres-ouvriers* (see Section 6.2.1 below, pp.96-98). Some of these events included loosely structured focus groups whose discussions I was permitted to tape record for later transcription and analysis.

In addition to my searches of the formal academic literature, I looked out for relevant pamphlets or periodicals of a less formal nature. Some wide ranging perspectives and personal narratives were documented in the papers from the 'Christians in Public Life' programme,[9] the CHRISM network[10] and the Industrial Mission Association.[11]

I identified a further source of pertinent literature in over a dozen training booklets and written or on-line course materials produced by a variety of church and para-church organizations which have developed initiatives relating to faith at work over the last couple of decades (Davies 1995, from the Diocese of Peterborough; Field and James 1994, from the Mothers' Union; Flood 1993(?); Flood 1995(?), from Ealing Abbey; Goodwin 1991, from the Methodist Church; Greene 2001, from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity; Grigor 1985, from the Bible Society; Halsey 1993(?), from Industrial Mission; Higginson 1997, from the Church Pastoral Aid Society; Lamdin 1990, from the Church of England; Leonard 1993(?), from Churches Together; McHugh, Pitt et al. 1994, from the Von Hügel Institute; Powel, Robbins et al. 1998, from Scripture Union; Thornton and Kowszun 1998, from the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship; *Being a Christian at Work* 2001, from the People and Work Programme; *Getting God to Work* 2003, from Christian Viewpoint; Greene 2004, from the London School of Theology).

All this accumulated material, some purposefully gathered and systematically stored, the rest stumbled upon by more haphazard processes of serendipity, I have designated my 'data'. This is not to lay claim to a strong material authority for the particular readings that I make, but merely to

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[9] An initiative co-ordinated by David Clark from Westhill College in Birmingham which produced a series of position papers from 1992 to 2001.
[10] The national association of Christians in Secular Ministry produces a quarterly journal, 'Ministers-at-Work'.
[11] IMAgenda is published monthly.

demonstrate that in the ongoing process of reflection on the articulation of Christian faith at work I have endeavoured to keep in touch with the context of my own and my co-informants' voices and experiences of working life. Gathering, organizing, sifting and interrogating this 'data' has been a tangible help, encouragement and corrective in that process: as Coffey and Atkinson sensibly advise, 'data are there to think with and think about' (1996, p.153).[12]

2.5 A conversation between data and theory

> What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to. [...] Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification. (Clifford Geertz)[13]

The process of focussing down on key research questions and facets of inquiry cannot be reduced to any simple description of analytical technique. In common with most qualitative researchers, I have played with themes and concepts, images and typologies, that have variously excited or exasperated me as ways of getting some kind of purposeful 'fix' on the material in hand. Examining the practice of speaking of faith at work from every angle, I tried to delineate what is involved: existentially – in terms of identity and belonging, linguistically – in terms of discourse and dialogue, and theologically – in terms of mission and power.

2.5.1 Working with the literature

My initial encounter with the literature proved somewhat frustrating, as I realized how little work had been done at any serious level on the topic in hand. On the one hand, I discovered that traditional academic theologies of work had very little to say about the communicative dimension of working experience (see Section 1.3.2 above, p.10), whilst on the other hand, I found a popular literature on faith at work which was positively awash with motivational publications offering uncritical solutions to the challenge of sharing Christian faith-perspectives in the workplace.

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[12] My attribution of specific quotations from informants is noted by reference to the interview or group in which he or she participated, as (Interview *x*) or (Group *y*). Material gleaned from my own research journal is referenced as (RJN *date*). Citations from published data sources are referenced in the usual way.
[13] (Geertz 1973, p.9).

Thinking more broadly about the use of literature I realized, following Creswell (1994, pp.20f.) that, rather than informing the current study with the findings of related research, it would be more realistic to engage the literature so as to relate the current research to the greater body of existing knowledge with the aim of filling gaps and to provide a context for positioning the study. With this agenda, I began to approach cognate fields in organizational and management theory, sociolinguistics and cultural theory, discourse analysis and literary theory, together with the more obviously theological fields of missiology and theology of the laity, theology of culture and sociology of religion, hermeneutic philosophy and trinitarian theology.

Within this highly interdisciplinary curriculum, I sought for themes and analyses which could elucidate the emerging questions of identity and belonging, discourse and dialogue, mission and power.

2.5.2 Working with themes

Throughout each phase of the study I continued to read widely, exploring the socio-cultural and theological-hermeneutical perspectives which, more or less consciously, cast helpful light on my problem and the formulation of my question: 'How may a Christian speak appropriately and adequately of their faith at work?' As I read and pondered, discussed and deliberated, jotted and journalled in the cyclical process of developing what Strauss calls 'theoretical sensitivity' (1990), my reflections slowly crystallized into three broad strands of analysis (existential, discursive and theological). From these broad strands I developed the outlines of a conceptual structure which began to give shape to the project (see Figure 1.1 above, p.9), focusing on questions of *identity*, *power* and *language* in relation to trinitarian practices of *engagement*, *fluency* and *communion*.

The choice of these strands and concepts, and the neglect of other arguably more pressing questions, reflects my practical theological interests. In selecting these areas of analysis, and not others, I was aware of making personal decisions about and connections with my data and my informants (Coffey 1999, p.139). I was equally aware that my informants might have wished to pursue different themes, puzzling at length over controversial ethical issues, grappling with personal vocational issues or debating how best to win a colleague's allegiance to Christ. In deciding to step back from these immediate preoccupations, I did not

judge them unimportant concerns; rather I considered that some prior conceptual work was required in order to outline a reasonably robust underpinning cultural, linguistic and hermeneutic understanding of these everyday practices of discipleship in a theologically coherent way. In this particularly communicative area of reflection, I hope to have contributed some fresh perspectives on the challenges of speaking of faith at work.

2.5.3 Critique of the conversational method

Throughout the project, I have been aware of the limitations of this kind of long-running conversation as an adequate and appropriate contribution to academic research. The kind of reflexivity which Willig denotes 'epistemological reflexivity' requires me to 'engage critically with such questions as "How has the research question defined and limited what can be 'found'? How has the design of the study and the method of analysis 'constructed' the data and the findings? How could the research question have been investigated differently? To what extent would this have given rise to a different understanding of the phenomenon under investigation?"' (2001, p.10; cited in Swinton and Mowat 2006, p.60).

The two generic weaknesses of qualitative research methods relate to problems of practical relevance and of validity (Banfield 2004, p.54). The intrinsic problem of practical relevance cannot be divorced from questions of the value and purpose of the research (Banfield 2004; Schwandt 1993). I have highlighted from the outset the missiological intention of this study and the practical theological commitment which guides my evaluative and hermeneutic position: I am not seeking a 'view from nowhere'. Rather, the adequacy and appropriateness which are the criteria of practical relevance take their bearings from a view of identity and faithfulness which is firmly rooted within a Christian understanding of practical wisdom. It is within the outworking of this faith tradition that I hope to make an effective and practically relevant contribution.

The second problem of validity is more complex, relating both to epistemological perspectives concerning the character of the research and to practical considerations concerning its conduct. In respect of the former, by approaching the project in terms of a mediated or critical realist stance, I accept that whilst the multi-faceted realities of social life might be known a little better through my interpretations, 'at the same time such constructions are always

provisional and open to challenge' (Swinton 2001, p.97). The hermeneutic character of my project requires me to maintain a critical reflexivity about the judgements and readings that I make, and to present a theologically accountable framework for my overall interpretation.

In respect of the practical conduct of the research I have tried to respect the standards of good practice and accountability appropriate to an interpretative study, with its accent more on 'trustworthiness' than on 'validity' (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.158). I set out in Table 2a below the strategies through which I hope to have demonstrated sufficient attention to trustworthiness in the ethnographic gathering and interpretation of data from my co-informants.

Threats to validity [14]		Strategies for trustworthiness
Accuracy of description	Material not heard, transcribed or remembered Missing or partial information	Detailed recording Data saturation Broad sampling
Accuracy of inferred meaning	Misrepresentation of the intentions, thoughts, feelings, beliefs of informants	Extended immersion time Multiple data types Use of participant language 'Thick description' Feedback from co-informants
Generalizability	Limited sampling Omission of alternative experiences	Sampling purposive as well as opportunistic
Socio-cultural value of the research	Research is over-generalized, conceptually over-determined	Links between interpretation and authorial interest are transparent Maximum personal reflexivity

Table 2a   Strategies for trustworthiness in research design and implementation

The overall strength of my research strategy lies in combining a practical and ethnographically grounded reading of the problem with a fresh, theoretically informed and theologically accountable approach to interpretation. This opens up new angles for reflection on Christian witness at work offering considerable practical theological potential. One arguable weakness of this combined strategy, however, could be that my theoretical readings might become over-abstracted, losing touch with any concrete foundations in daily working life. This weakness has been a recurring problem for theologies of work which are typically constructed by academic theologians equipped with time and critical resources,

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[14] The list of threats to validity is adapted from Smith (2000).

but placed contextually at some remove from the ordinary pressures and realities of working life. Like Nolan (1996), I recognized the problem that the working Christians who were my co-informants were often lacking in theological confidence and shy of venturing any theoretical interpretation of their experience in other than sociological terms. However, unlike those 'armchair theologians' whom Nolan reasonably criticizes for presenting 'second-hand' accounts which bear little relation to the experiences and concerns of actual working people (1996, p.214), I have sustained throughout the course of this research a continuous personal immersion in the pressures and realities of the secular working environment which I aim to interpret.

2.5.4 Continuation of the conversational method

The resulting conversation held in the midst of life is, however, far from complete. What has been attempted in this project can be represented, very simplistically, as four overlapping turns in a cyclical conversation which is continuing to unfold (Figure 2.1 below).
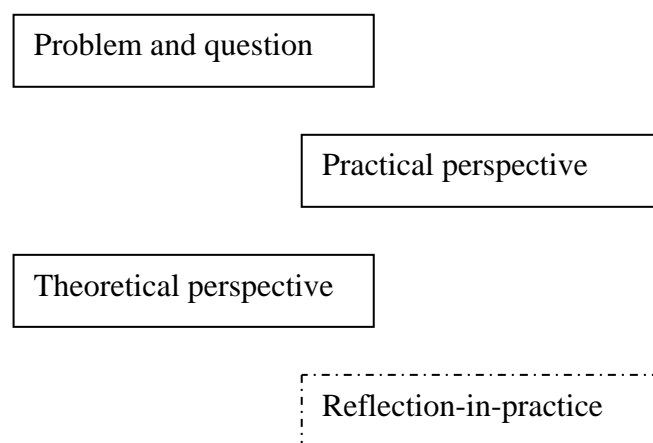
Figure 2.1   Stages in the research conversation

In the first turn I identify, from my own experience of work, a problem and a question which I take into a process of study and exploration with personal and academic conversation partners: this is the reflexive, authorial aspect of the project. In the second turn, I listen to the voices of my working co-informants, whose experiences and reflections contribute a much thicker understanding of the multi-faceted problem and help to shape the depth and detail of the questions which I pursue: this is the ethnographic aspect of the project. In the third turn, I

pay attention to the critical voices of my academic conversation partners, who offer a range of fresh lenses through which to focus and understand the questions and to point towards some resolution: this is the theoretical-evaluative aspect of the project.

The next stage of the conversation would be to return to my working co-informants taking a map for collaborative theological reflection with a view to refining my understandings and enriching our shared practice of Christian engagement, fluency and communion. On an informal level such shared reflection has pervaded every phase of this research, as co-informants have reflected back their questions and additions, excitements and encouragements when I have offered more or less tentative analyses in the progress of the research. More formally, however, I recognize that a comprehensive exposure of the research findings would require a specific action-research phase in this ongoing programme, and would demand an additional major project to bring to a further stage of completion.

Meanwhile, I recognize that the writing and reading of this thesis represents another dimension of the ongoing conversation in which the interpretative work of the study might be shaped and shared with an academic audience. For this textual stage of the conversation, I present the flow of reflection so as to display the overall coherence in the thesis and invite the reader's interaction and response (Figure 2.2 below).

Part I
Problem and question

Part II
Theoretical perspectives

Part III
Practical perspectives

Reader response to the

problem and question

theoretical perspectives

practical perspectives

Shared critique
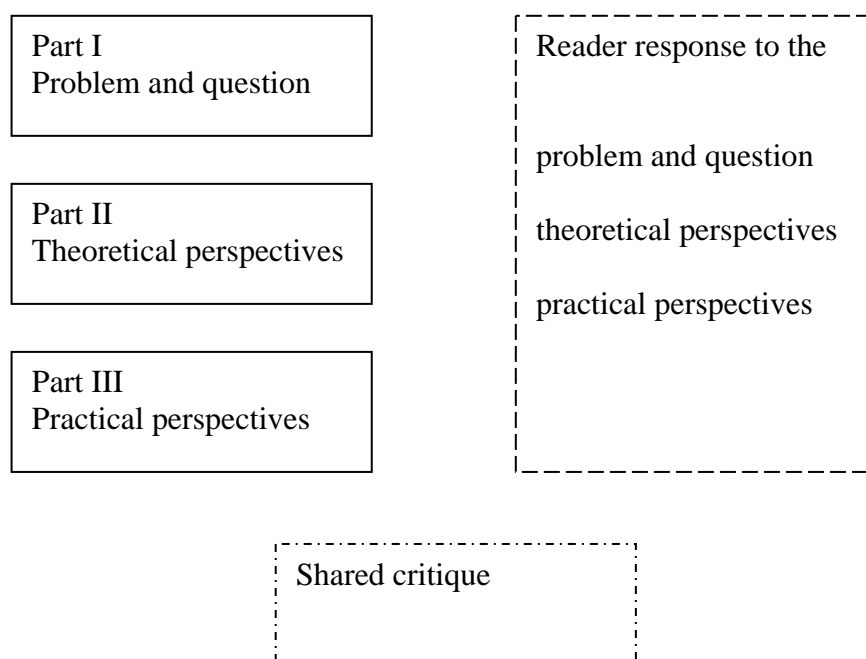
Figure 2.2   Stages in the thesis presentation

Chapter 2: Holding a Conversation

2.6 Conversation in the work of practical theology

> For the theologian to discharge his responsibilities within the community, he must experience the tensions between the spontaneity of faith, the pragmatic exigencies of the social order, and the critical quest of truth for its own sake, within his own life and experience. (Nicholas Lash)[15]

My commitment to a methodology which is conversationally structured is itself theologically significant. An approach which is expectantly open to the communicative grace of both Word and Spirit is central to any process of theological reflection rooted in trinitarian theology (Williams 1986). For this reason, I adopt a model of practical theology which is purposefully dialogical in both conception and practice. The test of this model is found in the seriousness with which I have attempted to engage with the conversational parameters identified above (see Section 2.1 on p.17 above, cf. Swinton and Mowat 2006, pp.25f.).

My responsibility has a *missiological* focus: the aim of this long-running research conversation is not idle intellectualism but a faithful participation in the ongoing *missio Dei* in, to and for the world. For this reason the whole research project is set within the concrete 'tensions' and 'exigencies' of my own life and experience of secular work, with no attempt to evade the challenges of *contextual seriousness* by withdrawing personally from the conversational field. There is a conscientious and detailed attention to the particularities of word and context, supported by social scientific theory and technique, in a constant dialectic of (participant-) observation and critical reflection which moves back and forth between the requirements of *sociological* analysis and *theological* evaluation. I am constantly surprised at the wisdom and insight which has emerged in this conversation, as each new facet of reflection sheds fresh light on the articulation of good news, with remarkable *hermeneutic creativity* and an expectant, *eschatological* openness to transforming grace.

Of course I realize that the 'conversation' which I report in this thesis is in no sense final or complete. It would be theologically presumptuous and methodologically naïve to pretend to offer the last word on the subject of my research. What I hope to have achieved, however, in demonstrating my respect for both the process and the participants in a fascinating conversation, is an

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[15] (Lash 1979, p.103).

adequately theological and appropriately practical stage of reflection which can be tested in continuing practice and contribute to ongoing research.

PART II

THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE

Part II of the thesis engages the problem of 'a life in two languages' through a series of three different perspectives: on identity (Chapter 3), on power (Chapter 4) and on language (Chapter 5). Each focus will be addressed through an investigation of theoretical themes in contemporary literature in order to identify fresh resources for a theological understanding of the challenge of speaking of faith at work.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORKING SELF: A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

> [P]ersonhood implies the 'openness of being', and even more than that, the *ek-stasis* of being, i.e. a movement towards communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the 'self' and thus to *freedom*. (John Zizioulas)[1]

> Dissonance
> (if you are interested)
> leads to discovery.
>
> (William Carlos Williams)[2]

The question of the self, which was introduced in terms of the experience of intercultural identity in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.1 above, pp.4-5), is examined in this chapter in the light of current thinking from post-modern, feminist and post-colonial cultural theory, and in relation to contemporary readings of trinitarian theology.   After a general consideration of the challenges to identity in the contemporary workplace (Section 3.1), I reflect on the particular dissonances which might threaten the integrity of Christians working in a secular institution (Section 3.2). I then introduce three perspectives on relationality from the work of Bhabha (3.3.1), Ricoeur (3.3.2) and Bhaktin (3.3.3) which together inform what Zizioulas describes theologically as a 'movement towards communion' (1975, p.408).   The chapter concludes with a practical theological agenda for the witnessing self at work (Section 3.4).

3.1   The self at work

The question of religious identity has recently come to the forefront of both academic and popular debate in the context of a complex, threatening and rapidly globalizing late capitalist society. The multifaceted nature of our post-modern identities affords us a dazzling mixture of possible selves to be explored, negotiated or asserted, together with a capacity to see a similarly complex

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[1] (Zizioulas 1975, p.408).
[2] From *Paterson IV* (cited in Rayment-Pickard 2004, p.1).

potential in those 'others' who are our economic and cultural partners at work (Crisp 2007). For people whose religion is a significant dimension of their identity, the ways in which that identity is expressed at work can become a matter of the most intense significance, and not a little controversy. An acute awareness of workforce diversity, and the highly charged nature of some aspects of overt or covert religious expression or activity, makes this a pressing concern for large numbers of contemporary business leaders and employees (Hicks 2003).

The struggle for identity presents particular difficulties in the highly fluid and flexible culture of the western post-industrial economy (Hage and Powers 1992). As new technologies and changing markets bring rapid changes to the once stable securities of regular employment, the predictable patterns of working life which might offer a settled identity are being comprehensively eroded. 'The occupational definition of a worker (mechanic, electrician, plumber), which used to offer a recognized pathway through a whole working life, is giving way to a portfolio worker with a variety of transferable skills' (White 2002, p.135). The same is true of career structures which traditionally reflected a coherent pattern of (mostly hierarchical) relationships and responsibilities, but whose stable architecture has now been fragmented in a series of short-term opportunities and project-related liaisons. The loss of mutual loyalty and the lack of integrity and continuity in many episodic working relationships contribute to the morally precarious climate which Richard Sennett has critiqued as a 'corrosion of character' (1998). With the duration of work contracts in the most advanced and high-tech corporations averaging at around eight months, the loss of social anchor-points and group solidarity produces the disconcerting sense that 'a flexible workplace is unlikely to be a spot in which one would wish to build a nest!' (Sennett 2002; in Bauman 2004, p.30). The challenges for a faithful and responsible identity in such a rapidly changing culture of work are profound.

Adopting a critical analysis towards the question of workplace identity, Catherine Casey (1995) examines the material and discursive practices through which self formation is influenced in the corporate sector. She demonstrates how this influence is wielded not merely through the 'manifest curriculum' of explicit training procedures, but also through a powerful 'hidden curriculum' of acculturation aimed at the production of 'designer employees' (Casey 1995; Parker 2000). So insistent is the inculcation of corporate culture through the myths, beliefs, history, norms, rituals and customs of the workplace, often

heightened by a spurious recourse to the rhetoric of 'team' and 'family', that Casey considers the psyche of many of her respondents (following Habermas) to be threatened by a 'corporate colonization of the self' (p.138).

For Casey, what is at stake in the continual negotiation and re-negotiation of identity in the working environment is a struggle between the social production of identity and the existential project of self-creation (p.4). This struggle goes to the heart of the post-modern concern about the self (Bauman 2004), and the Christian concern for faithful identity (White 2002). In the midst of intense competing and changing loyalties in both working and worshipping communities, what does it mean to forge an authentically Christian identity which bears faithful witness to the grace of the triune God?

3.2 A dissonant self?

The greatest threat to the self, as perceived by numerous social commentators, is fragmentation (Bauman 1995). The diversification of social contexts generated by the relentless logic of late capitalism results in individuals being caught up in a bewildering variety of differing encounters and milieux, each of which may call for different forms of 'appropriate' language and behaviour (Giddens 1991, p.190). The post-modern individual is discovered in a precarious position between an almost tyrannical excess of possible choices on the one hand, and a stultifying proliferation of bureaucratic interferences on the other (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1996, p.23ff.). At work, the alternatives lie between surfing the white water of wildly open opportunities or surviving the straitjacket of exponentially increasing corporate control (Merchant and Gilbert 2007).

A deep and unsettling dissonance can be the consequence for many workers. For Christians, this sense of personal dissonance is compounded when the culture of the workplace is felt to contrast with the culture of the worshipping community.

> At work I am called upon to be innovative, creative and participative; at church to be passive, conforming and controlled.
> At work I am required to identify my strengths and seek recognition; at church to confess my weakness and claim forgiveness.
> At work there is often conflict, if not always of the aggressive kind; at church conflict is denied or suppressed.

> At work the role of the professional is being severely questioned; at church professionals are imbued with almost mystical powers.
>
> Work demands intense periods of intellectual and/or physical activity; church places emphasis on being rather than doing, on silence, contemplation and reflection.
>
> Work puts a value on logical thought convincingly articulated; the spiritual life has a point at which logic must cease and words are shown to be the dangerous things they are.
>
> Work demands 'performance measures' and is concerned with 'outcomes'; church puts emphasis on doing one's best and leaving the outcome to God.
>
> Of course there are jobs which require quiet reflection, some bureaucratic work environments, and some enterprising churches. But my main point is that the culture of the church and the culture of working life are so different as to create a barrier which few are motivated to remove. (Green 1992)

Lois Green's depiction of '*The Two Cultures*' reflects the particular dissonances experienced in her own career as a Christian in information technology. Whilst the specific moral and spiritual tensions of language, culture and values will vary from context to context, a similar experience of compartmentalization and cultural dissonance is very widely reported by Christians reflecting on their identity and witness in the workplace.[3]

The struggle for identity faced by individuals who inhabit two cultures is often portrayed in oppositional and contrastive terms. Catherine Casey explains for example, drawing on Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957), how inconsistent thoughts or cognitions are intolerable for human beings who will go to great lengths to eliminate perceived dissonances in the hope of achieving a consistent sense of self (1995, p.60).[4] Yet it is her presumed underlying unitary sense of self, clearly bounded and strongly group-specific, which has been increasingly questioned in recent philosophical and theological reflection.

My theological argument in this chapter is that the compartmentalized self of cultural dissonance is being called and drawn, through the grace of God-in-Trinity, towards an integrated life in communion. For Christians, this means that the attempt to preserve personal legitimacy through any simplistic resolution of cognitive dissonances between work- and church-identities will be theologically inadequate. I have named already as a sin of broken relationship and failed communion the 'compartmentalized' position which refuses to build a bridge between the worlds of work and worship (see Section 1.4 above, p.11). I also

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[3] See, for example, David Clark's (1993) survey of Christians at work.
[4] The role of cognitive dissonance in workplace behaviour is further discussed in Chapter 6 below (pp.109ff.).

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maintain that it is equally inadequate for Christians to resist the integration of identities-in-tension through practical strategies which are either 'agonistic' (where the significance of working identity is disrespected or denied) or 'assimilated' (where the significance of worshipping identity is disrespected or denied).

COMPARTMENTALIZED **WORK** and **CHURCH** culture and identity are expressed in mutual exclusion	**AGONISTIC** **CHURCH** culture and identity resists expression of **WORK** culture and identity
ASSIMILATED **WORK** culture and identity resists expression of **CHURCH** culture and identity	**INTEGRATED** **CHURCH** and **WORK** culture and identity are expressed in mutual embrace

Figure 3.1 Identity positions for a Christian straddling CHURCH and WORK cultures

As the accompanying diagram suggests (Figure 3.1 above), a constructive Christian response to the challenge and discomfort of plural roles and cultural identities cannot lie in exclusion and denial but in integration and embrace.

3.3   A relational self

A preoccupation with personal legitimacy, which is foundational for traditionally circumscribed understandings of the self based on modernist social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Robinson 1996; Abrams and Hogg 1999), is giving way in post-structural cultural analysis to a growing appreciation of the pluriform relationality of the self. In the light of such understandings, the reflexive task of identity formation is no longer seen to depend on an 'overdramatized' protection of unitary personal integrity (Bhabha 1994, p.213), as if the expression of alternative identities must necessarily be construed as a 'zero-sum game' (Cunningham 1998). Rather, as trinitarian theologians are increasingly demonstrating, if interrelationality is built into the essential structure of being through the nature and activity of the triune God, then the achievement of mature human identity will

be achieved not through the antagonistic juxtaposition of one cultural form of identity over against another but through a subtly intercultural commitment to navigate an identity which is faithful to plural contexts.

In the following sections I turn to the work of Bhabha, Ricoeur and Bakhtin for a fuller exploration of these interrelational possibilities which might strengthen the integrity and witness of the Christian self in a secular working culture.

3.3.1 A hybrid self

> Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. (Salman Rushdie)[5]

The notion that two cultures must inevitably be positioned in contrastive or oppositional terms is severely questioned by contemporary cultural theory, especially that informed by feminist and post-colonial critiques of binary social structures.

For Homi Bhabha (1994), a more creative vision is to be found in the 'hybridity' and 'in-betweenness' by which lives fashioned on the border of two cultures open up a genuinely new Third Space for the articulation of fresh social possibilities. Bhabha writes as a post-colonial literary theorist rather than as a theologian, but his ideas are already proving fruitful for theological reflection on the challenges of mission in a culturally complex society.[6] The strength of Bhabha's analysis is that it points beyond a static or nostalgic understanding of fixed cultural identities towards a more open and interrogatory position in which radical newness can enter the world. His 'hybridity' is not based on ideas of accretion in which the essence of one identity is added to another; nor is it a simple synthetic, or bicultural, model in which different elements of identity merely fuse together. 'If hybridity became either of these two things it would cease being hybrid, and become a closed system – as essentialist as the categories of Black or White' (Baker 2006, p.8). Acknowledging the irreducible and uncomfortable untranslatability of some aspects of culture, Bhabha's 'hybridity' recognizes the way in which that very dissonance and discomfort can drive

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[5] Rushdie (1992, p.394).
[6] See, for example, Reader (2005) and Baker (2007).

cultural migrants ever forward in their search for a meaningful, innovative identity.

For those pilgrims who pitch their tents in the new Third Space of 'hybridity' there will be, as Eva Hoffman discovered, no easy return.

> This goddamn place is my home now. [...] When I speak Polish now, it is infiltrated, permeated, and inflected by the English in my head. Each language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilizes it. [...] The fissures sometimes cause me pain, but in a way, they're how I know I am alive. (Hoffman 1998, p.169,273)

Their transcendence of dissonance and discomfort, however, promises benefits which extend far beyond the small compass of any one nostalgic individual.

> One can resent all these discomforts and (hoping against hope) seek redemption, or at least respite, in a dream of belonging. But one can also make a vocation, a mission, a consciously chosen destiny out of one's fate of no choice – all the more so because of the benefits that such a decision may bring to those who take it and see it through, for the sake of the likely benefits they may then offer to other people around. (Bauman 2004, p.14)

Integrating such post-modern conceptions of identity with a belief in the universal scope of the grace of Christ, Kathryn Tanner argues that the idea of Christian identity for an individual or a community may never be self-contained or self-sufficient (1997, p.152). Challenging the anxiety (or pride) which is self-consciously concerned to maintain a clear cultural distinctiveness about the boundaries of Christian identity, Tanner argues that cultural insularity of any kind is opposed to a fully theological understanding of a Christian identity whose nature is intrinsically relational (p.108).

On this understanding, the contextual and relational task of Christian identity is to fashion something distinctive out of the wider host culture in which it makes its home.

> Christianity is a hybrid formation through and through; nothing must be exempted out of fear that the distinctiveness of Christianity must otherwise be lost. [...] Christian distinctiveness is something that emerges in the very cultural processes occurring at the boundary, processes that construct a distinctive identity for Christian social practices through the distinctive use of cultural materials shared with others. (Tanner 1997, p.115)

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Authentic discipleship, then, always entails fresh cultural work, deploying and developing any appropriate cultural or linguistic resources which come to hand, after the manner of a *bricoleur*. 'While Christians cannot do everything that non-Christians do – since not all practices can be made Christian (for instance, slavery) – Christian practices are always the practices of others *made odd*' (Tanner 1997, p.113, italics mine). Faithful Christian identity is then always a task which involves not simply repetition, but deliberation, reflexion and an exhilarating openness to the discovery of fresh meaning: an articulation of identity – with attitude!

It is, perhaps, especially in the novel use of language that a creative 'articulation' of meaningful identity across a variety of cultural and discursive fields can be fashioned, as Stuart Hall suggests:

> The term [articulation] has a nice double meaning because 'articulate' means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc. But we can also speak of an 'articulated' lorry where the front and the back can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. [...] An articulation is thus the form of the [social and discursive] connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. (Stuart Hall in Grossberg 1996, p.141)

The importance of language for critical understandings of the self and subjectivity has become a prominent theme in philosophical and literary theory, from which I now draw on Ricoeurian and Bahktinian insights for a deeper exploration of the hermeneutic and dialogical aspects of contemporary intersubjectivity.

3.3.2 A hermeneutic self

Some of the most beautiful and suggestive contemporary understandings of the self emerge from the philosophical work of Paul Ricoeur (1988; 1992). Ricoeur, whose own biography includes major periods of cultural estrangement and pilgrimage, rejects the simplistic Enlightenment model of the self as an entity, resolving the paradox of identity instead through a turn to language and the grounding of experience not in the unitary self but in a subtle and demanding intersubjectivity.

> To be human at the end of the millennium is to take on a complex identity and set of commitments. To be a reflective human being is to seek to understand and to be able to

articulate the context from which one makes commitments and the reasons for the commitments one makes. (Ricoeur 1992, p.46)

Reflecting on a nuance which is evident in the French language of the self (where the *même* in the reflexive pronoun *soi-même* conveys a sense of self-sameness) and in Latin, where the core term for the self (*ipse*) is distinct from that for the same (*idem*), Ricoeur distinguishes between two different concepts of identity as sameness (*mêmeté*) and identity as selfhood (*ipseity*). The concept of identity as something identifiable, based on a sameness (*mêmeté*) which remains durable through time and opposes alteration, tends to suggest an individualistic view of the self as a separate and autonomous entity. In answer to the moral-practical question, 'Who did this?' it can only identify one individual (*idem*) self as opposed to another. A vision of identity (*ipse*), however, which is open to temporal change and to positive relationships with the other-than-self leads Ricoeur beyond a substantial and formal sense of the self towards an identity which is fundamentally hermeneutic and richly narrative. In answer to the moral-practical question, 'Who did this?' the *ipse* concept responds with the story of a life. In other words, the self is a 'changing and dynamic identity [which] is not vitiated but validated by time and the other' (Stiver 2001, p.168).

The fundamental message of Ricoeur's influential essay on '*Oneself as Another*' (1992) is that the self evolves in a never-ending process of open relationship to the plural Other, so that 'reflection about difference from and incorporation of the Other becomes central to the experience' (Martin 1999, p.227).

In this dynamically open exchange of the intersubjective self, it is clear that language must play a crucial role. As narratives of selfhood are told, we become subjects in the stories of others just as others become subjects in the stories we tell. Through language we are both author and authored, and our hermeneutic of the self demands a keen sensitivity to the poetic and radically dialogical character of the story by which our lives are given meaning-full expression.

> We [...] are not transparent texts, whose meaning is to be read off univocally. We are more like a rich poetic text, full of allusions and depth. It is not just that others must interpret us, but we must [also] interpret ourselves. (Stiver 2001, p.164)

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3.3.3 A dialogical self

The interweaving of meanings envisioned in a Ricoeurian philosophical account of the self may itself be further informed, in an appropriately interdisciplinary way, through the heightened awareness of the inherently dialogical character of all language gleaned from contemporary literary theory.

The work of the Bakhtinian school of literary criticism[7] has exposed the creative and liberative potential of the inner dialogicality of all narrative in an intellectual discovery which has borne rich fruit in a wide range of disciplines from politics and philosophy to cultural and social psychology. According to a dialogical understanding of the self, the individual self is irreducibly social in origin and dialogical in function (Wertsch 1991). The self is multivocal, appropriating and reflecting the voices of other selves-in-relation, in a gloriously 'mixed stew' of dynamic and developing patterns of meaning and expression (Gergen 1999, p.130).

Our awareness of the dialogical character of identity is, according to the moral philosopher Charles Taylor, a peculiarly modern phenomenon whereby we struggle to define ourselves, not merely as atomized individuals but as those whose true self may be recognized in an authentic moral capacity which is not imperilled but rather enriched by the manifold intimate and public relations which it shares with others (Taylor 1989; 1992; 1994).

> The crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. (Taylor 1994, p.32)

Along similar lines, the theologian Kathryn Tanner argues that the definition and expression of Christian identity is always achieved through a process of cultural consumption (de Certeau 1984, pp.34-5) in which Christian groups and individuals 'make do with materials that they do not themselves produce' (Tanner 1997, p.112). The creation of Christian language and practice is necessarily parasitic in relation to the surrounding cultural discourse in which it is enacted. Even specifically religious language, in the narrow sense of the term, depends to much the same extent on a borrowing and transformation of the language of others.

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[7] See Section 7.4.1 below (pp.155f.) for a fuller discussion of dialogics in contemporary literary theory, and the central Bakhtinian concept of *heteroglossia*.

> Christians do not construct out of whole cloth, or from the bottom up, what they say about God and Jesus or the nature of things in relation to God; instead they use whatever language-games they already happen to speak. [...] A Christian way of life is, then, essentially parasitic; it has to establish relations with other ways of life; it has to take from them, in order to be one itself. Christian language is, then, as Søren Kierkegaard would say, essentially transferred or metaphorical language. (Tanner 1997, p.113)

But this borrowing and transformation is not a solely one-way process. The articulation of an authentically Christian voice and praxis within a secular culture may foster a dialogue which is neither opportunistic nor hegemonic, but rather generous and creative, and radically open to the fruitfulness of a gift relationship. There is a kenotic character to the outworking of Christian identity in the face of the dialogic other which finds deep theological roots in a trinitarian understanding of human calling into Christ (Ward in Heelas 1998, ch. 12; Newlands 2004, ch.3).

The engagement with others in the relationships of working life will also, therefore, invite a particularly centrifugal form of neighbour love: 'one which involves a donation of one's personal gifts and resources in order to meet a need in the other' (Pembroke 2004, p.12). Neil Pembroke understands the dialogical character of working relationships not primarily as a challenge to self-definition, but rather as an invitation to a generous and unrestricted self-communication which, in the human service professions especially, is intrinsic to the work itself.

Resisting the modernist tendency to see identity in terms of a personal possession to be protected and preserved, Pembroke draws on the dialogical philosophy of Gabriel Marcel to advocate a style of self-communication which is radically at the disposal of the other. In this attitude of *disponibilité*, the self is not construed as a quantifiable entity whose being is 'capable of being wasted, exhausted or dissipated' (Marcel 1964, p.54). The worker no longer anxiously counts the cost of her communicative service as something which must jeopardize her own identity but rather, in an attitude of gracious attunement to the other, the Christian servant risks putting her self-communication freely and willingly at the disposal of the colleague or client as a covenantal commitment of shared trust and belonging (Pembroke 2004, p.25).

I have argued in this section that the expression of an authentically Christian identity can never be achieved by strategies which seek to avoid dissonance through anxious protection of the boundaries of the self. The risk that

is required for faithful witness to the triune God requires, in Zizioulas' terms, an ecstatic 'openness of being' which transcends the boundaries of the self (1975, p.408). This openness of being, discovered and nurtured in the ecclesial community of the church, is the grace which grounds the practices of a faithful witnessing self which I consider in the closing section of this chapter.

3.4   A witnessing self

The paradox of Christian identity is such that neither the brittle, lonely self of the modern Cartesian *ego* nor the shattered and irresponsible self of unbridled post-modern relativism can faithfully articulate the potential for a responsive personal witness in the face of Jesus Christ. A fully trinitarian vision of human identity, which I have begun to explore through contemporary images of relationality, will flourish within the communion of an authentically ecclesial practice of worship and witness (see Chapter 8 below). Based on an ecclesial understanding of identity, then, which is first and always gift, I now suggest a practical agenda for a working and witnessing identity which is questioning, kenotic, and joyously open to the crucified-and-risen life of Christ. We 'self' because he first 'selfed' us (cf. 1 John 4.19).

The gift of an identity which is brought to birth and eternally renewed in the grace of Christ is celebrated ecclesially in the sacrament of Christian baptism. Living in the face of Jesus Christ, the self is continuously upheld and transformed by worship within a communion of other selves who are being transfigured – from glory to glory – in a non-idolatrous reflection of divine like-ness (2 Corinthians 3.18). Building on Ricoeur's (1992) pivotal concept of 'oneself as another', David Ford articulates a theology of the worshipping ecclesial self which transcends both the centred self-positing subject and the decentred, shattered subject in a salvific discovery of an identity which is lived before the face of Christ and other people (1999, p.9). This worshipping, singing, eucharistic self finds expression in the 'language, love and testimony' of a transformative tradition which is ever concerned to recapitulate the faith for new contexts. Following the classics of scripture in their depth of allusiveness and poetry, this entails 'taking up themes that [have] been much communicated, prayed through, debated and applied in varied situations, and improvising upon them to make a fresh and probably unprecedented synthesis'. The joyous witness of the Christ-

facing worshipping self, which is enacted primarily in the loving face to face relationships of daily life, finds attestation in 'an overflow of well-shaped language' (1999, p.111-2).

For Ricoeur, the concept of witness or 'attestation' is ontologically crucial,[8] since in attestation there is a confident 'assurance of being oneself acting and suffering' (Ricoeur 1992, p.23). But this confidence is not that of the isolated self-asserting subject, but rather the joy-full voice of the intersubjective self-as-other which, in Ford's terms, 'has interiorised the imperative, sung testimony of many others, and [...] lives by passing on that testimony' (1999, p.127-8).

The attestation which is pivotal to Ricoeur's philosophy of the self is acutely aware of its need for self-suspicion and critique, since it is always an attestation pronounced in the presence of an Other. In an analysis which reflects explicitly on the call of the biblical prophets, Ricoeur connects the alterity of the call of conscience with the attestational boldness of the 'summoned' or 'mandated' self (Ricoeur 1995, ch.15). The dialogic self which is attuned to the voice of conscience is never an absolute, self-defined subject, but a self which is intrinsically 'respondent' (p.262) and ultimately 'christomorphic' (p.267) in its incarnational discoveries of faith, and hope and love.

3.4.1 Faith-full questioning

For the working self, then, whose identity is improvised on the everyday borderlands between the two cultures of her working and her worshipping communities, the style of witness which she comes to inhabit must be, in the first place, interrogatory. A faith-full awareness of the 'other' community to which she belongs, and to whose cultural norms and expectations, rituals and values she is in some degree indebted, will necessarily provoke all kinds of critical questions.

Her questions might properly be put to either community. Why is my church so preoccupied with institutional survival? Why are Christians afraid of conflict? How has my business sector become so aggressive? Is there an alternative to destructive competition? To what kind of vision of human prosperity am I becoming enslaved?

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[8] In a telling footnote in '*Oneself as Another*', he claims that witness or attestation 'is the password for this entire book' (Ricoeur 1992, p.289).

A questioning stance is the first response of the worshipping self to the practice of idolatry. In the face of Christ, the summoned self must question the 'idolatrous monotheisms and polytheisms' which threaten both church and workplace norms and cultures (Ford 1999, p.99). It is not a case of addressing a unilateral witness from one cultural locus over against the other, since the faith-full self is called to a practice of critical companionship in both spheres of belonging.[9] But just as many of the biblical prophets were called to witness out of a situation of cultural estrangement, the critical edge of the Christian worker will be sharpened by her heightened sensitivity to the contrasting material and discursive practices of both her places of pilgrimage.

For theological reasons, then, I prefer an interrogatory style of attestation to a proclamatory mode because, rather than imposing a self-asserting monologue, faith-full questioning can invite dialogue. A questioning posture opens a potential space for conversation in which a shared discovery of fresh meaning and truth becomes possible. The mandated questioner makes no hegemonic claims but, with an openness to every kind of alterity, she works in the face of Christ to subvert any suspicion of self-compliance or self-deception at individual or institutional level. Such faith-full questioning must always therefore include an element of self-suspicion: though this is not to be confused with self-doubt.

As a model for the practice of faith-full questioning in the workplace, I draw on the traditional Quaker discipline of the 'query'. Since the seventeenth century foundational framework of 'Advices and Queries' was produced as an aid to corporate deliberation, Quakers have developed the use of 'queries' as a way of helping to recognize and to confront the operating assumptions, fears and prejudices which shape the culture and practice of the communities in which they live and work. Unlike the more familiar Christian practice of an 'examination of conscience' which is enacted at an individual and devotional level, the point of a 'query' is that it should be ecclesially deliberated, as a tool for discernment at the level of the local meeting and community, or as an aid to attestation in the public or political domain.

As the following example concerning whistleblowing demonstrates, the query method furnishes one way of combining an incarnational commitment

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[9] This point is well demonstrated in the critical model developed by Shigeko Masumoto (1983) which analyses the gap between both the church and the (working) world and the Kingdom of God. See Figure 8.2 below (p.174).

which is appropriate to the responsibilities and relationships of the workplace with a challenge which is adequate to a Christian vision of corporate integrity.

> Is the action you contemplate likely to lead to a change for the better? If not, what is your motivation? Is there a better, less confrontational, way of dealing with the situation? Do you realise that your action might cost you your job and that will affect your personal life and your career? Have you sought independent, wise counsel before proceeding? Is your company's culture one where staff and colleagues have the confidence to deal with corruption? Do you have the procedures in place so that your employees can, if necessary, blow the whistle without being penalised? (The Quakers and Business Group 2000)

I suggest that a posture and practice of faith-full questioning is the first necessity for the witnessing self who is summoned by the radical Otherness of the triune God to attempt an articulation of authentic Christian identity in the workplace.

3.4.2 Soul-full presencing

The second summons for the self-as-witness to Jesus Christ is to be passionately present in the midst of the discourses and demands of the workplace environment. A full-souled commitment to the intersubjective possibilities of the working environment is not easy to sustain in the face of the constricted instrumentality of many contemporary working relationships which contribute to Richard Sennett's picture of a 'corrosion of character' (1998).

Against a corrosive culture which manipulates the worker into a series of temporary role-plays and 'short-term collusions', the worshipping and witnessing Christian remembers the unswerving commitment of a God who establishes relationships through covenant, not through contract (White 2002, p.139, 30). God's thorough-going faithfulness, sustained through time, and enacted in a passionate narrative of unrestricted commitment embodies the pattern for a mode of witness which is fully present, and whole-souled.

Such a covenantal commitment to 'bringing our whole selves to work' (Whyte 1996) can scarcely be maintained, however, by the self-sufficient and atomistic subject of prevalent utilitarian ideologies (Taylor 1992). Paradoxically, for the Christian self to be 'whole' and fully 'present' there must be an outpouring of identity in a kenotic, even martyrial, expression of decentred self-giving. This

asserction of identity which is expressed through self-donation rather than self-protection is intrinsic to an authentically Christian witness, since it is only and always through the gift relationship into which the Christian self is baptized that she discovers the revitalizing and revelatory charisma that will make her ownmost presence felt (Pembroke 2004, p.79).

The articulation of a passionately Christian identity will require a paradoxical integration of the trinitarian virtues of both *participation* and *particularity* (Cunningham 1998). Playing a full part in the life and work of a secular institution whilst learning how to articulate a well-placed and distinctively Christian witness will demand a sensitive appreciation of power dynamics and a skilful application of discursive intelligence. I will consider the detailed outworking of these challenges in Chapters 6 and 7, and the need for appropriately ecclesial support in Chapter 8 below; but in the final section of this chapter, I affirm the ultimate hope-fullness with which the Christian approaches the challenge of giving voice to her faith at work.

3.4.3 Hope-full embracing

The third invitation for the witnessing self who is open to fresh discoveries of identity in every space of other-encounter is to connect creatively with people and projects in a spirit of hope-fullness. Against every temptation to retreat in the face of alienation, to withdraw into the safe compartmentalization of dissonant realities, the graced self chooses rather to engage, to connect and to touch.

As many recent exponents of trinitarian theology are discovering, there is an eternal hope-fullness in the history of the Trinity which lives by making space for the 'other' to be embraced (Volf 1996). Such theology is in contrast to more emphatically kerygmatic forms of Protestant theology which insist on the breaking in of the governing Word of revealed truth. According to these more monologically articulated theologies, any style of witness which embraces hybridity and dialogue lays itself open to dangerous dilution and syncretism.

My argument in this chapter is that such an agonistic interpretation of Christian identity and witness fails to embody the full potential of an openly trinitarian vision of human and cultural interrelationality. I am particularly indebted to the work of feminist theologians, who have recognized the enormous fruitfulness of intersubjective interpretations of identity and post-structural

understandings of language. Rebecca Chopp, for example, articulates a theology of the Word/God as the 'perfectly open sign', whose authentic articulation does not need the buttressing of a monological style of traditional 'proclamation'. Instead, it is the perfect openness of the living and responsive Word/God which itself infuses a collaborative and dialogical poetics into every fresh signification of truth.

> The Word/God is the sign of all signs, connected, embodied, open, multivalent, all the things a sign can most perfectly be, but the Word/God is this in the perfection of all perfection and thus, in full openness, creativity and gracefulness, creates, sustains, and redeems all words in their ongoing process of signification. (Chopp 1989, p.31 f.)

For the embracing self, every touching place becomes fertile with new meanings, insights and possibilities (Pui-Lan 2005, p.171). Free from the fear of contamination which besets more sectarian and separatist approaches to secular workplace cultures, the open self finds the redeeming newness of Christ in a hope-full embrace of all that is of significance to her working colleagues and customers.

I have demonstrated in this chapter that the insights of contemporary cultural theory can provide rich resources for understanding the struggle for Christian identity in the secular workplace. I have shown that compartmentalizing or conflictual responses to the cultural dissonances experienced between the enactments of work- and church-identities are theologically inadequate, arguing that a trinitarian understanding of identity invites a response to the other which faces necessarily towards integration and interrelationality. Considering the articulation of an authentically Christian identity to be a dynamically intercultural and interrelational task in which language plays a crucial and poetic role, I have sketched the outlines for a theologically answerable and ecclesially engaged practice of Christian witness in which the gracious summons to life in the face of the other is enacted in a radically open, conversational and fully trinitarian embrace.

The next chapter considers the political-economic context for a Christian witness in the workplace, introducing the critical questions of power which shape the encounter with secularity in the life of working institutions and professional groups.

CHAPTER 4

THE ECONOMY OF SECULARISM:

A QUESTION OF POWER

> Power is never merely a personal issue. It is also a function of corporate structures and processes, and of role definition and distribution. People of great skill, relational and communicational excellence, and admirable character are sometimes disempowered by forces and structures larger than themselves. (David Gill)[1]

> Secular hegemony in the workplace [...], or the subjugation of the spiritual, privileges particular worldviews that dominate [...] the discourses of organizational communication. (Buzzanell and Harter)[2]

> Welcome to the world of the Powers. (Walter Wink)[3]

The expression of Christian identity in the workplace does not take place in a political-economic vacuum. People at work, whether senior or junior in the organizational system, find themselves enmeshed in a web of complex power dynamics which may range in scope from the far-reaching pressures of global market forces to the intricate and immediate complexities of professional and personal office politics (see Section 7.2.1 below, pp.134-141). The short and long term economic implications of these forces for the witnessing practice of Christians engaged in a contractual relationship are immense, and arguably of a different order from the forces which might have to be taken into consideration when Christian witness is performed in a different capacity, for example within the more familiar domestic and neighbourhood setting, or through some voluntary engagement with a wider public sphere. My approach, therefore, to the question of how to speak adequately and appropriately of faith at work will require some very careful contextual analysis of the macro- and micro-forces which might position a Christian discourse in relation to the largely secular discourse which prevails in the majority of contemporary working institutions.

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[1] (Gill 2005, p.197).
[2] (Buzzanell and Harter 2006, p.1).
[3] (Wink 1998, p.2).

My agenda for this chapter is to prepare the ground for an appropriately astute missionary engagement with the workplace by presenting the chief lines of an ideology critique through which the interests of a secular hegemony in the contemporary workplace might be exposed. For this purpose, I will use the suggestive headings offered by Walter Wink of 'naming the powers', 'unmasking the powers' and 'engaging the powers' (1984; 1986; 1992). In the first section, I introduce the agenda with two case studies of the use of secularist language at work. From these studies I proceed to a 'naming' of the powers through an initial analysis of some major sponsors of secularism in the contemporary workplace (4.1). The main central section traces the genealogy of the secularizing myth which has become taken for granted in most sectors of modern economic life,[4] offering a critical 'unmasking' of the powerful forces of differentiation, societalization and rationalization which have conspired to marginalize the expression of Christian religious perspectives in the imagination and discourse, priorities and practice of the modern workplace (4.2). The third section looks ahead to the particular practices of 'engaging' the powers through appropriately critical Christian strategies of discernment and dialogue in the workplace (4.3).

4.1   Naming the Powers

4.1.1 Case study: A secular university

'This is a *strictly secular* university,' explained the Vice-President of Manchester University to conference delegates (RJN March 2007). He was not being antagonistic to the motley collection of university chaplains and faith advisors who had assembled there for the day. On the contrary, speaking as someone who served as a church warden in his private life, the professor told us how pleased and delighted he was to welcome these representatives of the 'faith communities' onto the campus where he committed the bulk of his working hours.[5]

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[4] The scope of this chapter relates to the economics of secularism in Britain. The wider debate about how British and European experiences of secularization may be understood in relation to the dynamics of religion in US public life is well covered in Martin (2005). See also Davie (2002).

[5] The conference on 'Religion and Belief in Today's Global Higher Education Context: Dangerous Distraction or Creative Partnership?' aimed to bring together 'university managers, leaders of faith communities, student leaders, religious professionals and others to focus on the practical and justice issues around internationalisation, equality of access and the place of religion and belief in the modern university'.

No, the term 'secular' was not intended to offend or exclude. It was simply part of the rhetoric attaching to a self-consciously *modern* university. It was not meant to belittle those religious guests whose roles held such minor operational significance in the work of his Higher Education institute. It was not meant to distance those who represented such valuable 'links with the local community'. It did send a clear signal, though, that he scarcely expected them to have anything to contribute to the university's strategic business.

For this Vice-President, the institution's self-designated 'secular' status was flaunted as a badge of honour. It stood for everything a senior management could be proud of – a university with a bold, expanding vision; a forward-looking institution not hide-bound by privilege and tradition; a successful, scientific, modern, competitive and independently-minded organization.

It also, perhaps, rather conveniently kept the trouble-makers at bay. If this secular university found itself surrounded by dozens of mosques, most of whose pugnacious leaders were not on speaking terms even with each other, then it need not get drawn in to their embarrassing sectarian politics. If the university students found themselves recruited by the repressive anti-liberalism and moral obscurantism of nearby thriving student churches, then the secular university need not shoulder any of the responsibility for fostering a more intellectually critical or morally mature Christian alternative.

4.1.2 Case study: A secular profession

At a different university, and another conference, it was a professional counsellor who proclaimed – even more emphatically – that her work was 'an *intensely secular* activity' (RJN December 2004).[6] Whilst asserting her own 'personal' allegiance to the Christian faith, she felt constrained to draw the sharpest of boundaries between her private faith commitment and her public professional practice.[7]

The word had slipped out unconsciously, she told me. She had not intended any compartmentalization between her private beliefs and public professional commitment; but somehow this demarcating word, 'secular', had

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[6] The conference on 'Faith, Identity and Culture' was one of a series of annual events for university counsellors organized by Kings' College London.

[7] A remarkably low level of religious allegiance amongst psychotherapists (only 42% in a recent survey in contrast to over 75% in national census data) has been noted by Cynthia Ransley (in Ransley and Spy 2004, p.53).

inveigled itself into her conversation with a group of chaplains. Regardless of any personal dissonance, this assiduously self-congruent professional had set a fireproof boundary between her public practice and probity and the values and commitments adopted in her private life.

It was an involuntary aside. She had not intended to betray a supersessionist attitude towards those more primitive professions whose mantle of 'priestliness' the modern counselling movement has so eagerly, and popularly assumed (Halmos 1966). She had not intended to deprofessionalize those for whom the boundaries of the sacred still intersect on a day by day basis with the appointment systems and supervisory structures of a busy bureaucracy, nor to impugn the propriety of those whose faith percolates so incontinently into their everyday practice of caring.

Yet somehow that emphatic and discriminatory word, 'secular', came to stand for everything that she wanted to believe in as a professional – accountability, effectiveness, demystification and rigorous moral maturity.

4.1.3 Sponsors of secularism in the contemporary workplace

These two brief exchanges documented from my own working experience as a university chaplain provide a useful springboard for an initial analysis of some of the major sponsors of secularism in the contemporary workplace. What both these cases illustrate is a typically modern posture of de-recognition of, and for, the place of religion within the public territory of commercial and professional life. In the modern settlement the economic sector has come to be regarded as a secular space, no longer in a deferential contrast to, but rather in an ever more assertive autonomy from, any necessary legitimating relationship with a previously established Christian religion. It is this secularist presumption which claims the workplace as an exclusion zone for religion that I have identified as a crucial issue for ideology critique.

The 'naming of powers' requires that the vested interests at stake in defining a particular institution or profession as 'secular' should be identified. Since these interests will always be highly contextual in terms of the local political histories and economic configurations which have moulded the cultural contours of any particular sector, I choose to introduce this exercise through a

consideration of the interests at work within my own current sector of Higher Education.

Here I identify, first, a powerful interest at work in upholding a *fashionable secularism* which is clever, knowing, and indissolubly wedded to the Enlightenment critique of religion. As any glance at the *Times Higher Education Supplement*[8] will confirm, the discursive presentation of the British academic establishment is overwhelmingly secularist in tone. This intellectually fashionable position, which is scarcely beginning to admit the challenge of the re-sacralizing discourses of post-modernity,[9] trades on the scornful debunking of former certainties and supra-critical cognitive structures and is powerfully invested in the future-oriented self-confidence of the modernist mind.

Secondly, I identify in many of the new professions which have come through differentiation to displace the territory and throw off the control of older and more traditional professions, an interest which I name as *reactive secularism*. This assertive style of secularism, typical of many of the new caring professions such as nursing, counselling and social work, is adolescent, emancipatory, and determined to protect an operational territory beyond the jurisdiction of the church and any other traditional establishment. Whilst it might be quick to dismiss the religious provision of pastoral care as anti-liberal in its agenda and amateurish in its delivery, it may, however, struggle to provide any meaningful 'modern' substitute for the depth of symbolic resonance embodied in the ministry of professions imbued with historic, cultural and religious traditional significance.

Thirdly, it is easy to identify in most contemporary sectors the bureaucratic interest of a *hard nosed secularism* which insists on definition, control and instrumental rationality. A full critique of the ideologies of modern technocratic management lies beyond the scope of this study,[10] but it is not hard to discern in the case study of chaplaincy at work an understandable wariness on the part of senior management when unaccountable outsiders seek to introduce operationally superfluous church personnel into the careful linear structures of institutional control.

Fourthly, one of the growing interests that I have observed throughout the process of this research, in the light of growing international tensions, has been

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[8] This weekly journal has recently been re-branded as the *Times Higher Education* (London).
[9] See Woodhead (2005) for a recent account of faith and post-modernity.
[10] See Pattison (1997) for a thorough theological critique of dominant features of the managerial worldview.

the interest of the sponsoring state in a *nanny secularism* which is nervous, protective and devoutly politically correct. Whilst it is easy to criticize the mindless and unimaginative political correctness which comes to colonize large bureaucracies, it is important not to underestimate the force of the factors which seek to distance institutions from confessional concerns, and to cool the temperature of dangerous racial and political tensions by minimizing the profile of historic Christianity. One of the important debates that has gathered momentum during the course of this research concerns the potential for religious representatives to act in this regard, not simply as agents of division, but as constructive forces for social cohesion (Furbey, Dinham et al. 2006).

Each of the interests I have identified above can be related to potent economic threats and opportunities for the sponsoring sector, or institution, or profession. In the Higher Education sector, as in every other business sector, one can trace above and beyond all other factors the overarching economic interests of a *free market secularism* which is fiercely autonomous, amoral and implacably hostile to interference.

My analytic strategy of 'naming the powers' which sponsor a secularizing interest in any particular working context should not be seen as an exercise in economic or sociological determinism. Rather, as Polanyi developed the argument in respect of religion and the market (1977; Haddorff 2000), I suggest that none of these secularizing interests should be understood as a single movement. More realistically, as Demerath envisages, each secularizing force might be seen to provoke a range of countervailing forces which tend to resist, restrain or subvert the triumphalist ambitions of its sponsor (2000a). This is not to propose 'some cultural version of Newton's third law that for every force in the direction of secularization there must be an equal and opposite force in the direction of sacralization' (2000b, p.11). Rather it is to assert sociologically an important space for indeterminism, and to make room theologically for the surprising discoveries of the kingdom in our midst.

The impact of secularization on the contemporary workplace can be neither monopolistic nor unidirectional: it is rather patchy, uneven and open to strenuous debate. The discursive tone and force will vary in each sector and profession depending on the historic and local interplay of far-reaching factors which promote or resist a triumphalist exclusion of religion. A simple model such as Kurt Lewin's (1951) force field analysis could be a helpful resource, therefore,

in extending the analysis so as to expose the dialectic of *both* promoting (i.e. secularizing) *and* countervailing (i.e. re-sacralizing) influences which play out in any particular context. In the final part of this chapter (see Section 4.3 below, pp.69ff.) I will suggest how such a subtle analysis of these forces might inform the practice of an appropriate Christian discernment and dialogue. In the next section, I turn to a review of the wider socio-historical literature on secularization to present a genealogical account of the hegemonic establishment of secularism in the contemporary British economy.

4.2   Unmasking the Powers

4.2.1 The modern myth of secularization

The grand sociological narrative of 'secularization', which on closer inspection can look more like 'a hodgepodge of loosely employed ideas' (Hadden 1987, p.598), has been shown by Oliver Tschannen to dominate much contemporary thinking in the manner of a Kuhnian paradigm (Kuhn 1970; Tschannen 1991). The 'very broad set of assumptions and analytical categories' (Tschannen 1991, p.395) drawn together by sociologists of religion within a portmanteau theory of 'secularization' have gained a remarkable hold on the imagination of an academic and lay society profoundly influenced by evolutionary thought.

Such is the grip of this paradigmatic narrative that it is not always easy to disentangle a descriptive and explanatory account of the processes of secularization from a normative and predictive theory which, as numerous critics have observed, bears significant ideological baggage. The force of the ideological element – 'the sense of history moving from darkness to light, from superstition to science (and the interest of the people who promoted it)' – is nowhere more cogent than in the economic realm (Martin 2002), and it is for this reason that my review of theories of secularization as they relate to working life must embrace the double task of critiquing their prescriptive ideological agenda whilst also reckoning with the truth and salience of their socio-historical accounts.

In reviewing the vast body literature on theories of secularization, I have used the overviews offered by Tschannen (1991) and Herbert (2003) to frame a perspective on key elements of the paradigm which bear especially on the discourses of working life. From José Casanova's study (1994) I note that the

scope of secularization can be considered in three interrelated modes: 'secularization as differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices, and secularization as marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere' (p.211). For my analysis, it is the first and third of these modes of secularization which relate most specifically to the practices of the workplace, and I will give less consideration to the vitality of church-related adherence which is not directly relevant to my concerns.[11]

At the heart of secularization theory is a focus on *modernization* as the 'deep structure' for a range of inter-related processes leading to the decline in the social significance of religion (Herbert 2003, p.35). Tracing the complex changes in Western Europe operating at economic, political, social, intellectual and cultural levels since the fifteenth century, sociologists have implicated a number of salient features as causal factors in the multi-contingent process of secularization. In Bruce and Wallis' account of an 'orthodox model' of secularization, the three crucial features of modernization are named as (1) *social differentiation*, (2) *societalization* and (3) *rationalization* (1992, pp.8-9); and it is through this general framework that I will first examine the shifting relationship between religion and the workplace in the modern period before turning to critique the ideological conclusion that secularity in the economic sector is a necessary and unambiguous good.

4.2.2 The outworkings of differentiation

Essential to the complex and contested sociological account of 'modernization' is an analysis of social differentiation, which Tschannen identifies as 'absolutely central to all secularization theories, without exception' (1991, p. 404). A narrative of functional differentiation, originally developed by Talcott Parsons (1960), describes the process whereby each sector of society becomes specialized.

> Instead of work activity, family life, education, religious practice, the operation of law and custom and recreation, all being part of each other and affecting everyone in more or less self-sufficient close-knit small communities, as occurred in large measure in all pre-modern societies, we have highly specialized places, times, resources, and personnel

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[11] Key theorists addressing this institutional dimension of adherence to church and the practice of worship include Grace Davie (1994), Callum Brown (2001) and Steve Bruce (2002a).

involved in each of these areas of social life, and their efficiency and viability has depended on this process of specialization. (Wilson 1976, p.40)

The effect of differentiation is to decentre religion. Where once organized religion operated at the hub of a highly significant wheel, contributing to and controlling the operations of health and welfare, education and leisure, law and government, in modernization its social role is reduced to those merely religious functions which, in a highly differentiated society, are associated with a low utility. The increasing division and specialization of labour and of many other areas of life allows the various secular spheres of work to achieve what Weber called their 'internal and lawful autonomy' (1946, p.336). From a systems perspective, society develops along a series of semi-independent functional sectors, each of which adopts its own patterns of discourse and spheres of engagement. The 'lawful autonomy' asserted by the market economy, by the nation state, and by traditional and newer professions has been the driving force behind the emancipation of these differentiated domains from the grip of religious influence. 'The coping stone has come down' (Martin 2005, p.124).

In the economic sphere, the most momentous shift was the development of European capitalism which arose in the wake of Jean Calvin's reforming approach to the centuries old prohibition of lending money at interest. Distinguishing between a productive loan and usury, Calvin taught that lending money to increase capital – in order to make production possible – was not a sin. Despite its admirable emphasis on the economic needs of the whole community, such teaching lost sight of the acquisitive temptations facing wealthy individual investors, thus paving the way for a thoroughgoing separation of religious teaching from business activity amongst the burgeoning commercial class (Grundy 1992, p.29).

The audacious individualism unleashed by the Reformation was to provide fuel for far-reaching changes in the European economy in ways which remain the subject of vigorous debate.[12] In essence, Max Weber's (1930) critique unearthed some of the subtle and intricate ways in which Calvinistic attitudes of mind converged with the striving spirit of post-Reformation capitalist economies. Pointing to the fundamental changes taking place in the ethical behaviour of the new traders, bankers and businessmen, he noted how the business leaders, higher

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[12] Reviews of the Tawney-Weber thesis connecting Protestantism with the rise of capitalism can be found in Green (1959) and Lehman and Roth (1993).

grades of skilled labour and higher trained personnel in any country of mixed religious allegiances were predominantly Protestant; and he concluded that the underlying attitude of mind of reformed Christianity was dynamically different. His search for the origin of this dynamism led him to an innovative doctrine of 'calling'.

The Reformers' revolutionary understanding of vocation had effectively baptized the whole of secular working life. 'Calling' became no longer the exclusive preserve of clergy and religious. 'The works of monks and priests,' according to Martin Luther, 'however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic labourer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but all works are measured before God by faith alone' (1959, p.203).

Good Christian energy was turned away from the heavenly and contemplative towards this-worldly activism and productivity. An asceticism of hard work and diligent stewardship replaced the monastic asceticism of preparation for other-worldly rewards. When Calvin designated rational, wealth-oriented work-effort as the principal sacrament for those who felt called and wanted to be chosen (Ditz 1980, p.625), he secured the religious legitimation of autonomous commercial enterprise which has underpinned a practical secularity in the profit sector of the economy in the last four hundred years.

The effects of differentiation on the economy represent the chief causative factors in the secularization of many aspects of working life, contributing in large part to what Charles Taylor suggestively calls 'The Great Disembedding' (2004, p.50). Yet, as Tschannen's analysis demonstrates, other richer and more complex consequences can be seen to unfold as the processes of differentiation affect the wider workings of every aspect of a modernizing society (1991, p.401). In politics, the influence of religion on the operations of state has steadily diminished. In education, health and social care, a high level of secular autonomy has developed as the welfare state has taken over functions formerly overseen by the church.

A further consequence of differentiation is on the character of religion itself: this is Casanova's third mode of secularization (1994, p.211, see p. 59 above). According to this view, the role and place of religion in highly differentiated societies takes on a different, *privatized* character whereby it supplies meaning, identity and values for individuals alone, but without that

articulation between public commitments and private values which had once sustained an overarching communal integrity for diverse spheres of social engagement (Luckmann 1970; 1996).

> As people are compelled to shift back and forth daily between different social spheres, each of which demands of them superficial allegiance but functions according to an interpretation of the world incompatible with that of the other spheres, the individual must construct his own (privatized) vision of the world by drawing freely on the elements he finds in the different competing world views. (Tschannen 1991, p.398)

The effects of such a 'privatization' of religion present profound challenges to the performance of an integrated identity (see Chapter 3 above). As the Christian worker shuttles regularly between different institutional spheres, in each of which she will play a very specialized role, she inhabits domains whose norms may be unrelated to her individual religious biography. She must, therefore, according to the privatizing logic of modern secularism, construct separate public and private identities. 'Personal identity becomes, essentially, a private phenomenon' (Luckmann 1970, p.97); and the place for religious expression becomes firmly 'corralled' within the personal and 'private' domain (Hervieu-Léger 2000, p.109) .

Of course, the modernist boundaries between a 'public' realm including the workplace and a 'private' realm in which personal beliefs and religious commitments are tightly contained have never been unequivocally defined. The very concept of a public/private distinction continues to be hotly critiqued in contemporary social analysis. Jeff Weinstraub outlines at least four different ways in which the public/private distinction has been modelled:[13]

> 1. The liberal-economistic model [...] which sees the public/private distinction primarily in terms of the distinction between state administration and the market economy.
> 2. The republican-virtue (and classical) approach, which sees the 'public' realm in terms of political community and citizenship, analytically distinct from *both* the market *and* the administrative state.
> 3. The approach exemplified by Ariès (and other figures in social history and anthropology), which sees the 'public' realm as a sphere of fluid and amorphous sociability.

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[13] Although Weinstraub's analysis relates primarily to the US context, where a clear-cut division of powers is enshrined in the constitution, a similar complexity of meaning surrounds the use of public/private distinctions in British debate.

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4. A tendency [...], in certain kinds of economic history and feminist analysis, to conceive of the distinction between 'private' and 'public' in terms of the distinction between the family and the market economy (with the latter becoming the 'public' realm). (Weinstraub, cited in Casanova 1994, p.41)

Adopting a pointedly feminist critique of a so-called 'public' (but predominantly male) sphere, Seyla Benhabib similarly questions the (deliberately?) confusing and contradictory ways in which 'privacy' has been constructed in at least three different dimensions: first, as the sphere to which moral and spiritual concerns are relegated in the arena of the *private conscience*; secondly, as the sphere of the autonomous market, the *private economy*; and thirdly, as the intimate sphere, the domain of the household, of sexuality, and of care for the young, the sick and the elderly, the *private and domestic sphere* which is often excluded from the discourses of working life in the so-called 'public' arena (Benhabib 1992b, p.108f.; Benhabib 1992a, p.91). The vehemence with which public/private boundaries are maintained may be of great interest and advantage to the second, whilst potentially disadvantageous and seriously marginalizing for the concerns of the first and third of these dimensions.

The acute insight of feminist analysis has been to expose the oppressive aspects of the public/private split. Rebecca Chopp points out that the modern liberal 'public arena' in which individual rights and freedoms, as well as market exchange, can freely be expressed 'depends on the private sphere in the form of women's place, not only to take care of procreation, but increasingly to absorb the private values that the bourgeoisie has to deny, things like friendship, tradition, religion, and kinship. Indeed, religion and tradition once used to justify women's inequality now find themselves placed with women in the private, supposedly nonnecessary realm' (Chopp 1989, p.113).

In the public fora of working life, the outworkings of differentiation have had a powerful impact on discourse. As Richard Fenn points out in his studies of the secularization of language, modern secular public institutions now have little scope to claim the authoritative overarching discourse which, in a pre-modern society, had been the prerogative of religious liturgies and ritual settings. Based on his studies of the courtroom and the classroom, Fenn finds little ground left for the kind of weighty language which reduces ambiguity and uncertainty – saying things 'for real'. The other side of the coin, in a process which he sees as highly

agonistic, is the way that modern secular authorities take steps to severely limit the scope of performative utterances made in the name of religion (Fenn 1982).

The result is a drastic privatization of religious language, which strictly curtails the spheres of expression of religious claims. As Benhabib's analysis illustrates, the public male/private female split has deeply impoverishing consequences for both the public and the private realm when religion, like moral virtue, becomes 'so sentimentalized, subjectivized, and privatized' that it loses not only public power but also intersubjective public relevance (Casanova 1994, p.64). The public spheres of work and economy become literally 'amoral' spheres – from which any 'private' religious considerations ought to be excluded – according to the modern liberal ideal of 'public dialogue' whose alleged rule of 'neutrality' imposes certain 'conversational restraints' and 'gagging rules' excluding from public deliberation the entire range of matters deemed to be 'private' (Benhabib 1992a).

I have argued in this section that the social differentiation of modernism, with its deep divisions of labour, and strict demarcation of public from private, has driven a powerful wedge between the specialized roles and discourses of modern professional life and the socially curtailed roles and discourses of privatized religion.

4.2.3 The consequences of societalization

A second plank in the 'orthodox' account of modern secularization (Bruce and Wallis 1992) is what Bryan Wilson termed 'societalization'. Following Tönnies' classic delineation of the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (1925), Wilson identified societalization as the process by which 'life is increasingly enmeshed and organized, not locally but societally (that society being most evidently, but not uniquely, the nation state)' (1982, p.154). In a modernizing society, a process of societalization can be seen as the spatial counterpart to the functional process of differentiation, both of which contribute to a fragmentation of roles and relationships characteristic of the 'Great Disembedding' (Taylor 2004, p.50) .

In Britain, the territorial system of parish life originating in the eighth century was a structure which had supported the integration of religion with society at every local and geographic level (Northcott 1989, p.12). With industrialization, the entire landscape changed both materially and socially,

temporally and geographically. The church of the mediaeval period had celebrated and legitimated local life, its calendar of services mapping onto the ordered rhythms of a rural society. Its parish officers had held a wealth of powerful roles in the local community: from keeping the peace to overseeing law and order, watching over the poor, providing rudimentary education and social welfare, as well as offering the essential religious rites of passage for settled family life. When former agricultural workers poured into the new towns, severing their age-old links with the customs and relationships of village life, the parish church was shorn of its functions and the workplace became central to a whole new pattern of rhythms and relationships.[14]

The effects of social mobility were especially challenging for the Church of England, with its deep historic roots in the rural landscape and the feudal alliance of squire and parson. Yet within and beyond the established church, innovations such as Robert Raikes' Sunday Schools, and the upsurge of nonconformist chapels in growing towns and cities proved better suited to the aspirations of working children, women and men. Although the traditional churches demonstrated a regrettable 'cognitive lag' in adapting their structures to the new realities of industrial communities (Ramsden 1971), 'it was in the Methodist, Congregational and Baptist chapels that working men and women found a home and a voice and an opportunity to become responsible for their own religion, and with it their own well-being and their own social and educational betterment' (Grundy 1992, p.30).

Whilst new denominations and 'fresh expressions of church' still try to keep pace with the shifting population patterns of modern life, accelerating trends of social mobility nevertheless contribute to an overall loss of 'social capital' according to the 'decline-of-association' thesis popularized by Robert Putnam (2000).[15] In the current context, where the travel to work distance in England and Wales now averages 8.36 miles,[16] an inevitable effect of societalization has been to disrupt and fragment systems of relating such that local and domestic networks (typically including church, school and, to some extent, leisure) map very

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[14] Michael Walzer gives a fascinating account of the way in which time has been re-conceptualized in industrial society, from the mediaeval practice of telling time by church holy days, to the appropriation of time for public holidays, and finally to the use of time as an input to market processes where vacations are purely individualized (1983, pp.184-96).

[15] The pertinence of Putnam's thesis to the secularization debate has been well explored by Steve Bruce, Grace Davie and Robin Gill (in Bruce 2002b and subsequent articles).

[16] Data from the 2001 Census (Office of National Statistics).

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differently from work-related networks (often reaching far beyond any immediate neighbourhood). This geographic separation makes it difficult for either home or work focus to sustain any long-term friendship base under the additional pressure of frequent job changes (Church of England 2004, p.5f, and see p.182 below).

It was David Martin, in his bold 'general theory of secularization' who first linked the dynamics of societalization with a further confounding factor, namely the bewildering *pluralism* of modern life, noting that 'geographical and social mobility erodes stable religious communities organized on a territorial basis; [and] that it also contributes to a relativization of perspectives through extended cultural contact' (1978, p.3). Whilst sociologists debate the extent to which pluralization operates as cause or effect in the trend towards secularization (Tschannen 1991, p.409f.), all acknowledge the importance of plurality as a factor in the marketization of religious belief.[17] Thus Peter Berger argues that the public plausibility of religion is irrevocably undermined when religious affiliation becomes a matter of choice.

> When religion ceases to be a matter of fate and becomes a matter of choice, there are some fundamental changes in the manner in which religion is maintained in the consciousness of individuals. [...] "Religious preference" is the phrase that sums this up. (Berger 1981, p.13)

In terms of private belief, the impact of pluralism has arguably affected the *how* of religious belief more than the *what* (Berger 1999, p.196), underlining the elective and individual status of convictions which, according to the ideals of a modern society, anyone may hold in private without conflict or coercion. In public life, however, the tensions inherent in an increasingly diverse population are not always so readily smoothed over. Neither the drastically secular solution adopted, for example, in France, nor the seemingly enlightened multi-culturalism preferred in Britain, has averted the potential for violent confrontation in the name of religion as the shock waves of global conflict have reverberated through minority and mainstream politico-religious subcultures closer to home. What has shaken the former liberal consensus is the realization that religion has re-entered the public sphere in a way that few had anticipated (Berger 1999; MacLaren 2007). In such a climate, a potent wave of secularizing reaction against all forms

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[17] More controversially rational choice theorists argue that the pluralization of options can exert a stimulating rather than inhibiting influence on religious life. See, for example, Stark and Bainbridge (1985).

of religious expression is understandable. 'In a sense,' since 11 September 2001 , 'the most important effect of radical Islam has been to mobilise secularist opinion' (Hobson 2006).

At work, fear of conflict has made the exhibition of religious identity an increasingly contested issue, as recent headlines over distinctive dress and jewellery amply illustrate.[18] Yet, as Douglas Hicks cogently argues, conflict is a normal part of any working environment, and neither an anxious subservience to the norms of political correctness nor the tireless purging of all forms of religious expression can guarantee a workplace free of tension – from religious or any other factors (2003, pp.63ff.).

Since the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 came into force in the UK, all faiths can potentially aspire to a new level of recognition in the workplace. Under the new legislation, employees are protected from discrimination, harassment or victimization on the basis of religion or belief. They are not, however, guaranteed any special consideration or provision and may arguably suffer the consequences of a heightened level of nervousness about the risks of causing offence through everyday levels of personal, or shared religious expression. Although it is not the aim of the new legislation to outlaw religious discussion at work, and 'staff should be able to distinguish between reasonable discussion and offensive behaviour', it is widely recognized that the new legal climate has compounded the anxiety which surrounds religious expression as a trigger for offence and conflict (ACAS 2005, p.33).

I have argued in this section that changes in the level of socio-economic organization within the modern period, from local to national and global, have interacted in complex ways with the relation of religion to the workplace. Whilst the spatial separation of the traditionally domestic axis of religious practice from the modern workplace (or multiple/serial workplaces) has conspired with other secularizing forces to marginalize and reduce the salience of (Christian) religious influences, a more recent sensitivity to (predominantly Islamic) religiously-based conflict has brought questions of religious expression to the centre of a highly controversial debate about the parameters of free expression and respectful pluralism in British public life. In such a difficult and dangerous climate, it is not

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[18] In October 2006, classroom assistant Aishah Azmi's claims of discrimination and harassment as a result of being asked to remove her veil in class were overturned. The same month a check-in assistant at Heathrow airport was sent home by British Airways for refusing to remove a silver cross from around her neck. She was subsequently reinstated.

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surprising that demands for greater secularization of public discourse – especially in the influential sectors of education and public service broadcasting – have become ever more clamorous.

4.2.4 The rewards of rationalization

A dynamic of rationalization as the third plank in the 'orthodox' account of secularization (Bruce and Wallis 1992), whilst overlapping considerably with their accounts of differentiation and of societalization, is distinguished by key theorists as of crucial historic and ongoing importance for modern secularization (Tschannen 1991; Beckford 2003; Herbert 2003; Wilson 1998).

For industrial and post-industrial societies, powerful forces of rationalization can be traced in some of the major shifts in the economic, technological and managerial parameters of human work. Among these far-reaching processes of modernization, James Beckford identifies, *inter alia*, the systematic pursuit of economic productivity and power at national and international levels, the application of theoretical knowledge and practical skills to the enhancement of productivity, the valorization of education and freedom of thought and expression, and the dominance of urban centres of residence and work (Beckford 2003, p.49f.).

As a defining feature of modernization, rationalization affects both the way that people think and the way that they act. In the cognitive and epistemological dimension, rationalization refers to the process by which, in everyday life, naturalistic, physical explanations gradually displace explanations that refer to supernatural agencies. 'Thus disease is no longer caused by curses or demons, but by germs, immune failure and genetic mutation' (Herbert 2003, p.40). Although at the academic level the perception that 'science replaced religion' is both over-simplistic and historically questionable, at the level of practical usefulness the triumphs of science and technology have been outstanding. In one well-known area of medical science alone, the understanding that diseases caused by germs can be prevented by hygiene measures or cured by antibiotics has procured phenomenally successful improvements in human wellbeing.

The sheer technical power of science undergirds a popular plausibility for scientific explanations over and against their pre-scientific alternatives in such a

way that the authority of scientific rationalism extends to a wider range of experiences – beyond the understanding of the natural world (*scientization*) to the interpretation and determination of human social life (*sociologization*). This second-order rationalistic process is identified by Tschannen as a further compounding dynamic in an escalating drive away from religious influence (Tschannen 1991, p.402).

The influence of rationalization on the modern working environment can scarcely be overstated. Extending far beyond merely intellectual subservience to Enlightenment epistemology, the 'unholy trinity of science, technology and economic progress' has achieved a practical domination of modern business methods (Middleton and Walsh 1995, p.165) in an overwhelming victory for instrumental values. Whilst some sectors, such as Higher Education, maintain an antithetical disdain for religion as a force for dangerous superstition, in most instances the dismissal of religion is attributable more to a pragmatic judgement of its low utility value. Thus Nigel Wright observes in a telling aside (2003, p.9), that 'where faith intrudes into public life, as in military, industrial or hospital chaplaincy this needs to be justified in rational or social terms such as the strengthening of the will to fight, complementing the therapeutic process or contributing to commercial and economic prosperity'.

I have taken three central concepts from the so-called 'orthodox' theory of secularization to unmask the complex and powerful socio-historic processes by which Christian religious influences have been made marginal to the imagination and discourse, priorities and practice of the 'modern' workplace. Against the background of the grand mythological narrative in which an established secularism in the economic domain has come to be accepted as a necessary and unambiguously good thing, I will now turn to a consideration of the Christian practices of engagement through which the ideological sponsors of secularism in the workplace might be critically and faithfully challenged.

4.3   Engaging the Powers

I proposed in Chapter 2 above an approach to practical theology in which sociological analysis is brought into critical and contextual conversation with theological evaluation. My concern, therefore, in the final section of this chapter is to outline an appropriately theological model for engaging the powers of

secularism in the workplace which is coherent with an overall trinitarian hermeneutic.

The Powers which need to be challenged theologically are those which force a separation between the love of God and human work in the world. These Powers, which on Walter Wink's (1984) analysis manifest both social-structural and spiritual-ideological dimensions, work sinfully when they disrupt the communion of relationship between creator and creation which is the gift and call of God-in-Trinity.

Christians caught up in the complex power dynamics of working life frequently respond to overwhelming secularist pressures in ways which are either *agonistic* or *assimilated*, reacting to a disturbing compartmentalization of understanding and behaviour through a dualistic strategy which either confronts or capitulates to the perceived threat to faith. As I argued in the previous chapter (see Section 3.2 on p.39, and Figure 3.1 above), such simplistic strategies to resolve the tension between commitment to Christian faithfulness in the life of the church and economic implication in the business of the secular workplace are both contextually inappropriate and also theologically profoundly inadequate.

I believe that the challenge for Christians working in a secular workplace is to learn a faithfully trinitarian practice of engagement which expresses the virtues of discernment and dialogue.

4.3.1 Practising discernment

The potential for a Christian ideology critique which is both politically astute and contextually serious has been demonstrated in the critical reflective practices of liberationist and feminist theological method.[19] The particularity of this method is helpful for Christians grappling with the highly contextual specificities of occupational roles and working responsibilities. It would not be realistic for Christians engaged at the grass roots level of working institutions to try to voice a comprehensive critique of the powers which have shaped, and continue to sponsor, the climate of modernism in work and economic life which is so powerfully challenging to the discourses of traditional Christianity. This is the

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[19] See Graham, Walton et al (2005, pp.182-199) for a summary and evaluation of this school of theological reflection.

proper responsibility of public representatives of the church and academic theologians.[20]

Within this wider reflective community, it is essential that a robust critique of ideologically driven secularist thinking should challenge the hegemony of those academic, bureaucratic and economic élites who stand to gain through a process which does not merely describe, but actively promotes, the marginalization of religious discourse and influence. The general idea that secularization just happens, that it is historically inevitable and morally neutral or even desirable, is something which Christians working in academia may be called upon to challenge.

The discernment required of most ordinary working Christians is, however, more particular and specific. The extent to which any institutionally specific expression of cultural secularism may not be merely religiously indifferent but might actively sponsor a practical, moral or discursive atheism can often only be judged by Christians on the ground. In many cases, the constructive task of Christian discernment will be to name and celebrate the implicit Christianity which is deeply embedded in many sectors of British working life.[21] But where a critical discernment is required it will fall to them to identify and, if necessary to challenge, the sponsors of secularism in the particular setting where their responsibilities lie (see Section 4.1.3 on pp.55ff. above).

4.3.2 Practising dialogue

An *agonistic* response to secularism which aims simply to 'out-narrate' perceived competitors to Christian belief[22] is scarcely likely to win allies or to achieve any kind of practical consensus amidst the realistic power politics of the contemporary workplace. Equally, I maintain that an *assimilated* posture which abandons any hope of voicing a Christian perspective in an overwhelmingly secularized milieu represents a failure to enact an appropriately critical engagement. The *dialogical* approach, which Brown (1997) describes as a 'method of encounter', is both more appropriate to the hidden plurality of moral and ideological commitments (for which an established secularism in the workplace provides such convenient cover)

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[20] See, for example, Taylor (2007) for a recent comprehensive critique of the modern secularist paradigm and Davie (2007) on the current state of the academic debate within sociology.
[21] For an example of how 'implicit religion' has been discerned at work within the health care sector, see Grainger (2002).
[22] See Milbank (1990).

and more faithful to a trinitarian view of Christian practice which proceeds from engagement towards communion.

This dialogical movement towards communion invites a Christian practice of dialogue at every level of public life, including the contextually specific levels of life in the occupational settings of daily work. Within the complex force fields of the workplace, where secularizing and re-sacralizing dynamics may both intersect with powerful local and professional economic pressures, the need for Christians to express their calling with tenacity, compassion and wisdom has never been greater.

My focus in this chapter has been on the ideological context in which ordinary individual Christians find themselves challenged to speak of their faith at work. In later chapters I will develop the missiological question as to how they might position a Christian witness with respect to the complex enactments of power in professional roles (Chapter 6), and consider the ecclesiological question as to how they might be sustained and supported in their vocation (Chapter 8). In the next chapter I begin to focus specifically on the use of language in the articulation of faith commitments, exploring the theme of how language intersects with the enactment of power through the lens of critical discourse analysis (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 5

HOW DISCOURSE WORKS:

A QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. (Ludwig Wittgenstein)[1]

The trouble with words is that you never know where they've been before you pick them up. ("Quotes, Words and Dates")[2]

This chapter focuses on the expression of Christian identity within the ideological context of a secular workplace through the vehicle of language. My agenda in this second part of the thesis has been to introduce the theoretical perspectives drawn from contemporary social studies which I have found useful in shaping a practical approach to the question of how a Christian might speak adequately and appropriately of faith at work. In Chapter 3, I focused on the underlying *question of identity* through a consideration of intercultural perspectives on the self. In Chapter 4, I focused on the crucial *question of power* through a consideration of the ideological context of secularism within which a Christian witness is framed. In this chapter, I turn to the third perspective, focusing on the *question of language* to consider how the performance of discourse intersects with the structures of power in the workplace.

In the first section (5.1) I will introduce the concept of 'discourse' as it has been developed in Foucauldian critical theory. I will then discuss the practice of discourse analysis as a tool for exposing the ideological dynamics at work behind and within language (Section 5.2), and show how a critical discourse approach might be used to bring a Christian critique in the managerial context of the contemporary workplace (Section 5.3). In the final section (5.4), I will offer a constructive trinitarian reflection on the non-dominating and interrelational promise of interdiscursive fluency.

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[1](Wittgenstein 2001, p.68).
[2] (Snelson 2005, p.3).

5.1 The trouble with words

Words are rarely innocent. (Sadly, not even mine.) The ideological freight with which they are loaded is a common focus of suspicion in the workplace. For example, which interests are being pursued when university 'students' are redescribed as 'customers' or health service 'patients' as 'service users' (Larvor 2006)? And who determines the 'sending out' of the workforce when their institution promulgates its 'mission statement'? Or what might be the agenda of the lunchtime prayer meeting where Christian colleagues gather to 'do business with God'?

A sensitivity to the role of language – or 'discourse' – as an instrument of socio-cultural and institutional power is one of the striking features of contemporary social theory, and especially critical theory. A useful definition of 'discourse' in this regard has been given by Kress:

> Discourses are systematically organised sets of statements that give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that they serve to define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension – what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally. A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about. In that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions. (Kress 1989, pp.6-7)

This understanding of discourse owes much to the work of Michel Foucault, whose influential studies (1972; 1977; 1981) analysed the ways in which the structures of society, in themselves apparently objective and natural, operate as discourses of power to privilege some whilst punishing others for their non-conformity. Foucault's concept of discourse embraces a wide range of social practices including not only the structures of speech and language, but also nonverbal communications, visual images and the power-laden processes of spatial and governmental relations.

In Foucault's brilliantly documented studies the links between language and power are meticulously dissected to reveal the circumstances and rules under which statements are combined and regulated to form and define 'a distinct field of knowledge/objects requiring a particular set of concepts and delimiting a specific "regime of truth" (i.e. what counts as truth)' (Barker and Galasínski 2001,

p.12). Through such means the actual discourse in any domain is powerfully regulated by socially constituted 'orders of discourse' (Foucault 1981) – those prevailing sets of conventions which operate in every social institution (Fairclough 2001, p.14).

It is through these powerful tacit conventions that all kinds of hegemonic assumptions come to be embedded in a governing discourse. As David Tracy explains:

> What [Foucault's] analyses show is that every discourse bears within itself the anonymous and repressed actuality of highly particular arrangements of power and knowledge. Every discourse, by operating under certain assumptions, necessarily excludes other assumptions. Above all, [...] discourses exclude those others who might disrupt the established hierarchies or challenge the prevailing hegemony of power. (Tracy 1987, p.79)

An important focus of Foucauldian analysis is to draw attention to the ways that particular discourses construct not only objects, but also subjects. According to the linguistic repertoires that are used, certain subject positions become possible whilst others are excluded. The notion of discursive position, of 'how we experience ourselves when we speak, when we hear others speak about us, and how we still have to use that talk when we think without speech', has been one of the particularly fruitful areas for the politicized use of discourse analysis (Burman and Parker 1993, pp.7, 167).

This power to define and delimit possibilities relates to a set of interrelated procedures of mastery which operate at all levels of society. Not only in major issues of government (the *macrophysics* of power) but in everyday aspects of institutional life (the *microphysics* of power) such procedures variously exclude and prohibit, or reproduce and disseminate particular discourses of power (McNay 1994, p.3). In relation to faith-talk, procedures of exclusion and prohibition can be seen to operate in certain (secular) contexts to create strong taboos or, at least, to weaken and deflect the force of religious language, whilst in different (religious) contexts the procedures of reproduction and dissemination are seen to operate to construct the kind of rituals in which a privileged subject is accorded a particular role and efficiency within the sacred discourse.

One of the critical features of a dominant discourse in any political, religious, cultural or economic regime is its ability not only to legitimate and

reproduce itself but also to render invisible its own dominance (Casey 1995, p.13). As Ian Parker observes:

> Language is so structured to mirror power relations that often we can see no other way of being; and it structures ideology so that it is difficult to speak both in and against it. (Parker 1992, p.xi)

Alert to the consequent oppressive potential in successful discourses, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is committed to unmasking the ideological pretensions which lie subtly hidden within seemingly innocent patterns of speech, helping practitioners to become more reflexive about the power relations which operate between speakers and language communities (Barker and Galasínski 2001, p.22). In this way, the work of critical discourse analysts demonstrates how:

> [T]he definitions, values and attitudes assumed by most speakers and writers are typically those of the group in power; hence the dominant ideology in a society generally underpins apparently "objective" descriptions. Taken for granted assumptions tend to go unquestioned, but they are often a means of repressing challenges and inhibiting change, and language plays an important part in encoding (or masking) such assumptions. (Holmes and Stubbe 2003, p.5)

The tools and techniques available for discourse analytic research are enormously varied, ranging from detailed conversation analysis to broader interpretative approaches which interrogate the ways in which vocabulary, mood, information structures and forms of address construct repertoires of meaning and value.[3] From a critical perspective, however, the most important questions are those which bring to awareness the unseen workings of power. Why this discourse and not some other? What are its effects? What subject positions does it open up? What alternative subject options does it preclude? Which political interests does it serve? What role does it play in the politics of knowledge/power? What benefits does it confer on the speaker? Which institutions are reinforced when this discourse is used? Which institutions are attacked or subverted when this discourse is used? What are its modes of existence, distribution and circulation? By what rules does it delimit the sayable and unsayable, the knowable and unknowable, the effective and the ineffective? How does this

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[3] For details of different technical approaches see Parker (1992), Burman and Parker (1993) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999).

discourse connect with other discourses? And by what procedures does it create the spaces in which new statements can be uttered?

Beyond the formal academic critiques of discourse analytic research, a much wider awareness of the ideological presumptions embedded in language has developed in popular thinking in recent decades. From George Orwell's (1949) dystopian novel, '*Nineteen Eighty-Four*' in which he coined to word 'newspeak' to describe the manipulation of language for (totalitarian) political purposes, to the widespread cynicism about the rhetoric of advertising or the simulated personal touch ('Have a nice day!') of people representing vast, impersonal organizations, the listening public has learned to be wary of the hidden interests concealed in 'innocent' language. In the next section I will consider how the tools of discourse analysis might be useful for ordinary Christians as they learn to practise critical discernment (see Section 4.3.1 above, pp.70f.) in their engagement with the manifold powers expressed in the workplace.

5.2   The power of discourse analysis

The power and purpose of discourse analysis is both theoretical and practical (Fairclough 2001, p.1). As a theoretical tool, it helps to correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and transformation of social and economic relations of power. It is thus particularly important in the analysis of secularizing forces in the workplace (see Section 4.1 above, pp.53ff.). Practically, it also offers a potent set of tools for the unmasking of hidden ideological agendas transmitted by discursive forms. By critiquing the 'loadedness' of interpretative repertoires in working contexts, discourse analysis helps to engage the manifold lines of power which operate through the cultural politics of language. These political forces will reflect and determine:

- the power to name
- the power to represent common sense
- the power to create 'official versions'
- the power to represent the legitimate social world (Barker and Galasínski 2001, p.56).

A critical approach to the discourse of the workplace needs to distinguish between the power at work *within* the discourse and the power at work *behind* it

(Fairclough 2001, p.38). The lines of power *behind* discourse which criss-cross within and without the working organization are legion. At the macro-structural level, global economic forces and shifting regional political priorities will impinge to some extent on every field of work, affecting practices as diverse as productivity targets, professional pecking orders and norms of political correctness. The extent to which these macro-level power contours have become enmeshed with religio-political power struggles on a global scale has become increasingly evident during the period of my research study (see Section 4.2.3 above, pp.66f.).

Meanwhile, at the micro-structural level within any working organization, more local and immediate forms of power jostle for dominance. Some are predictably hierarchical and positional, such as the relationships between line managers and their staff, executives and employees. Others relate in more variable ways to cognitive and technical ability and qualification, professional recognition, and the authority to teach and supervise others. Many loci of power form and dissolve in short-lived and episodic ways, as short-term projects, reviews and inspections are charged from time to time with far-reaching responsibilities to determine the future direction of an institution and its staff.

Working within and between these recognizably structural lines of power is woven a complex web of informal, personal and relational forces which determine to a remarkable, and sometimes quite baffling extent, both the objective realities of the organization's commitments and, still more, the subjective experience and attitudes of those who work there. Thus the humour, charisma, gender, history, loyalty and energy of key working colleagues are for many people some of the most decisive influences on their opportunity, or otherwise, to thrive and flourish in their identity at work.

It is the intersection of these complex and, at times, overwhelming powers with the subtle, rhetorical power *within* discourse which poses the critical challenge for local, contextual analysis. The enactment of power in the specific situational context can be studied, according to Fairclough, at four levels. Within any discursive setting, four levels of questioning can usefully open up for scrutiny some of the hidden power dynamics at work. First, the *transactional* question, *What is going on*? (in terms of activity, topic or purpose) reveals the *contents* of the discourse. The second question, *Who's involved?* reveals the *subjects* of the discourse. Thirdly, *In what relations?* reveals the *relational context* of the

discourse. And fourthly, *What is the role of language (in what is going on)?* reveals the *connections* between language behaviour and power dynamics (Fairclough 2001, p.122).

The purpose of these questions, within a setting in which people have been socialized by ruling interests into oppressive or even exploitative subject positions, is to raise the kind of critical consciousness which can empower resistance and transformation. This highly politicized approach to discourse analysis can be used to good effect when, for example, the concentration of power in an institution threatens the common good. In the next section, I will suggest how a CDA approach of this kind might be used to bring a Christian critique to the operations of management in a contemporary business setting.

5.3   Managing discourse: A critique

The importance of language in the contemporary commercial world is almost impossible to overestimate. There are immensely powerful economic interests at stake in the development and dissemination of various discursive forms of commercial governance. A successful managerial discourse will promote the interests of its purveyors in a wide range of ways, including some or all of the following: (1) the management of motivation; (2) the flattening of dissent; (3) the inculcation of instrumentalism; (4) the valorization of management; (5) the promotion of the product; and (6) the bonding of the customer/client.[4]

The extent to which successful managerial governance is achieved at the expense of a colonization of everyday communicative practice is coming under increasing academic scrutiny (Rose 1989; Parker 2000), and subject to growing satirical critique.[5] Whilst there are many entirely constructive uses for skilled communication and rhetorical practice within the workplace, there is a growing consciousness of the more manipulative, conceited, and patronizing abuses to which 'management-speak' has been prone, and it is this recognition of concealed ruthlessness which makes the criticism of managerial discourse a significant task for practical theology (Pattison 2007).

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[4] These features of managerial discourse might equally well apply to the power-laden discourses of other more traditional professions such as medicine, law and academia.

[5] See, for example, Newbrook (2005); and note the phenomenal popularity of the BBC's comic series on '*The Office*'.

It is largely through the 'hidden curriculum' of the workplace (Casey 1995, p.80), expressed in its tacit organizational culture, myths, norms, rituals, customs and symbolic practices that the *management of motivation* works to cultivate desirable qualities of commitment to corporate goals. More overtly, staff development activities provide a powerful platform for discursive formation as managers deploy a range of technologies aimed primarily at enhancing staff performance – where 'performance' is understood in overwhelmingly economistic terms.

The *flattening of dissent* can be achieved in apparently non-coercive ways through the use of discursive techniques which exclude or reduce the voicing of an alternative rationality (Foucault 1981). The pressure to discursive uniformity which is designed to reduce conflict over matters of value is often achieved through a reduction of discourse to the level of merely instrumental concerns. Where religious commitments are perceived as a source of potential conflict between members of the workforce, or between the agendas of employees and management, it is not unusual for the overt expression of faith commitments to be suppressed. As Mitroff and Denton observed, 'the usual way in which organisations respond to spiritual matters and concerns of the soul is by declaring them inappropriate or out of bounds' (1999, p.5).

What Foucault termed the 'rarefaction' of discourse suggests the way in which language is deprived of expansion and plenitude of meaning in the interests of maintaining control. The *inculcation of instrumentalism* in a workforce or bureaucracy is typically associated with discursive practices which constrict and control the prevailing language and thought forms in ways which lead to a shrivelling of spirituality and an impoverishment of creative potential.

Much criticism of managerial discourse and ideology is directed not so much to its impact on the subjects of its governance as to its arrogant *valorization of management* itself. The portrayal of managers as gurus and 'cultural heroes of our time' (Pattison 1997, p.4) is enhanced by a global industry of promotional best-sellers, videos, television stunts and live performances aimed at selling managerial skills and consultancy at audacious levels of financial reward and personal recognition (Greatbatch and Clark 2005).

The discursive techniques employed in the *promotion of the product* and the *bonding of the customer/client* are familiar through the phenomenal level of penetration achieved by advertising in contemporary society. Less evident are the

ways in which employees are personally co-opted in the technologization of discourse for the purposes of selling. Chouliaraki and Fairclough draw attention to the increasingly large category of service workers for whom language is part of the service they provide. These 'face' workers, such as shop assistants and receptionists, 'have little choice in the routinised simulation of conversational spontaneity (even to the point in some cases of having to talk to each customer as if he or she were a close friend)' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, p.5). For these workers, and their customers, the resulting cheapening of intimacy and abuse of emotional labour could have deleterious consequences for the communicative currency of wider aspects of personal life.

I have aimed to show how a critical discourse analytic approach might help – where necessary – to expose some of the unwarranted, and often covert, pretensions embedded in contemporary managerial discourse. These pretensions pose a threat to personal freedom to the extent that they manipulate workers into an uncritical level of compliance through processes of subtle inculcation. Such inculcation, according to Fairclough, 'attempts to naturalise partial and interested practices to facilitate the exercise and maintenance of power' (2001, p.62). Inculcation is thus the typical discursive mechanism of power-holders who wish to keep a hold on their power, as opposed to more transparent forms of communication which operate to equalize or redistribute social and economic power.

The uncritical acceptance of aspects of management-speak in wider society may also carry significant threats to the values of sincerity and trust. The acceptability of a discourse which routinely uses euphemism and evasion to veil the ruthlessness of its operations (so that, for example, 'downsizing', or 're-engineering', or 'cutting out the dead wood', or 'trimming the fat' are regarded as perfectly normal – whereas few managers would ever dream of 'sacking' anyone) contributes to a subtle erosion of honesty and compassion in society at large. Similarly, the everyday manipulation of public slogans and personal small talk for the purposes of selling represents such a wholesale infiltration of the communicative atmosphere of society that it must be considered at least partially responsible for the undermining of public trust and a heightened suspicion about motives (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, p.6).

Still more seriously, it has been argued that managerial discourse misappropriates (or, more kindly, selectively appropriates) elements of religious

mystique for its own, more self-interested, purposes (Moore 1994; Greatbatch and Clark 2005). With its 'vivid revivalist language and shining metaphors' (Pattison 1997, p.39), the skilful oratory of the management guru will evoke an idealized sense of possibility through its sweeping portrayal of corporate 'mission', 'vision' and 'purpose'. What this beguiling rhetoric may conceal is the way that complex realities are being simplistically reduced for the sake of control, and callous values are being sugar-coated in conscious or unconscious denial of the harsher realities of the commercial world. The current vogue for a 'feel-good' style of spirituality-in-business (Howard and Welbourn 2004) further indicates the extent to which symbols originally of a religious provenance can be co-opted into the entrepreneurial repertoire for the ultimate purpose of financial gain.

Christians attempting an authentic expression of their faith at work will need a critical awareness of the ways in which prevailing discourses manipulate perceived meanings and realities. Whilst I have no wish to discredit the honest use of highly developed communication skills at every level of working life, I suggest that a discourse analytic approach can provide some important tools where a necessarily critical evaluation of some harmful communicative practices is required, and perhaps begin to point towards fresh possibilities for prophetic resistance and poetic re-enchantment of any discourse from which faith-talk has been systematically expunged.

5.4   The dream of a common language: [6] A conversation

The agonistic style of Foucauldian discourse analysis reflects its disciplinary roots in a critical field of cultural studies which has been characterized historically by resistance, oppositionalism and anti-commercialism (Barker and Galasínski 2001, p.60). For Christian practical theology, such an approach has much to offer in the necessarily suspicious and subversive deconstruction of discursive imperialism and ideological atheism in the economy. It can also be enormously effective in uncovering questionable patterns of power articulated within churches and religious groups (Heather 2000). In Chapter 7 (on pp.132ff. below), I will apply the ideological analysis and sharp questions developed by Fairclough to some of the more uncritical practices of Christian witness in the workplace.

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[6] The title of a poem by Adrienne Rich in which she writes of the poet's 'drive to connect; the dream of a common language' (1978).

As a predominantly critical tool, however, CDA may have less to contribute to the constructive task of re-narrating and re-enchanting the discourses of work in the light of a Christian vision which looks beyond critique to communion. The 'drive to connect' (Rich 1978) which impels the poet in her pursuit of fresh languages is the same impulse which I have already identified as a central concern of a trinitarian hermeneutic (see Section 1.4 above, p.11). In this final section of the chapter, then, I will reflect on how the insights of trinitarian theology might inform a Christian approach to workplace discourse which, whilst retaining a necessary critical edge, strains forward to the development of a rich and poetic *fluency*.

5.4.1 From Babel to Pentecost

The ancient myth of Babel (Genesis 11.1-9) survives to mock the pretensions of any social group – commercial or ecclesial – which seeks domination through a monopolization of the discursive currency. The supremacist ambitions of the ancient Babylonians were widely known and potently symbolized by their enormous ziggurats which sought to build a connection from earth to the heavens. So the 'Babel' tale of the confusion of tongues (Hebrew, *balal*) creates a nice etymological joke at the expense of any institution which makes a bid for total control and restriction of the discourse in the interests of concentrating and retaining power.

In a story which is sometimes presented as a simple reversal of Babel fragmentation, the Spirit's gift of utterance on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) bestowed an astonishing communicative fluency on members of the nascent Christian community. Discursive boundaries were broken down as believers dialogued with the people around them, each hearing them speak in their own native tongue. When Peter stood up to interpret the miracle, he cited the ancient prophecy in which God promises to pour out his communicative Spirit on all flesh. The eschatological scope of this prophecy embraced even those who had not hitherto been regarded as members of any powerful discursive élite:

> 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
>
> that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
>
> and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
>
> and your young men shall see visions,

and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,

in those days I will pour out my Spirit;

and they shall prophesy.' (Acts 2.17-18)

The narrative which then unfolds from this event is emphatically missionary in its purpose. We read how members of the young church are driven, often through persecution, to move out centrifugally from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8). Far from undoing Babel in some triumphalist display of discursive totalitarianism, the Spirit's outpouring leads to an antithetical recapitulation of the Babel dispersion in which the curse of confusion is overturned by the blessing of a pentecostal communication which works to build communion in the most unpromising locations and contexts.

The 'dream of a common language' is not fulfilled through some simple agonistic reversal of power dynamics. Instead we read of a church still embroiled in difficult and dangerous power struggles, but astonishingly mobilized for a new Spirit-directed and Spirit-empowered vocation of missionary conversation. For the church which faithfully receives the Spirit's gifts, a new and gracious kind of eloquence is discovered in the enactment of a contextually adequate and appropriate interdiscursive witness – not for the claiming of domination and control but for the offering of fresh meaning and life – in communion.

I will explore practically in Chapter 7 how the insights of poetics might assist in the re-narration and re-enchantment of Christian discourse at work (see Section 7.4.2 below, pp.159ff.). At the heart of this missionary challenge I will argue for a fresh recognition of the transformative power of metaphors. The creative potential for apt metaphorical language to draw two language worlds together is well described by Jeff Astley:

> When we employ a metaphor we are in effect bringing together not only two words but two "worlds", by drawing on two sets of associations, or frameworks of meaning. [...] As the two domains of meaning interact, we might say that one of them "filters", "organises" or "transforms" the other, highlighting some features of the subject and suppressing others, so that something new (a new meaning) is created. (Astley 2004, pp.37-8)

It is this inventive, transformative potential which gives metaphorical and poetic language such power both for resistance and for re-envisioning. Through bold re-descriptions of reality, the power of language is released to make new and different things possible and important. This possibility and this importance is

never more compelling than when, as so often in the workplace, 'one's aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description' (Rorty 1989, p.62).

At the heart of faithful speaking then, for the Christian in the workplace, lies 'the fullness of the sign and the plenitude of the word' (Martin 2005, p.178). Out of the creative friction between her religious vision and her secular experience, she learns to voice new images and interpretations in vivid symbols and stories. This is not to say that the two language worlds simply merge. Her calling will demand a hermeneutic of suspicion just as much as a hermeneutic of retrieval; but all of this is the work of the one sanctifying Spirit.

5.4.2 Conversation-in-Trinity

> In my opinion, the personal identity of communicating persons is the most beautiful mirror of the Trinity. (Francis Jacques)[7]

My argument in this chapter has taken me from a critical hermeneutic of the discourses of power which pervade the workplace towards a creative hermeneutic which looks to the resourcefulness of the living Word for the interdiscursive gifts of fluency with which to craft an expression of faith which is both adequate and appropriate to its workplace setting. I will explore in practical detail (in Chapter 7 below) how this linguistic fluency might take shape amidst the pragmatic pressures and poetic possibilities of concrete workplace settings, showing how the resources of discourse analysis and hermeneutic philosophy can be used to inform and evaluate the practices of everyday Christian witness.

My purpose in this part of the thesis has been to engage the problem of a Christian 'life in two languages', using theoretical resources from contemporary social studies to elucidate the problem in relation to questions of *identity*, of *power* and of *language*. My analysis has shed new light on the ways in which life at work generates friction and dissonance between the secular language, culture and values of the workplace and the religious language, culture and values of the church. Faced with such conflicts, many Christians accept an awkward compartmentalization of their identity and role and language. Others seek to resolve the tension either aggressively, through strategies of agonistic resistance,

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[7] (Jacques 1991, p.68; cited in Cunningham 1998, p.189).

or compliantly, through strategies of assimilated quietism (see Figure 5.1 below). My theological argument is that none of these essentially dualistic strategies is adequate to the vision of life at work as a hermeneutic of the love of God-in-Trinity.

COMPARTMENTALIZED **WORK** and **CHURCH** language, culture and values are expressed in mutual exclusion	**AGONISTIC** **CHURCH** language, culture and values resist expression of **WORK** language, culture and values
ASSIMILATED **WORK** language, culture and values resist expression of **CHURCH** language, culture and values	**INTEGRATED** **CHURCH** and **WORK** language, culture and values are expressed in mutual embrace

Figure 5.1 Possibilities for Christian engagement with CHURCH and WORK domains[8]

Using the practical insights of contemporary trinitarian theology, in which the vocation for Christian life is not simply to adore the love of God-in-Trinity but to participate in God's conversational embrace of the world, I have identified three practices of Christian faithfulness at work as those of *engagement*, *fluency* and *communion*. In the next part of the thesis I will introduce a series of practical reflections based on the ethnographic element of my research which explore the outworking of *engagement* (Chapter 6), *fluency* (Chapter 7) and *communion* (Chapter 8) in the everyday contexts of Christian people setting out for their work in the world.

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[8] Compare Figure 3.1 on p.39 above.

PART III

THE PROBLEM IN PRACTICE

Part III of the thesis presents the main findings of the study. The challenge of speaking of faith at work is analysed through a detailed and contextual examination of Christian practice. Chapter 6 brings a detailed power critique to the enactment of 'missionary positions', using the heuristic device of ideal types to probe the contextual appropriateness and theological adequacy of different practical models of engagement. Chapter 7 develops the analysis through a specific focus on language, demonstrating the use of critical discourse analysis to excavate the pragmatic sociolinguistic dimensions of Christian witness, and drawing on the creative potential of hermeneutic and dialogical philosophy to sketch a vision of interdiscursive and trinitarian fluency. Chapter 8 exposes the communal dimension of Christian witness at work, using a case study to argue for the need for a critically adequate and contextually appropriate ecclesiological model of support. Chapter 9 concludes the thesis with a reflexive review of the methodological process and a summary of the academic contribution with pointers towards further practical development.

CHAPTER 6   MISSIONARY POSITIONS:

THE PRACTICE OF ENGAGEMENT

> We are convinced that England will never be converted until the laity use the opportunities daily afforded by their various professions, crafts and occupations. (William Temple)[1]

The challenge of speaking of faith in the secular context of the workplace demands careful reflection on the appropriate style of Christian *engagement*. In this chapter I discuss the patterns of practice which I have observed and on which, together with co-informants, I have reflected in the course of the research. In particular, I consider how questions of context and power can be seen to bear on the adequacy and appropriateness of the missionary stances displayed. For this purpose, I introduce a series of ideal types as a heuristic device for exploring and evaluating the underlying theological issues.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the workplace as a sphere of public engagement and discourse, with a critical discussion of how a Niebuhrian method might help to delineate typical and recognizable postures of Christian witness (Section 6.1). In the main part of the chapter (Section 6.2) I proceed to an analysis of three broad styles of Christian witness: *implicit*, *explicit* and *dialogical*. Through a detailed examination of contextually specific sub-types I then seek to excavate the underlying power dynamic and operative theology which informs each position. In the final section I reflect on the marks of an authentic missionary engagement in relation to a trinitarian understanding of Christian *engagement* in the world of work (Section 6.3).

6.1   Engagement in practice: Context and models

6.1.1   Situating the workplace context

The missionary question of how to speak adequately and appropriately of faith at work requires a careful assessment of the nature of the workplace as a sphere of

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[1] (Church of England 1945, p.58).

'public' Christian engagement. As discussed earlier (see Section 4.2.2 above, pp.61-64), the extent to which faith is regarded as a personal matter, which can and should be confined to an ostensibly separate 'private' domain, is a highly debatable question turning on prevailing representations of a 'secular' economic domain which are far from disinterested.

The contextual realities which face individual Christians as they inhabit this contested sphere have not been subjected to sustained, critical reflection. In the overall field of practical theology, there is no shortage of reflection on the manner and appropriateness of Christian engagement in wider public life. The concern from both church and academy to contribute to questions of political-economic policy and to intellectual and cultural issues at the highest levels of social, national and international life demonstrate the range and depth of theological reflection at this macro-level of public debate.[2] Such policy-level debate has rather less salience, however, at what I term the 'loco-public' level represented by the working roles and operational responsibilities of ordinary Christians who operate as individuals at some remove from the centres of strategic power. For these Christians, the far-reaching agenda of church reports and theological studies of social ethics may bear little immediate relation to the more specific and limited scope of their daily working opportunities and concerns.[3]

The majority of ordinary Christians are equipped with neither the global knowledge nor the executive power to engage their workplace in a politically strategic way. The interests of their 'loco-public' witness at work thus fall between the two stools of a macro-level style of 'public' theology which treats matters beyond their effective reach and a micro-level style of 'pastoral' theology whose remit is limited to the intimate and personal matters of domestic and family life. In this chapter I wish to reflect on contextually appropriate models of missionary engagement for this 'loco-public' level of social involvement, where Christians engage in the business of the workplace neither as public representatives of the church nor as individuals acting in a purely private or personal capacity.

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[2] For examples of current British reflection at this level, see Atherton (2000), Brierley (2006), Brown (2004a), Storrar and Morton (2004) and Young (1995).

[3] This may, in part, explain the frequent observation that major church reports on questions of social ethics achieve a disappointingly low level of uptake beyond the immediate circles of church-sponsored structures.

6.1.2 Engaging a Niebuhrian approach

My procedure in this chapter will be to describe and reflect on a series of models as recognizable styles of Christian engagement in the workplace. In this approach, I follow the highly influential analysis brought by H. Richard Niebuhr to the question of '*Christ and Culture*' (1951). Adopting the sociological device of 'ideal types', Niebuhr surveyed the options for a constructive post-war contribution to the task of public theology and presented a range of five, now classic, positions. His fivefold typology ranged from the extremes of *opposition* and *agreement* to include the more central positions of *synthesis*, *duality* and *transformation*.

Despite considerable criticism, the overall shape and clarity of Niebuhr's analysis has continued to inform practical theological reflection and contextual approaches to mission for over fifty years.[4] Of course, the depiction of any set of models or ideal types will represent a simplification of complex social realities. Max Weber, whose sociological studies first promoted the typological method, saw clearly that ideal types would function merely as 'analytical constructs that enable us to simplify a set of social relationships, to detail what is relevant and exclude misleading complexities' (Weber 1949, p.78; in Graham, Walton et al. 2005, p.11). The researcher's enthusiasm, then, to present a tidy typology should not be allowed to justify an unwarranted abstraction from real life. However much a set of models might reasonably be simplified for the purposes of discussion and debate, as constructs they must nonetheless appear recognizable and persuasive in order to be practically useful.

In Niebuhr's schema the most dangerous over-simplification, from a critical perspective, is his scant attention to the serious implications of power. For Gorringe (2004, p.105), this issue of power is emphasized as central to any responsible analysis of mission in a culturally plural society, requiring a searching ideology critique and a vigorous hermeneutic of suspicion in relation to any missionary position adopted by influential Christian individuals, movements or institutions.

I have already identified the crucial significance of power relationships for the enactment of an appropriate Christian witness in the workplace. Yet surprisingly (or perhaps conveniently?), it is this question of power which I have

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[4] For a detailed critique of Niebuhr's project, see Scriven (1988) and Yoder (1996). For contextual approaches to mission, see especially Bevans (2002; 2005).

found to be least openly addressed by Christians, as individuals or in the churches, in connection with their witness at work. Whether it is in the denial of our implication in oppressive powers, or the refusal of our potential for a micro-prophetic witness of liberation, such a blinkered attitude to power must be at best spiritually naïve and at worst morally dangerous. For this reason I expose these questions of power – personal and institutional, professional and religious – as one of the key dimensions in my typological analysis of missionary positions.

In beginning to develop a Niebuhrian approach to my data, I was able to draw some pertinent insights from two recent US studies of Christian styles of discursive engagement in the face of secularism. Gary Simpson's (2002) study examined the type of public discourse enacted by US church congregations from a Habermasian perspective.[5] His study depicts three types of engagement in the public sphere (Simpson 2002, p.137-145). The first is characterized by an *agonistic* view of civil society, where the public space is seen as a site of struggle. This stance is typified by an élitist theology and morality ('the church standing on the hill'), a totalizing view of society, and an apocalyptic/Manichean world-view. The second type espouses a *liberal* view, characterized by a repressive tolerance in which theology is excluded from public debate, and banished to the private sphere. His third ideal type ('ideal' in more ways than one?) is a *communicative* view of society in which the role of the church is to welcome and accentuate questions of public truth, offering a prophetic vocation not so much for heroic individuals as for congregations which relate to the public sphere as companions, reminding society of the eschatological 'not yet'.[6] It is this type of discursive engagement with the surrounding community which Simpson finds most in tune with the central positions within Niebuhr's model, and especially with his 'Christ and culture in paradox' (p.142).

Whilst Simpson's study considers chiefly the macro-level of broad societal issues and opinions, Marsha Witten's (1993) book focuses on a more local and personal level of Christian discourse in a study of pastoral preaching in US Protestant churches. She also discovers three predominant patterns of linguistic response to the surrounding climate of secularity. The most prevalent *accommodative* position is the one in which adjustments are made to the expression of religion 'in its practices, pronouncements and creeds to bring them

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[5] See Habermas (1988).
[6] It might, however, be argued that the ideal speech situation proposed by Habermas can itself be seen only as an eschatological possibility: see Lash (1991).

into conformity with the values and behaviours of secularity' (Witten 1993, p.18). Specifically, she identifies and critiques an accommodation towards the movements of privatization, pluralization and rationalization. Under the antithetical position of *resistance*, she cites three predominant patterns of language use as: re-sacralization, or the explicit reintroduction of elements of the sacred into contexts where it had been diluted by liberalism; the bolstering and tightening of religious arguments so that they are formally seamless and cohesive; and the setting of clear symbolic boundaries of identity and belief, segregating truth from error, and the faithful from the faithless (p.26). Again, it is to a middle position that Witten finds herself drawn. In the posture which she describes as *reframing*, 'the relationship between Christian faith and the secular world involves a dynamic process of interaction, struggle and synthesis, as Christian belief informs, transmutes, or operates in tension with, the norms of secular culture' (p.56).

In my own work of analyzing the possibilities for Christian engagement with the cultural and linguistic domains of church and work, I have found the simplicity of clear typologies very appealing (see Figure 5.1 above, p.86), and the tendency to commend the middle position all but irresistible. However, I am also suspicious enough to question the kind of tidy schemes which almost inevitably bring us as readers to 'find ourselves queuing up to sign on as Transformers of Culture' (Wright 2003), leading to the impression that the whole analysis has been set up to lead unquestioningly in that direction.

For that reason in my own presentation of ideal types of engagement I will do two things. First, I will purposefully complexify the analysis so that the richness of the data is not abstracted into a small number of 'ideal' but practically unrecognizable positions. Through a series of contextually specific sub-types I will examine a plurality of possible styles of engagement, each of which may be valid in its own terms. Secondly, I will carefully reflect on the power dynamics displayed in each position, so that the uncomfortable challenges realized by the more extreme positions may not be smoothed over by an automatic preference for a safe and sophisticated middle ground.

Chapter 6: Missionary Positions

6.2 Three missionary positions at work

A simple starting point might be to construct three clear postures of *implicit*, *explicit* and *dialogical witness* in relation to the identity positions which I have already outlined in response to compartmentalization (see Figure 6.1 below).

COMPARTMENTALIZED (disengaged?) WORK and CHURCH culture and identity are expressed in mutual exclusion	**AGONISTIC** (explicit?) CHURCH culture and identity resists expression of WORK culture and identity
ASSIMILATED (implicit?) WORK culture and identity resists expression of CHURCH culture and identity	**INTEGRATED** (dialogical?) CHURCH and WORK culture and identity are expressed in mutual embrace

Figure 6.1 Relating missionary positions to identity positions in respect of CHURCH and WORK[7]

Such a crude lumping together of complex behaviours and self- and theological understandings, however, would fail to do justice to the data. As Lips-Wiersma and Mills noted in a study of New Zealand workplaces, 'it seems that grappling with the issue of one's spirituality in the workplace is not just a matter of choosing expression or silence. What people do is much more complex than this' (2002, p.195). They found in their respondents from different faith groups a spectrum of expressive behaviours ranging from avoidance, concealment, cessation of action, non-action through to limited signalling, openness, modified action and praxis. They also noted ways in which patterns of faith-expression changed in relation to learning experiences and shifting configurations of identity and belonging.

In conversation with my own informants I found not only a wide range of expressiveness in practice (which I depict in a spectrum from *Closet Christian* to *Crusader*), but also in many instances a desire to critique and to reflect theologically on stereotypical models of Christian engagement which my

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[7] Compare Figure 3.1 on p.39 and Figure 5.1 on p.86.

informants had found variously attractive or repellent, practical or unworkable. This subtle and dynamic reflexivity cannot be realistically captured by any simplified typological account of my informants' patterns of engagement. For this reason I will present my analysis in a more conversational manner.

I will proceed as follows. Each model of engagement will be introduced by a 'clear case' illustrating the *implicit*, *explicit* or *dialogical* stance. Each of these is contextually exceptional in some way: one relates to a historic model of practice, another to a uniquely staged presentation, and a third to a classic scriptural narrative. I will then discuss how each 'clear case' has been used as a heuristic device to explore in specific and contextual detail the issues facing ordinary Christians and show how, through a plurality of missionary positions, the *implicit* or *explicit* or *dialogical* stance might be practically and theologically evaluated.

First, then, we go on a study trip to France.

6.2.1 Implicit witness: Meet the worker priests

An ecumenical group of British Christians were invited to Arras in northern France on an exchange visit. The most memorable day was our encounter with a small group of worker priests, some retired, and others still working in the chemical, engineering, and horticultural sectors of local industry (RJN March 2003). These men were some of the few surviving heirs to the remarkable mission of the *prêtres-ouvriers* which had become such a *cause célèbre* in the post-war period of political and economic tension.

It was easy to idealize the passionate incarnational commitment which this movement embodied. Determined to reconnect the church with a downtrodden and deeply anticlerical working class, the early priest-pioneers had opted not only to go and live amidst the workers' tenements but also to put on their overalls and join them working side by side on the factory floor. Their inspiration had come from those heroic war-time clergy who had volunteered to serve as secret chaplains by working amongst French labourers conscripted to work in German munitions factories. Preserving *incognito* had become an essential part of the worker-priests' understanding of authentic witness, as they learned what it meant to live alongside others in sacrificial service rather than in wordy proclamation (Perrin 1965). It was their simple raw determination to 'be there' in the tenements where the drunks beat their wives, and to share in the heaviest of manual labour, which won such respect from Christians around the world. One English bishop evaluating the worker-priest movement quoted their superior, Abbé Godin, in his emphatic answer to the question – what do the worker-priests do? '*C'est la presence. C'est la presence*!' (Edwards 1961, p.126).

6.2.1.1   The implicit theme, and variations

The *implicit* model of witness by incarnational presence proved very appealing to our group of visitors. They warmed to the 'authenticity' and the 'grittiness' of such whole-hearted engagement with the material conditions of oppressed workers. They admired the worker priests' combination of 'militant asceticism' (Siefer 1964, p.26) with an instinctive reticence, so eloquent in its self-denying silence (RJN March 2003). The courageous witness of these 'strong, silent types'

from another time and another country did much to commend a model of *implicit witness* to our working Christians from twenty first century County Durham.

Yet the socio-political setting for this iconic model of implicit witness was far removed from the city banks and schools, and modern offices and workshops which we knew at home. And the cultural-religious expectations of a Catholic priest in post-war France were very different from those of an ordinary lay Christian in contemporary Britain. For all that we admired the missionary impact which the *prêtres-ouvriers* had achieved in their day, we were left with some important practical and theological questions to debate on the way home (RJN March 2003).

For one thing, as Stella (a secondary school teacher) pointed out, the worker-priests were (and still are)[8] volunteers. Their ministry of presence amongst the poorest sections of the working class is freely offered – and may be freely withdrawn. Their identification with the materially and spiritually oppressed is a choice made on the basis of a particular, and highly contextual, understanding of priestly vocation. Whilst many embraced considerable hardship – especially in the early years – through their choice of solidarity with the workers, it was always the case that they had the freedom to leave. Other fellow-workers without priestly training and status had no such option – and no such romantic notion of their calling.

It was in this light that their self-denying ordinance of silence needed to be critically appraised. Tom (a theologian) emphasized that the chosen silence of a priest, who is trained and authorized to proclaim the faith, carries a very different meaning from the awkward silence of a layman, who might be disempowered by his church or his secular context or both (RJN March 2003). Because of their different historic power positions, one might be rather good news and the other very bad news. The mission of the worker-priests, in deciding to forgo historic privileges, and to refrain from voicing a local-contextually oppressive discourse, started to raise some acute questions about the differential impact of power on the style and import of Christian witness at work.

Our group realized that the contextual subtleties of a well-placed Christian witness, particularly when considered in the light of a critical reading of realistic power dynamics in work and wider society, meant that no one simple model could

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[8] Despite the official disapproval of Rome, French bishops have continued to license small numbers of *prêtres-ouvriers* in the industrial north of the country since the 1950s, a handful of whom are still engaged in active ministry.

offer a blueprint for any and every situation. Our reflections on the <u>*Silent Servant*</u> model of the worker priests, and my subsequent discussions with informants working in very different professional and political contexts, helped me to recognize even within the overall category of *implicit witness* a plurality of patterns of engagement, any one of which might be adequate in its own terms and appropriate to its own situation (see Table 6a below, p.103).

The designation of the first of these variations was suggested to me by André Delbecq.[9] These <u>*Hidden, Holy People*</u> are typically Christian executives and professionals invested with considerable power and authority in the secular domain who choose to remain tacit in relation to their faith in order not to impose their convictions on their subordinates. In contrast to the worker-priests, such people are rarely recognized as heroic by the churches.

> No-one says of them, as they might of a priest, or nun, or Buddhist monk, 'Ah, there goes a holy person.' Yet these organizational leaders share the humility of Jesus. They are not recognized by either their Church, Temple or Mosque nor are they understood by their professional colleagues. Yet they are the face of God through a long line of causation that is often hidden to the recipient of the final blessing. They are God's hidden holy people. (Delbecq 2006)

I set this type of Christian witness alongside that of the *prêtres-ouvriers* to underline the potentially positive value of reticence and restraint. Like the worker-priests, they calculate that any overt display of Christian identity may be more oppressive than liberative. In their case, this is not on account of their status in the church, but because of their unequal influence over the lives of others – commercially, professionally, educationally – within which the introduction of a religious agenda might be unjustly intrusive.

Delbecq celebrates this deliberate posture. Again, like that of the worker-priests, it is adopted from a position of power and freedom and embraced as a positive vocation. Unlike the lowly worker-priests, however, their social position places them towards the top of their organizations and often in situations of some prestige and financial reward. Perhaps it is for this reason that their vocation is less likely to be applauded within the church.

Yet their commitment can nonetheless embody an important form of Christian mission. They believe that the primary purpose of their work is to

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[9] See Delbecq (2002; 2006).

provide needed products and services, though this is not something they discuss in explicitly theological terms. They see their workplace as a locus of community, and have a concern for justice and stewardship, though these values are not necessarily justified by recourse to Christian ethics. When they are given structural power, they strive to exercise 'servant leadership' (Greenleaf 1977); when faced with unjust criticism, they embrace where necessary the role of 'scapegoat'. Their witness is characterized by restraint and non-arrogation of power, whether religious or secular, personal or rhetorical. In this style, they emulate the self-emptying of Christ and the reticence of St. Francis: 'Let your life speak, and as a last resort use words.'

> Bernard has worked for many years in a humanitarian development agency. Now he holds a senior teaching post in the university. His teaching on human rights is passionate and authoritative, inspired both by wide-ranging international experience and by his deeply held Quaker beliefs. Though he never speaks openly of his faith-commitment, it is no surprise to his students to learn of the motivation behind his career. (RJN March 2006)

> Robert is a community youth worker in a multi-racial area on the rough side of town. He engages boys who are dropping out of the school system and helps to re-integrate them into some kind of informal class environment. His work is very much a vocation, not because of any explicitly religious conversation which ensues – that would be quite out of place – but because his whole demeanour aims to be 'capturing the personality of God'. (Interview 2)

> Lewis organizes training programmes aimed at getting long-term unemployed people back into work. He finds his work deeply rewarding, but refrains from using religious language to legitimate his position. It would alienate for the most part the very people he is trying to serve. 'I think that the most moving experience I've had in the last two or three years was a programme we ran for [a major retail firm]. We got one hundred and forty eight people into work with one employer, and they represented about 75% of their workforce. [....] Then by Christmas, they were planning the work's Christmas do.' 'Do I work as a Christian? When I go about my work, I'm going about as Lewis. And if people see that as Christian, that's fine. If people see it as being fair, honest and just, that's fine too.' (Interview 1)

> John's style was quiet and he often operated behind the scenes. So his interventions were not always visible, even to those who benefited from them. As a minority group member with a senior level job, he was often expected to do more and to be more visible. Sometime he was criticized for not doing enough and for not 'taking a stand against the company' regarding racism and sexism by people who were unaware of what he was

doing. Sometimes his support of others cost him when they did not perform at expected levels. Despite the criticisms, he continued to do quietly what he could and encouraged his colleagues and superiors to act as well. Thus he was able to further the careers of many through a justice ministry that was highly effective in the corporate world. (*Ministry in the Corporate World* 2001)

A second variation on the implicit theme might be the *Transformer*. More positive and pro-active than the Hidden, Holy People, *Transformers* look out for situations in need of redemption, seeking out partnerships for the common good. Less reticent than the Hidden, Holy People, these change-makers actively engage their faith-based values in the challenges of everyday work, seeking not merely to serve individuals for whom they have a direct responsibility, but to exert a transformative influence throughout the structures of their institution, 'changing the world one company at a time'.

> William (systems manager, manufacturing)
> In my previous workplace I did not integrate my Quaker beliefs. The car industry was dominated by multinationals with very hierarchical structures. I knew I was in level seven and there were twenty-six levels. [...] So there were all these levels and in that kind of environment it was very easy to get swamped and very difficult to be different. After a string of computing jobs in different production companies, it was the construction company I'm currently working for that gave me the "break" I now think I was looking for. The construction company was in trouble and badly needed its employees to start thinking much more creatively to move forward. To achieve this they put all employees on leadership skills. Over the years I'd become quite cynical. It had become a habit I wanted to get rid of. So I had already identified there were some things I wanted to change about myself. In the course there was a huge sense of group identity and a set of values which I suddenly realized that I had had for a long time and had been hiding for years. And I came to a major realization that these could be compatible with my work. Values of service, integrity, understanding what you want, but also what other people want, being vulnerable and taking risks. So it was now legitimate to express these values in the work place. And through the course I discovered many like-minded souls, which is important to me and which I now actively look for. It seems to me to be important that where I do have influence that that influence is used to create an environment and uphold those values so that other people feel that it's safe or that it's valuable or worthwhile to be that way. (Lips-Wiersma and Mills 2002, p.192)

William had discovered his potential to be a *Transformer* partly as a result of a (secular) training initiative. Prior to this empowering experience, he had felt stuck in the position of a *Closet Christian*. Others are inspired to adopt the

Transformer position through the encouragement of church- or workplace-based Christian groups, some of which, like Catholic Action, have a strong praxis-orientation.

> The purpose of Catholic Action is to enable Christians to discover what Christ wants them to do in the world and then to help them do it. The first principle is to take seriously what matters to you and the people round you wherever you are (as a teacher, a housewife, a steelworker, a solicitor or a small-holder): the second principle is to find other Christians where you are, meet, talk and share your common concerns and support each other in industrial or common action. (Arras visit, March 2003)

> Pamela had worked for many years as a nurse tutor trying to instil a sense of professional worth in young women who felt disempowered in their chosen career. With the encouragement of the chaplain, she shared her concerns with some Christian lecturers from other clinical disciplines. Their idea of "Crossing Over" 'came from the physical divide which runs between the Medical Faculty and the rest of the institution. It would be good to see this bridged, and people feeling confident in relationships across the divide.' Soon they had established a collaborative interprofessional learning project which transformed the mutual understanding and respect between previously divided groups of students. (Interview 4)

The least exciting embodiment of implicit witness is, of course, that of the *Closet Christian*. I had to include this seemingly unappealing position in my analysis of practical positions simply because it represents the only realistic option for a large number of Christian people at work.

The reality for many people is that their workplace is something of a spiritual desert: arid, hostile, unrewarding. It is not a place of flourishing, but an environment to be endured. The work itself may be demeaning, and the pay and conditions degrading. To think positively of Christian witness in such contexts is a luxury beyond imagination. Merely to survive, morally and spiritually, in such situations is a major achievement.

The degree of freedom afforded in many spheres of work is terribly limited. I learned from many informants how my middle class notions of making a creative contribution, or of voicing an effective testimony, can be dismally out of place where there is either very little power, or very limited scope for personal expression. At certain times, and in certain contexts, the best that many can aspire to is to be a *Closet Christian*.

Recognizing these restrictive realities is important for many of my informants who reflected predominantly on the constraints of their work. They do

not walk the corridors of power. Even in their own immediate workspace, the atmosphere can be deeply hostile. The opportunity to offer a positively Christian contribution seems remote. The only realistic option – for themselves and for their loved ones to survive – is to keep their head down. Faced with an aggressively secular culture, or a hostile management or openly derisive colleagues, for many people discretion is the better part of valour.

> Hugh spoke of the unpleasant atmosphere in the office whenever Jim was around. Loud-mouthed and irreverent, Jim's presence precluded any personal or intimate level of conversation. To speak openly of faith in such a setting would have been crazy. (Interview 17)

> The culture in this [police] force means that if you do confess yourself to be a Christian in that environment, you are likely to get stick for it. There are people here who have a hidden Christian ministry. (Group 2)

> Education is scared stiff of any influence. You can't get the kids to do this, or do that. 'You can be a Christian in this place, but please don't tell the kids about it because they might run off and join the church, and that would be *wrong*.' (Group 6)

Most of my informants felt apologetic in some degree, or even ashamed about their experience of being a <u>Closet Christian</u>. It is a stance adopted not by choice, but by necessity; not from a strong position of freedom – like the self-emptying of the worker-priests – but from a prudent response to a position of enforced weakness.

I have set out for comparison in Table 6a overleaf some of the characteristics of different strategies of *implicit witness*, and tried to highlight the practical value of a 'negative capability'[10] in certain situations. My clearest case of this strategy is the historic ministry of the French worker priests, the <u>Silent Servants</u> who chose to forgo the sacerdotal privilege of a proclamatory witness in order to embody the gospel in a situation of reduced religious and economic power. Variants of this approach include those senior professionals and executives who, whilst expressing their personal faith through a strongly ethical and strategic service commitment, maintain a tacit posture in public in order to avoid undue influence and imposition. These are the <u>Hidden, Holy People</u>.

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[10] The phrase 'negative capability' was coined by John Keats (Letter to G. and T. Keats, 21 December 1817). In terms of Christian mission, according to Rowan Williams (in Burnham 1989, p.106), it reflects 'a reluctance to force the language and behaviour of others into Christian categories prematurely'.

| Position | Variations of implicit witness | | | |
	Silent Servants	Hidden, Holy People	Transformers	Closet Christians
Slogan	*C'est la presence*	Let your life speak; and as a last resort use words	Change the world one company at a time	Keep your head down
Attitude to work	Context for sacrificial service	Place of vocation and stewardship	Material for transformation in the light of the Kingdom	Place of spiritual alienation
Goal	Working in identification with the poor	Making a caring and constructive contribution	Changing structures and institutions for good	Avoiding negative reaction
Ethic	Liberation	Service	Justice	Self-preservation
Target group	Materially and spiritually oppressed workers	All clients and colleagues seen as neighbours	Networks and partners in common cause	[Avoiding those hostile to faith]
Practical Christology	Jesus friend of the poor and sinners	Christ of culture; kenotic	Christ the transformer of culture	Christ the innocent victim
Doctrinal base	Incarnation	Creation	Kingdom (>Church)	[Uncertain]
Spirituality	Apophatic	Contemplative	Praxis-orientated	Desert
Expression of distinctiveness	Implicit	Implicit	Implicit and actively engaged	Impractical or unwise
Power dynamic	Critical; self-renouncing	Empowering	Collaborative	Defensive

Table 6a Variations of implicit witness at work

A similar variant are the *Transformers* who actively seek out partnerships for the outworking of gospel practice in collaborative action for change. Whilst personal faith remains the motive force for these workers, it is not essential to their witness that their transformative initiatives should be legitimated in overtly Christian terms. The final variant is found in the places of least personal and structural power where someone, whilst living and working out of a deep personal basis of faith and Christian commitment, keeps quiet about their religious commitment at work for reasons of self-preservation. Unenviable, but not necessarily dishonourable, this is the position of the *Closet Christian*.

6.2.1.2   Theological evaluation

The implicit style of Christian witness fits comfortably within a broadly catholic spirituality of sacramental presence. Embodiment is primary, word is secondary. An authentically Christian identity is expressed, not through any personal narrative or doctrinal or symbolic presentation, but through ethical standards of work and attention to personal and institutional relationships.

> Doers of the word – that's what I like. (RJN August 2003)

My informants who reflected theologically on implicit styles of witness drew on positive themes and motifs concerning the theological meaning of their work: creation and co-creation; incarnation and the sanctification of everyday life; vocation and the ultimate value of human work. Their paradigm for Christian witness in a secular environment was cast in terms of making a 'generous contribution' (Newlands 2004) to the common good. Explicit articulation of underlying faith, on this view, was considered at best a secondary priority. More often they spoke of their witness as 'salt and light' (Group 14).

> Christians are to be salt and light for the world. First, they should use their talents and energies to make a positive difference, to enhance life for others, to give it flavour, to encourage others to savour it as a gift. Then they should witness, by word and example, that it is Christ who is the source of their strength, the focus of their attention, the goal of their future and the pathway to life and fulfilment. Witness by example precedes and has priority over witness by words. Explicit articulation of the Christian faith relies very heavily for its cogency on this faith being implicitly embedded in and permeating thoroughly our everyday behaviour. (John Sullivan in Astley, Francis et al. 2004, p.26)

For Christians whose faith is nourished by an awareness of God's sacramental presence in the world, the implicit posture is theologically as well as politically appropriate. Their reticence duly recognizes the mystery at the root of all Christian discourse. Yet as Newey observes, the notion of reticence often suffers from negative connotations. 'Reticence can, all too easily, carry an association of "biting one's tongue", of knowing the truth and refraining from telling it. [...] Feminist and liberation perspectives have taught us to recognise the extent to which silences are often involuntary, as louder and more dominant voices drown those of the powerless.' Against this negative assessment, Newey advocates an apophatic kind of reticence which neither silences nor is itself a

silence. 'By its nature it does not seek to impose itself; instead it strives to foster openness both to other voices and to the voice of the divine Other, the God, who, as Nicholas Lash puts it, "does not shout"' (Newey 2003, p.178f.; citing Lash 1992, p.11).

Yet, for most of my informants, a stance which is wholly implicit was deemed inadequate, and they wrestled over the necessity for and the appropriateness of a more overt and distinctive Christian contribution.

> But is it enough just to love? Do I have to bring the God-language in? Do I have to say where all that comes from? (Group 13)

Such questions cannot be answered in abstraction from the specific context of working roles and responsibilities. What in one situation represents a properly loving reticence and restraint might give the appearance of denial and abdication of responsibility in another. Teachers in particular, charged with a responsibility for moral and spiritual formation of young people, felt keenly the tension between using their position to offer a visible and constructive commendation of Christian faith and refraining from undue influence by bringing their 'private' beliefs into the classroom.

> This is fine, but are we totally happy with the implicit nature of our functioning? (Group 6)

The wider social and political context is also acutely relevant. For the Marxist-inspired *prêtres-ouvriers*, the fierce criticism which they faced focused especially on their refusal to challenge the atheistic agenda of their Communist bedfellows. By withholding a positively theological perspective, these priests lent tacit support to the Marxist vision of a secular humanist utopia. To the Vatican officials, their refusal to 'proclaim the truth' in such a conflicted political-intellectual context was not merely inadequate but dangerously collusive.

Where individuals are forced to grapple with the demands of truth and justice in less controversial working situations, the implicit posture may nonetheless appear to be highly *appropriate*, because it is sensitive to the enormous potentials for professional, economic or religious abuse; yet there are few settings in which it is found to be fully *adequate* insofar as it colludes with a prevailing privatization of faith which is ultimately repressive and detrimental to the common good.

Those who resolve this dilemma in the opposite direction prefer a more explicit approach to Christian witness at work. For a memorable encounter with this very different approach typified in the evangelical 'Faith in the Workplace' movement, we now take a trip to the Palace of Westminster.

6.2.2 Explicit witness: Or, getting God to work

November 2003. The House of Lords in London. I feel rather flattered by the invitation to attend a 'reception' in such splendid surroundings, until I realize that it is really little more than a book launch. Geoff Shattock, the National Director of *WorkNet*, uses his friends well; and one of them – who, like me, is on the Council of Reference[11] – happens to be a Peer of the Realm. (I wonder if his lordship is also paying for our canapés?)

The question of how one uses one's friends stays with me throughout the evening. Geoff is launching a book called *WorkTalk* (Shattock 2003) which supports a training course to promote the practice of 'friendship evangelism' in the workplace. His presentation is slick and self-deprecatory. 'I hate selling,' he cheerfully confides, whilst blatantly deploying every marketing technique possible to impress his potential backers and clients. (I wonder how far we are all being led by the nose?)

Geoff has learned how to talk things up. We hear that he is the 'National Director' of the WorkNet 'Partnership'. (I know that Geoff established this small home-based initiative with himself as the only full-time member of staff.) His web site[12] boasts that WorkNet 'is the leading provider of resources in the UK to help people work well by integrating spirituality with their life at work'. (I know of numerous initiatives which are far more highly regarded in this field.) The blurb claims that Geoff is 'a qualified Physiotherapist and Theologian' (I know that he is professionally recognized in neither specialist field), and that he has completed a 'major research project' into the impact of faith on occupational stress (I know that this relates to a very small survey undertaken as part of his Masters programme). His sales pitch (for this, surely, is what I am hearing) is peppered with knowing office-speak and religious name-dropping. (I wonder if there is anything he is telling us which is not being exaggerated for effect?)

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[11] I have since withdrawn from this nominal position.
[12] At http://www.worknetuk.org (last accessed 28 June 2006).

Geoff knows that there is a difference between befriending and marketing. 'Although you may want your colleague to become a Christian, the level of friendship must not be determined by his or her degree of interest in your faith – that would not be befriending but selling' (Shattock 1999, p.13f.). Yet his frequent allusions to marketing and advertising tactics tell a different tale, and his headline maxim that 'if you would win a man to your cause you must first convince him that you are his sincere friend' (Shattock 1999, p.9, citing Abraham Lincoln) suggests an agenda which is anything but genuinely disinterested. (I am wondering if this ostensible 'friend' doth protest too much?)

It is the incongruities in this presentation that disturb me (RJN December 2003). The more I observe the dynamics and listen critically to the rationale of the fast-growing evangelical 'Faith in the Workplace' movement, the more I wince at the vested interests and the utilitarian approach to relationships that characterize the stereotypical _Evangelist_ at work.

According to popular evangelical mythology, there is a 'big story to tell' about how 'things are afoot' for Christian evangelists in the workplace (Interview 15). This story is being written up in 'exciting' and 'dynamic' ways in racy paperbacks and practical training packages (many imported from the United States)[13] and disseminated through a growing number of local and national networks and conferences. In its crudest form, the myth tells of Christians 'boldly' penetrating a hostile workforce for Christ. Using 'friendly and winning ways', they pursue relationships with their 'non-Christian' colleagues in prayerful hope that 'opportunities for the gospel' will arise. Having 'actively and intentionally' cultivated close relationships they watch out for 'natural' occasions on which to deploy their carefully honed evangelistic tools.

> A workplace story. _The Passion_ is an ideal evangelistic tool, once you have seen it. The morning after I saw it, I said I had seen it and immediately the question arose about violence etc. Nevertheless it gave me an opportunity to talk about the crucifixion, not only as a historical fact of the time under Roman rule and the additional elements of scourging that Christ suffered but also crucially, why. I was then able to present the full gospel of salvation. Not well received, but that's not the point. A seed was sown. So

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[13] My informants have enthused about the publications of Robin Scurlock, Ed Silvoso and Mark Greene, and several of them subscribe to the resources of the _Getting God to Work_ network promoted by _Christian Viewpoint for Men_ and the _London Institute for Contemporary Christianity_. A good summary of the theological vision of this movement can be found in ('Marketplace Ministry' 2004).

encourage all who are able, to use the film as a key for evangelism at work. An evangelistic tool. Sometimes it's hard to find a suitable opportunity. This film provides it in the most natural way. Not only that a magnificent film. Praise the Lord! (*Reading@Work: Testimonies* 2004)

Among my direct informants, mercifully few presented such crass caricatures of the 'Evangelist@Work'. More commonly I overheard the inner reflections of people, once reared on the evangelical myth, now struggling to construct a valid model for personal evangelism in the workplace in ways that are attuned to contextual realities and sensitive to personal dynamics. Beneath these soft social niceties, however, a harsher driving influence still came through of a largely unreconstructed dualism which portrays 'non-Christian' colleagues in arrogantly judgemental terms.

> Although the tone of this book is not meant to be guilt-inducing or exhortationary, I am assuming that you realise the importance of the issue at hand. It really does matter that you communicate your faith, because people without Jesus Christ are in real trouble. (Shattock 1999, p.14)

Such a disparaging soteriological framing of allegedly 'non-Christian' work colleagues sits at odds with the purported collegial respect and compassion which representatives of this movement are eager to own.

> The workplace has to be considered a major area for evangelism. Here's my experience as a systems analyst, working alongside many middle class, white collar workers, most with issues in their lives and almost all with no hope of salvation. In chatting to people in my own team, I am often fascinated by the variety of lives. Many people are just so lonely, but excellent at hiding it. They often have no-one to really turn to, whether in times of bereavement, marital difficulties, redundancy... etc. There are so many people that we can reach just by being immersed in their lives. Indeed one of them has now said that he would like to come on the next Alpha course. (*Getting God to Work: Workplace Stories* 2003)

6.2.2.1   The explicit theme, and variations

I do not wish to caricature a genuine missionary position through exaggerated or selective reporting.[14] Many of my direct informants, as I have already observed, are engaged in a complex process of reflection on an ingrained model of personal

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[14] For a wonderful parody of workplace evangelism published from within the evangelical movement itself, see The SkitGuys' videos on YouTube (2006a; 2006b).

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evangelism which they hold, to some extent unconsciously, in the mind. Their frequent caveats, qualifications and disclaimers betray a struggle for lived authenticity in the face of inner cognitive and spiritual dissonances.

> We do want to do it in the way Jesus would have done. [...]

> There was a hesitancy even in the ministry of Jesus. He offered only the aspect of the gospel that was most relevant to the person concerned. [...]

> Lord, help us to be appropriate and discerning at all times. (Group 16)

Most commonly, I found that people in practice suppress any disabling dissonance at work through a discreet avoidance of the more polemical aspects of their traditional evangelical package. Appropriateness, for them, is worked out in an explicit, but tempered expression of personal faith, in which they are very hesitant to voice any critical or exclusive beliefs. These mellow evangelists, often women, lead on the positive humanistic and psychological benefits of their faith, deferring or downplaying any theologically or ethically challenging issues which might alienate clients or colleagues at work. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) suggests that there are many other ways of reducing dissonance between inner attitudes and socially sanctioned behaviour,[15] some of which can be discerned in the variant approaches to explicit Christian witness which I now consider (see Table 6b below, p.114).

Apart from the obvious psychological tactic of displacing all evangelistic efforts towards far-flung strangers,[16] one of the commonest ways of avoiding the immediate dissonance of explicitly religious testimony in a socially forbidding setting is to employ what Lips-Wiersma and Mills identify as 'limited signalling' (2002, p.195). Aware of the risks of overt discussion of taboo topics, _Subtle Signallers_ resort to a range of more indirect verbal or non-verbal signifiers to identify their personal commitment. Car stickers and fish badges, screen savers

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[15] The use of evangelism to offset the discomforts of cognitive dissonance is perceptively explored in Hull (1985).

[16] Such an approach might exempt colleagues and clients from directly evangelistic engagement, whilst harnessing the income gained from 'tentmaking' to finance the 'Christian work' of mission further afield. Through such a tactic, any dissonance felt between an uncritical pursuit of economic power at work and an energetic commitment to 'the gospel' in private life can be ethically and structurally displaced.

and crosses, WWJD[17] lanyards and wrist bands beam out a silent message inviting interest and response.

> On top of the season tickets this Christian put a little card that said, "God is Peace", and then there was a scripture bit. And that was what he felt was his sort of evangelizing card, because there was nothing else he could do. He couldn't put up a sticker in the depot or anything like that. But the hope was that if anybody asked for one of these tickets, of course they would see this text at the top. (Group 9)

In negative terms, the _Subtle Signaller_ hopes to avoid the potential offence of direct conversational engagement. Yet it would be simplistic to imagine that an unspoken message is inevitably less threatening than one which dares to speak its name: certain signals can be anything but 'subtle'. One informant told of the outrage felt within an office when a Christian member of the team selected a biblical text denouncing homosexuality as a screensaver for his computer within yards of the workspace of a gay colleague (Group 1). The current unease over the wearing of Muslim religious headgear in schools and offices similarly illustrates the depth of provocation that can result, in sensitive contexts, from even non-verbal symbols of religion. The judgement as to what is appropriately 'subtle' is therefore highly contextual.

In positive terms, the _Subtle Signaller_ hopes that her deliberate, albeit tacit, message will evoke a response of curiosity concerning her faith.

> I always wear a cross. Nine times out of ten I wear a cross. And I collect crosses because I like them. Because as a jewellery item I like them, and it's been something that [my husband's] always been fond of buying for me, so I have quite a collection and some of them are particularly unusual. And that's often a conversation-starter. [...] I had an amber one bought for Easter. And it's amazing. I did put that on immediately on Monday and kept it on for a couple of days because [_with a knowing smile_] I knew I'd get a reaction. So I did it deliberately, and actually the reaction I got was, "Oh that's beautiful. Did you have a lovely Easter?" And it was just an ability to say, "I'm acknowledging Easter." (Interview 5)

Although subtle signals occasionally draw out an interested response from colleagues who do not share the same Christian faith, more commonly the coded message emitted is picked up predominantly by fellow-believers. The badge of belief can be an encouragement to others who feel isolated in their faith,

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[17] WWJD is the colloquial, sub-cultural, abbreviation for a range of Christian merchandise bearing the logo: 'What would Jesus do?'

strengthening the witness of those who feel anxious to come out of the closet on their own. Baelz and Jacob, for example, describe what happened when a senior industrialist let it be known in the company that he was training for ordination.

> Gradually, people began to sport fish badges, and little crosses on their lapels. One man was a churchwarden and a district engineer who had never done so before. [...] People began to call into the office and talk about it, and to ask me to pray for people and situations. And again people would have fish badges or crosses on their lapels. [...] It's as though people say to themselves, "If he says it's alright, and if he's not frightened to admit openly that he is a Christian, then it must be alright for me." (Baelz and Jacob 1985, p.22f.)

A net increase in symbolic signalling – even if primarily restricted to those of shared faith – still effectively raises the profile of Christian presence in a workplace, creating the preconditions for a more fully adequate and locally appropriate witness to develop. As a missionary then, the _Subtle Signaller_ takes an intermediate power position between the reticence of silent types and the directness of the overt evangelist. Judging that an oblique message is better than no message at all, he looks for muted ways to display his own faith identity that will leave the option for response in the hands of interested colleagues.

A more complex response to spiritual dissonance is enacted by those I have designated as _Secret Agents_. For certain Christians there is an undercover character to their witness at work which, by its very nature, is unlikely to be revealed with full transparency to a curious researcher. The fatuous jokes, collusive asides and occasional denials voiced by my informants hint at the presence of a 'mafia mindset' which is acted out as in the manner of an evangelistic hero-fantasy, perhaps as a diversion from the less exciting actualities of a workplace role.

> A man standing on a train platform was asked one day: "Who are you?" He replied, "I am a Christian, thinly disguised as an accountant." (Greene 2001, p.17)

A glamorous secret identity which operates by stealth in the 'worldly' marketplace to draw others into the life of the 'kingdom' gives spiritual point and purpose to those who might otherwise discern little of theological value in the responsibilities of their daily work. There is a certain thrill associated with the invitation to form 'a secret army working for God at the boundaries' (Etchells 1995, p.58), and if the romantic idea of being entrusted with a hidden mission

gives meaning and dignity to otherwise dull and demotivating jobs then it may represent a significantly empowering pastoral message.

> God gets real pleasure from sending his agents on secret reconnaissance missions with personal instructions no one else knows about. (Hybels and Holberg 1994, p.27)

The dangers of entertaining an uncritical fantasy of this nature, however, are readily apparent. Even as a relatively harmless form of play, the idea that the main reason for going to work is to pursue an undercover evangelistic role is a moderate distraction from the larger moral and theological challenges of the work itself. More seriously, the use of a counter-cultural rationality to legitimate any kind of underhanded or subversive agenda in the context of a clearly agreed working contract is simply dishonest. Those who approach the working day with ulterior motives, justifying to themselves their abuse of an employer's time or resources to further the particular interest of their church, will be seen as sneaky 'Trojan horses' (RJN March 2005), whose longer term witness to the gospel of truth will be seriously compromised.

According to John Hull, the drive to reduce cognitive dissonance in those whose minority beliefs are ignored or even ridiculed by a hostile world takes on an aggressive edge in certain predatory forms of mission and evangelism (1985, p.128f.). Rather than engaging with the painful incongruities and estrangements of their secular role and identity, those I have dubbed _Crusaders_ turn their discomfort outwards in a campaign to win others to their sectarian cause. Since the drive to 'evangelism', in this ideal type, springs from bondage and weakness rather than from freedom and strength, it becomes necessary for _Crusaders_ to identify dependent or vulnerable groups who might be susceptible targets for their practice of 'mission'. Seen as potential converts, these unsuspecting colleagues and clients represent an opportunity for shoring up the shaky plausibility structures which maintain the believing community against the assaults of a surrounding secular culture.

Wherever this unhealthy dynamic is enacted within the power structures of a working community there is the potential for personal harassment or structural abuse. I have observed too often the satisfaction – sometimes a barely concealed glee – when members of a workplace prayer cell identify a colleague suffering from depression, or marital difficulties, or even cancer, who might become the next target for their 'pastoral concern'.

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> Now the lady with cancer died in August, and the company put out an announcement and a photograph of her [on the intranet]. Now this particular woman who's a Christian sent out an email to the Christian group saying, "I was able to pray with the lady who died at the hospice on her deathbed." (Interview 15)

In my own experience as a hospital doctor I have faced repeated requests from outside Christian enthusiasts seeking access to vulnerable patient groups whom they wished to 'support' and to whom they felt called to 'witness'. Being seen as a gatekeeper who might be persuaded to lower the boundaries of privacy which protect sufferers from the unwarranted intrusion of zealous self-appointed 'pastors' has acutely heightened my own sensitivies to the exploitation of the needy which is required for the gratification and reassurance of crusading Christian individuals and groups (RJN December 2005).

On a broader canvas, I have noted the alliance of a crusading mentality in some of my informants with the global entrepreneurial aspirations of their employing company. These new-style international missionaries will seize any opportunity to penetrate unreached parts of the world with their gospel.

> If you look at a sort of map of the world, take out all the places you can't send Christian missionaries, and you've probably got half the world. If you take out all the places you then can't send Christian doctors and nurses and sort of aid workers, you've got an even larger proportion. But if you look at the places you couldn't go as a business person, you've probably only got North Korea. (Interview 12)

Mixed motives for cross-cultural economic engagement abound. What is most troubling in the _Crusader_ mentality is a tendency to pursue uncritically an evangelistic agenda, whilst remaining oblivious to – or even collusive with – a blatantly exploitative commercial relationship with relatively powerless international partners.

> Annabel works for a major multi-national company which is developing new business through the extraction of gas and oil from Nigeria. Seemingly oblivious to the human and environmental cost of this highly controversial field of commerce[18] she takes her share in the company's huge profits in this field whilst enthusing to me about the 'very

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[18] The loss of life from pipeline explosions, with the attendant environmental degradation and economic corruption associated with this industry is exposed in Peters (2004). The growing domination of multi-national companies is reflected in the description of Nigeria by local human-rights attorney Oronto Douglas as a country designed by corporations for corporations that "simply disregards the people who live there." (ibid., p.130).

exciting' ways in which this new 'mission field' is opening up to the influence of visiting Christian business partners. (Interview 15)

Steve is an IT consultant working for a company which outsources the bulk of its technical work to a developing country. He presents to me an altruistic and explicitly Christian rationale for creating relationships with a high level of economic dependency, in which highly skilled workers are paid a fraction of the costs of their professional equivalents in the UK. Unconcerned by the gross inequalities in his commercial relationships, he takes every possible opportunity on overseas trips to introduce an evangelistic element into all his business conversations. (Interview 12)

The variations of explicit witness are tabulated in Table 6b below, where I summarize the underlying rationales and typical attitudes for a range of recognizably evangelistic styles of engagement at work.

| Position | Variations of explicit witness | | | |
	Evangelists	Subtle Signallers	Secret Agents	Crusaders
Slogan	Never miss an opportunity for the gospel	Show your badge of belonging	Purpose-driven work	A world to win
Attitude to work	Arena peopled by souls in need of salvation	Neutral background to religious self-expression	Dark place to be infiltrated by agents of light	Mission field to be conquered by spiritual warriors
Goal	Sharing good news with individuals	Expressing Christian presence	Inviting people to church	Reaching the lost
Ethic	Conversionist	Faithfulness	Boldness	Obedience
Target group	Clients and colleagues without a personal faith	Interested or initiated colleagues and clients	'Non-Christians'	People in non-Christian societies or sectors
Practical Christology	Christ the saviour of all people	Christ the Lord of my life	Christ against culture	Christ over culture
Doctrinal base	Salvation	Remnant	Church (=Kingdom)	Judgement
Spirituality	Kerygmatic	Exile	Heroic	Triumphalist
Expression of distinctiveness	Explicit within immediate relationships	Subtly explicit	Stealthily explicit	Explicit within targeted relationships
Power dynamic	Opportunist	Subliminal influence	Subversive	Imperialistic

Table 6b Variations of explicit witness at work

I have characterized the *explicit* model of Christian witness in contrast to an *implicit* model which, for most of the time, prefers a more reticent posture. Of course, there are times when even the most reticent believer will stick their head over the parapet to speak out over an issue of importance. Informants often told me of critical incidents when their habitual discretion was pushed to the limit and they knew, as a matter of integrity, that they must take a stand. These are the martyrial moments of Christian witness, when an issue is of such seriousness that it seems that one's sense of spiritual and ethical identity, if not one's whole life and livelihood, is on the line.[19] For most Christians, such moments represent a critical test, a limit situation. They evoke the etymological link between 'witness' and 'martyr' which, as Paul Ricoeur noted, is a link not made without danger (1971, p.443).

The difference between an *implicit* and an *explicit* model of witness is that for the former such moments of challenge and conflict are exceptional. They are moments of profound provocation, even of social violence, when beliefs and values which, for reasons of peace and privacy, are rarely expressed in public 'explode into explicitness'.[20] It is the characteristic of the *explicit* witness, however, to normalize the exceptional and to subvert the taken-for-granted demarcation of public and private, making the explicit expression of faith into a routine duty of Christian discipleship. It is this judgement which needs to be carefully and contextually evaluated.

6.2.2.2   Theological evaluation

Evangelism is, or ought to be, about good news. Why, then, have I found it necessary to criticize the current evangelical enthusiasm to bring the gospel out of the corralled realm of the churches right into the heart of the workplace?

There is much to welcome in the increasingly influential 'Faith in the Workplace' movement. It has brought healing and affirmation to many Christians who have felt undervalued by the church's chronic disregard of the lay vocation in secular work. Sunday and Monday have been reconnected. It has fostered fresh interest in the spirituality of work, offering patterns of prayer and reflection

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[19] Studies of whistleblowing consistently reveal that those who speak out in criticism of serious legal and ethical violations are highly likely to face occupational martyrdom. See Vinten (1997).
[20] This phrase capturing the disruptive impact of public testimony comes from David Tracy (1981, p.4).

ranging from Brother Lawrence's 'practice of the presence of God' to the insights of the Rule of Saint Benedict.[21] It has helped many people to recognize 'that God could be here in the workplace and that he could be very interested in very practical things' (Interview 15).

With the strong sense of purpose characteristic of contemporary evangelicalism, this movement has challenged the cultural conventions which place workplace relationships beyond the purview of the church, boldly 'invading secular space' (Robinson and Smith 2003). No longer need the 'fringe' of the church be considered merely in relation to domestic or neighbourhood proximity. Instead, taking the mobility of contemporary work patterns seriously, the movement encourages a pattern of relating and evangelizing which harnesses the full power of occupational networks (Church of England 2004, pp.4ff.).

> Church-based evangelism is often a cold contact farm. Meanwhile, back in the workplace, the average Christian has already built bridges to 'the fringe and beyond', has already developed relationships and already speaks their co-workers' language. Warm contacts. And on average over a hundred of them. (Greene 2001, p.7)

As a young and vigorous movement, touching a point of felt need in many church members, the 'Faith in the Workplace' lobby is doing a great deal to re-integrate and re-envision previously fragmented aspects of Christian life and discipleship.

Yet I have major concerns about the movement, broadly considered, which focus on its largely uncritical and frequently insensitive approach to secular power and authority. In my case study of *WorkNet*, through my visits to a number of evangelical workplace cells and mission events, and through a close reading of a variety of popular books and training materials in this genre, I have detected a recurrent tendency to co-opt uncritically any social or economic or professional source of power which might advance the interests of the evangelist. Relationships are approached in instrumental ways for the opportunities which they afford, and the doors which they open – 'for the gospel'. Whilst the importance of relationships of trust and friendship and disinterested service are frequently asserted, there are deep contradictions in an agenda which makes the quality of those relationships subservient to their potential as a platform for the explicit promotion of a decontextualized Christian message.

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[21] See Brother Lawrence (1989) and Dollard, Marrett-Crosby et al (2002).

This explicit posture of Christian witness in a workplace setting, through its desire to give a fully *adequate* presentation of its kerygma, pays inadequate attention to the *appropriateness* of its methods for a context where moral accountability and social sensitivity are of paramount importance for a fully Christian demonstration of good news.

Between the Niebuhrian extremes of 'Christ of culture' and 'Christ against culture' lies a beckoning tract of middle ground in which Christian witness is neither demurely veiled nor flagrantly paraded. To interpret this sensitive position of dynamic balance, I recount a story heard from long ago.

6.2.3 Dialogical witness: Sitting on the fence?

Israel. 701 BCE. Sennacherib's army is besieging the holy city of Jerusalem. The military bombast of a dominant Assyrian empire is pitted against the faith experience of a small and vulnerable kingdom of Judah in a dramatic series of conversations which take place at the wall of the city (2 Kings 18-19). The Assyrian chiefs engage the representatives of the Judean King Hezekiah in lengthy negotiations across the wall. In a fascinating exchange, the Assyrian spokesmen begin the parley in the Hebrew language, demanding Hezekiah's surrender and setting out the terms. The Israelites, however, insist on using Aramaic, which is the common commercial language of public negotiation, reserving the native, everyday, heart-language of worship for the faithful community 'behind the wall'.

Walter Brueggemann (1991) takes this story as paradigmatic for the twin tasks of Christian faithfulness in the public sphere. Christians in this context need to be bi-lingual: nurtured on the one hand in the identity-forming symbols of their own worship and witness, whilst becoming fully fluent and confident on the other hand in the grammar and dialect that belongs to the powers-that-be.

> Christians should be nurtured to be bilingual, to know how to speak the language on the wall in the presence of the imperial negotiators, but also how to speak the language behind the wall in the community of faith, where a different set of assumptions, a different perception of the world, a different epistemology are at work. The conversation on the wall is crucial, because the Assyrians are real dialogue partners who must be taken seriously. They will not go away. But unless there is another conversation behind the wall in another language about another agenda, Judah on the wall will only submit to and echo imperial perceptions of reality. When imperial perceptions of reality prevail,

everything is already conceded. If the conversation with the empire at the wall is either the only conversation or the decisive one, Israel will decide that Yahweh is indeed like all other impotent gods and consequently will endorse imperial policies as nonnegotiable realities. The ground for any alternative will have been forfeited. (Brueggemann 1991, p.44)

Central to Brueggeman's argument is his clear-sighted reading of the power-gap between the two discourse communities. The context is a serious 'mismatch between an imperial power and a tiny kingdom without visible resources' (p.41). The onus is then on the believing minority to develop an intentional and skilful response to the challenge of those who do not share their faith, or may be hostile to the commonwealth envisioned by the faith community. Of course, such a pessimistic view of the secular world may not always be entirely fair, and Brueggemann is careful to note (p.43) that it may be a harsh reading of imperial negotiators as a type. 'Perhaps they are not always so hostile, and perhaps more common ground can be found. But the truth is that they speak a language which is for the community behind the wall not only a foreign language but a secondary language in which serious matters are not primally expressed.'

The first essential task for Christians in this context is to become fluent in the sophisticated, public language which carries the dominant social agenda. This is the only language available for effective engagement 'on the wall'. But there is a second and less obvious task for Christians in public life, which is to nurture the communal language 'behind the wall' in which the story of God's actions in the world can be interpreted. Only by attending to this language with its counterperceptions of reality can they discern a meaningful response to the challenges of the wider world. Without this 'thicker' repertoire of richly referential spiritual and symbolic language, they are left with only the thinned and attenuated discourse of prevailing pragmatism.[22]

I was introduced to this exegesis by Bernard, who used it to explain to me his vision of witness as an _Ambassador_. Bernard is a Quaker academic colleague engaged in the Christian peace witness. With typical ambassadorial initiative, it was Bernard who had approached me for an interview because he wanted the opportunity to reflect on the theological meaning of his life's work. Reflecting on many years of skilled diplomatic involvement in one of the major NGO's, he

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[22] The idea of discursive 'thickness' and 'thinness' comes from Walzer (1994).

spoke of delicate negotiations and high-level meetings where his working language had to be 'the language of the international human rights protection system.'

> So you're speaking to them in those moments in that language. Using that language, you have to be very fluent in it. But for me what is so extraordinary about this, why it's so resonant, is that I came to understand how I could function in those situations, and speak that language of negotiation, but at the same time be very alert to my mother-tongue, my faith, and allow that in subtle ways to inform the way in which I was conducting those meetings. So I find that terribly exciting as a way of thinking about what it is to be an activist and negotiator who works from a deep basis of faith but recognizes that an explicit language of faith may not be heard, it may not be appropriate in certain fora. (Interview 18)

Speaking to me of his public role, Bernard was smooth, professional and articulate, presenting the impressive outward face of a man well versed in complex diplomatic negotiations. Yet as he spoke of his 'mother-tongue', the language of prayer and faith and belief, an inner fire flickered. His eyes moistened, he put his hand to his belly, and the cool fluency of the public ambassador gave way to the intimate voice of deep-rooted conviction.

> You have to have this other language which isn't appropriate to that [public] moment, and it's not the language you're going to speak in that very delicate position, but it's *there* at the roots of your being, so that it's informing your negotiation. It's *there*. (Interview 18)

For Bernard, his Christian identity is of paramount importance. Whilst he has proved the value of translating his convictions into a working language that others can accept, he is acutely aware of the dangers of becoming 'so fluent in that language that you lose touch with your roots.'

> And you can, you know. I've seen lots of people in the NGO world who actually in a sense, gradually over time, because they're constantly operating in this environment of high politics, diplomacy etc., in a sense become absorbed into that realm, and in a sense they lose their edge, you know, their voice. And so you *have* to nurture your mother-tongue. (Interview 18)

In line with Hauerwas and Brueggemann, and true to his own Pennsylvanian Quaker roots, Bernard defends 'the legitimacy of a sectarian hermeneutic' (Brueggemann 1991; Nation and Wells 2000). It is this 'sectarian' discourse, celebrated behind the wall of an intimate faith community, which has

made him capable of 'dreaming and visioning, remembering and hoping, caring and fearing, compassion and passion'. Compared with this evocative language, the conversation at the wall, conducted according to imperial rationality, is a poor relation. 'For there the subject is about battalions, quotas of horses and riders, deadlines, and performance' (Brueggemann 1991, p.61).

For a Christian *Ambassador*, however, both languages and both conversations are indispensable. Moreover both conversations must be held accountable to a thorough-going theological critique.

> The liberal temptation, felt by those embarrassed at the sectarian narrative, is to believe that the conversation at the wall is the only conversation and that all needs for conversation can be met there. That, of course, is not countenanced by any of the Judean voices in our textual encounter with Assyria. None of those in the story seem like very good liberals. They all know there is another conversation.
>
> The conservative temptation, held by those enamored of the sectarian narrative in its uncriticized form, is to imagine it is the only conversation and to conclude that anyone who wants conversation must join this one. (Brueggemann 1991, p.61)

Those who are called to be Christian *Ambassadors* must not only be proficient in two languages, but they must also maintain a critical awareness of the relative *appropriateness* and *adequacy* for their specific witness of each discourse. This calls for a sensitively tuned hermeneutic, a high degree of spiritual poise and a passionate commitment to an exquisitely public form of Christian witness. The fence is not an easy place to sit.

6.2.3.1 The dialogical theme, and a variation

I have sketched my ideal type of the *Ambassador* as the clearest case of the middle ground position, where translation is the primary task of Christian witness. Not all Christians are quite so exposed to public scrutiny in their work, however, and there is another more common style of Christian witness which may be less acutely visible, but no less significant in its long-term influence. I have called these Christians *Connectors* (see Table 6d below, p.122).

Connectors look hungrily for the points of integration between work and worship, faith and ordinary life. Sensing intuitively the holiness of everyday life, they seek to reflect the presence of God in all that they undertake. In contrast to the *Evangelist*, who yearns to 'bring Christ into the workplace', *Connectors* are

profoundly aware of the Christ who is already there, present and active, blessing and transforming the work of their hands.   For these reflective believers, the dialogical task is first and foremost a contemplative work of personal recognition and articulation of the ceaseless activity of God in their midst.

> Jackie is a senior nurse in the local health authority. Her working days are filled with administration and finance, policies and procedures, strategic planning and consultation. Her responsibilities seem far removed from the hands-on patient care which first motivated her career. Yet while colleagues around her become increasingly cynical, Jackie strives to hold on to the Christian convictions underpinning her vocation, and to give voice to values that matter. On her desk, she keeps before her a simple word chart (Table 6c below) as a reminder of the connections that fundamentally inspire her approach to work. (Group 11)

Church (religious) words and phrases	World of work words and phrases
Care for the poor/ children of God/ care for the vulnerable	Rights/equality/justice
Loving one's neighbour/ fellowship	Teamwork/ sharing/ community care/ putting others first
Confession/ repentance	Ownership of responsibility/ truth/ guilt/ apology
Redemption/ grace/ salvation	Forgiveness/ rescue
Mission	Business trip/ representative/ delegate/ engagement
Going the extra mile	Unpaid overtime/ work at home/ generosity
Resurrection	The new life that comes with a new job/ house/ baby/ wheelchair/ cure
Led by the Spirit/ word (Word)	Inspiration/ idea
Creativity	Sculpture/ decorating/ poetry/ gardening/ computer programming/ architecture/ physics
Freedom	Autonomy
Stewardship	Use of resources/ responsibility
Contemplation/ meditation	Value judgements/ decisions
Covenant	Contract/ policy/ agreement
Fruits of the Spirit/ talents	Skills/ abilities
My brother's keeper	Safety/ efficiency/ management
Conscience	Morals/ ethics
Death	Death/ redundancy/ bereavement/ loss
Worship (worthship)/ love	Valuing people for themselves
Salvation	Restoration to health/ wholeness

Table 6c   Church/Work parallels in religious and secular language (from Johnson 1996)

Another health service manager is Janet, who reads each morning from a poster by her desk an old prayer from John Baillie (RJN July 2006).

> O Holy Spirit of God, visit now this soul of mine, and tarry within it until eventide. Inspire all my thoughts. Pervade all my imaginations. Suggest all my decisions. Lodge

in my will's most inward citadel and order all my doings. Be with me in my silence and in my speech, in my haste and in my leisure, in company and in solitude, in the freshness of the morning and in the weariness of the evening, and give me grace at all times to rejoice in Thy mysterious companionship. (Baillie 1936, p.89)

Janet makes no attempt to outwardly 'translate' Baillie's classic prose into contemporary office language. She knows that too much would be lost in translation. Her approach is more internally questioning, more subtly allusive in public. Before making tough decisions, she sits back to ask herself and her colleagues, 'What is it that suggests our decisions?' At the start of a strategy meeting, she will invite the team to bring with them 'the best of their imaginations'. Those who regularly visit her office and know the importance of her faith will recognize the connections. Enough said.

Position	Variations of dialogical witness	
	Ambassadors	**Connectors**
Slogan	All things to all people	Seeing God in all things
Attitude to work	Inspired by Christian vision	Interpreted in Christian categories
Goal	Commending Christian vision for work	Understanding how God is present and at work
Ethic	Integrity	Integration
Target group	Thoughtful colleagues	Sensitive colleagues
Practical Christology	Christ and culture in paradox	Christ and culture synthesized
Doctrinal base	Go-Between God	Holy Wisdom
Spirituality	Contextual	Reflective
Expression of distinctiveness	Explicit and interpreted	Implicit and interpreted
Power dynamic	Mediating	Affirming

Table 6d Variations of dialogical witness at work

Connectors are watchful and discerning. They know that 'interpreting secular terms into religious language is often easier than putting religious language into the secular'. But they insist that the parallels are possible 'because the love of the incarnate God is present and similarly active in both, although recognized and named differently' (Johnson 1996, p.8). Less dramatically than the *Ambassadors*, whose every words are weighed in highly critical exchanges,

Chapter 6: Missionary Positions

Connectors dig deep into the soil of their own understanding and inspiration, so that the daily outworking of Christian wisdom will be seen in the fruit of faithful work. The different emphases of the two variations of dialogical witness are summarized in Table 6d above (p.122).

6.2.3.2   Theological evaluation

If good news in action is the preferred missionary stance for an incarnational catholic spirituality, and good news in words the default position for a conversionist evangelical attitude, then a dialogical interpretation of good news is the genius of an educated liberal approach – searching, sophisticated, and satisfied with neither sentimental gestures nor shallow half-truths.

A dialogical approach has been championed in the British workplace through the theological work of many Industrial Mission chaplains, positioning themselves self-consciously on the ambassadorial interface between the proclamations of the church and the commercial practice of shifting economic contexts. The trick is to 'make the connection at both ends' (Group 2), and it requires not a little discernment and discipline.

Peter Challen introduced a practice of 'theological audit' through the South London Industrial Mission (1996), and I have applied and developed its potential in a number of healthcare settings. It is an energizing process, whether embraced as an individual or corporate programme, which adopts one of a range of theological reflection exercises – from personal journaling to value clarification, narrative exploration and the implementation of a formal audit cycle (Whipp 2001, pp.60-66) – for the purpose of making critical connections between 'private' belief and 'public' responsibilities. Essential for the success of any programme is a commitment to change.

Ambassadors and *Connectors* have typically discovered their commitment to change in experiences of profound and disturbing dissonance (see Section 3.2, pp.37ff. and Section 6.2.2, pp.109ff. above). Through a passionate commitment to their working responsibilities and a loving attention to the wisdom of their faith tradition, they find themselves impelled to do the correlational work of 'loco-public' theologians – typically on their own. Rarely do these adult Christians feel themselves well supported by the wider church. They may draw comfort from the generalities of a 'spirituality of work' approach from their local church or,

increasingly, from their workplace management, but unless they have encountered an adult educational initiative such as that of 'theological audit' the more substantial resources of public correlational theology may remain largely unknown.

It is perhaps for this reason that the quality of 'translation' actually achieved by the majority of lay (and even professional) Christians on the boundary is fairly modest – only occasionally *appropriate*, only partially *adequate*. Very few of my informants felt that they were even beginning to get it right.

> Translating from another language is, in the end, impossible. (Group 12)

Any dialogical stance can therefore appear, in missionary practice, quite mediocre – typical, perhaps, of the sort of feeble rapprochement between a secular ideology and more full-blooded expressions of Christianity that is often expected from the liberal establishment. But as a parabolic narrator of the 'impossible possible', the interpreter poised precariously on the wall might be in the best eschatological position to catch a glimpse of the coming Kingdom of God.

6.3   Engaging with power

I have learned through a typological survey of *implicit*, *explicit* and *dialogical* styles of witness that the Christian engagement in the workplace can never be innocent of the realities of power.

Although I began my search for a 'loco-public' theology of witness with Niebuhr's clear-cut framework of 'Christ and culture', I have found that his supra-contextual categories, of agreement and opposition and something more subtle in between, leave many questions unexplored concerning the way that Christians position themselves in respect of the prevailing powers of economic or professional or socio-political context. It is a critical sensitivity to these powers, whether at the micro-level of the office or at the macro-level of global religious politics, which crucially determines the integrity of any individual or corporate missionary position.

I referred in Chapter 4 (see pp.53 and 70 above) to the work of Walter Wink (1984; 1986; 1992) which has brought the realities of power sharply into focus for Christians engaging with contemporary institutions and structures.

Through his critical programme of 'unmasking the powers', Wink offers a missiologically pertinent reframing of angels, demons, principalities and powers. He writes, 'Every business corporation, school, denomination, bureaucracy, sports team – indeed, social reality in all its forms – is a combination of both visible and invisible, outer and inner, physical and spiritual.' These systems, institutions and structures – whether sacred or secular – can do good and evil at the same time. 'They form a complex web that we can neither ignore nor escape' (Wink 1998, p.4-5).

In the case studies of this chapter I have tried to expose some of the ways in which the interplay of personal and positional, historical and religious, structural and economic aspects of power have strongly coloured the expression of and response to a Christian presence in the workplace. Wherever these powers are naïvely or wilfully co-opted for self-serving religious aggrandisement of any kind, the resulting witness will be distasteful or abhorrent. But wherever these powers are engaged in truth and love, for the liberation of individuals and their institutions, then a kind of Christian witness can emerge which is faithful and refreshing, even beautiful in its place and time.

The chief contours which emerge, then, for an appropriately and adequately critical theology of witness concern not so much the issue of how 'explicit' to be in relation to discourse, but rather more the question of how authentic to be in relation to power. In Chapter 4, I introduced a trinitarian reflection on the practice of engagement in terms of the twin virtues of *discernment* and *dialogue* (see Section 4.3 above, pp.70-72). For a more critical evaluation of the appropriateness and adequacy of any style of witness *for its context*, I now suggest three more specific marks of Christian authenticity.

The first mark of authentic witness in any particular context is that of *service*. This is the special vocation of the strong, in contexts where Christians in their work are aligned in some respect with the powers-that-be. The silent witness of the *prêtres-ouvriers* amongst the poorest working communities of war-time France was especially telling in its reversal of historic priestly status and privilege. Instead of retaining the power of a religious position for their personal and ecclesial advantage, the worker-priests put their energy and intellect (and, in some cases, their considerable political *savoir faire*) to work in the service of their fellow-workers who were least able to repay them. Likewise, in the case of the *Hidden, Holy People*, those senior professionals and executives who might be

tempted to use their positional power to promote the cause of their own religion present a characteristic reticence in order that the force of their tangible service might not be invalidated by suspicions of inappropriate self-interest. Like the kenotic Christ, their commitment to behave amidst all the enticements of workplace power 'as one who serves' (Luke 22.27) requires a considerable negative capability.

A witness of *service* is by no means inevitably silent, however. The *Ambassador* who takes scrupulous care in his presentation of an appropriately pitched apologetic can bring about significant transformations in local institutional, or even larger international settings, in ways which will work for the common good. Similarly the *Evangelist* who displays a holy boldness in raising the tone of office conversation above the level of bitchiness and gossip, whilst investing in supportive and meaningful relationships, can be an invaluable nexus of social capital in the workplace.

The second contextual mark of authentic witness is that of *hope*. This is the special vocation of the weak, in contexts where Christians in their work are excluded in some respect from the powers-that-be. The cheerful endurance of some believers, even when they are forced to adopt the position of *Closet Christians*, can be a remarkable testimony to their discovery of grace. By refusing to capitulate to the dehumanizing grind of the physical and/or spiritual unpleasantness of their working environment, such Christians bear eloquent witness to 'the hope that is in them' (1 Peter 3.15) – even in situations of abuse.

Yet there will be times when patient endurance alone is not enough, and Christians will be called to speak out 'with courtesy and respect' to confront issues of serious injustice and dishonesty. The risks of these martyrial moments cannot always be fully foreseen, and the Christian whistleblower who 'suffers for doing right' can pay a heavy penalty for their courage.

At a more everyday level, the doggedness of the *Subtle Signaller* and the sheer audacity of the *Secret Agent* bear witness to realities that transcend the shallow confines of workplace expectations. To the extent that their hope is free from escapist fantasy, their willingness to bear an eccentric testimony to a greater glory can be a force for liberation and remarkably good news.

The third mark of authentic witness, then, is that of *critical wisdom*. This is the special vocation of the prophet, in contexts where there is an ambiguous relationship between the vision of Christ and the powers-that-be. Here the

critically reflective practice of the *Connector* is an essential discipline in learning to 'interpret the signs of the times' (Matthew 16.3), engaging a careful hermeneutic of history with an astute reading of economics and loco-professional politics. In a more practical mode, it is the *Transformer* whose intentionality and capacity for relational and task-oriented engagement impels him beyond reading the signs of the times to effective and liberative praxis.

The practice of *critical wisdom* deepens and qualifies the application of both *service* and *hope* for every thoughtful Christian, enabling a witness which is acutely sensitive, but never subservient to the culture and constraints of its workplace context.

I have identified in this chapter, through a heuristic engagement with the crude categories of *explicit*, *implicit* or *dialogical* witness, a rich plurality of missionary positions any one of which might be justifiable according to a sensitive hermeneutic of theological self-understanding and contextual self-criticism. In striving to explicate the outer dynamics and inner, theological rationale of each model, I have constantly returned to the evaluative question, 'Is one model better – more adequate, more appropriate – than another?' I have concluded that a plurality of missionary positions can be defended as valid types of authentic Christian witness in the workplace, provided that they are not insensitive to crucial questions of power, and to the extent that they display the authentic marks of *service*, of *hope* and of *critical wisdom*. The question of the best missionary model is an important one, but it is never one which can be decided in abstraction from the contextual features of personal and professional, loco-political and economic factors. As Bevans concludes, 'within today's world of radical plurality and ambiguity the best answer to the question can only be: "It depends on the context"' (2002, p.140).

CHAPTER 7   SPEAKING IN TONGUES:

THE PRACTICE OF FLUENCY

> A true translation proceeds by the motions of understanding and sympathy; it happens by slow increments, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase. (Eva Hoffman)[1]

The previous chapter explored the challenge of speaking of faith at work through the practice of *engagement*, considering critically how a range of missionary positions might be appropriate and/or adequate according to their particular context at work.   In this chapter I consider the specifically communicative dimension of speaking of faith at work, which demands a considerable maturity of linguistic skill and hermeneutic sensitivity. Despite a growing recognition that the faithful expression of Christian discipleship at work involves a very wide range of practical and theological competencies,[2] the discursive dimensions of this challenge have received little formal or critical attention (Welbourn 2002; 2006, and see Section 1.3.2 above, p.10).   My aim in this chapter is therefore to consider in some depth and detail the practical questions of language which arise in the outworking of everyday practices of engagement in the workplace.

I have found in conversation with many informants that the struggle to achieve fluency in what is, effectively, a cross-cultural engagement raises profound questions not only in relation to *language*, but also in relation to personal *identity* and the use of *power* (see Chapter 1).   In Part II of the thesis, I identified some of the fresh resources from contemporary cultural studies which might inform a deeper understanding of these questions and begin to point to a theological resolution of the challenge (see Chapters 3 to 5 above).   The current chapter will draw further on these resources in a weaving together of insights from critical discourse analysis (see Chapter 5 above, and Section 7.2 below, pp.134ff.) and from hermeneutic and dialogical understandings of the self (see Section 3.3. above, pp.39ff. and Section 7.4 below, pp.154ff.).

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[1] (Hoffman 1998, p.211).
[2] David Welbourn's (2002) list of core skills for working Christians includes theological, economic, practical, pastoral, prophetic and ecclesial competencies.

My analysis in this chapter is presented around two case studies of faith-talk at work. The first case (Section 7.1) illustrates the complex *pragmatic problems* provoked by an attempt to develop a Christian witness for the workplace. In the light of this case, I reflect critically on the detailed sociolinguistic dimensions of articulating a Christian faith-perspective within the working context, outlining the specific issues relating to the enactment of *power* (Section 7.2.1), *privacy* (Section 7.2.2) and *propriety* (Section 7.2.3) with the help of insights gleaned especially from critical discourse analysis. My second case study (Section 7.3) illustrates the rich *poetic possibilities* for a confident and creative expression of the Christian self at work. In the light of this case, I reflect constructively on the hermeneutic and dialogical dynamics of an authentically Christian articulation of a contextually appropriate and adequate fluency in the workplace (Section 7.4). The chapter concludes with a theological reflection on the practice of discursive *fluency* in the light of a trinitarian vision of the good news.

7.1 Case study: "Let me tell you my testimony"

John is the pastor of a local evangelical church which has been experimenting with lay training in personal evangelism. He was interested to talk with me because of the perceived failure in his church of a recent course on '*Becoming a Contagious Christian*' (Hybels and Holberg 1994), based on the training model of a growing mega-church at Willow Creek in the USA. John's smaller British church was keen to grow in numbers, and his church members had identified a need for more confidence in personal evangelism. Perhaps, John reasoned, if the church members could be 'trained up', they would get over their 'undue nervousness' about witnessing to their faith on an everyday level, and the many contacts which people had with friends, neighbours and work colleagues could be targeted as the basis for an effective programme of outreach into the church 'fringe' in the coming months. This was John's rationale for mounting the recent lay training initiative (Interview 9).

John shares my interest in skills training, and appreciates the benefits that he himself has reaped as a Christian minister from training programmes designed to develop his sociolinguistic tools for evangelistic conversation.

> If you give people tools, it's very releasing. And that would be true of my own experience, because as a teenager I was exhorted until I was sick to share my faith, and nobody told me how. And then I went to a one day conference with Campus Crusade. They were doing training for the local schools area. And they, they gave me some tools on how to share my testimony, how to share the gospel. And I was away! (Interview 9)

Based on this positive experience as a young man of learning the 'tools of the trade' for full-time Christian evangelistic work, and supported by his perceptions of how effective marketing is underpinned by a shrewd deployment of practised and persuasive conversational skills, John recommended the Willow Creek course to his 'nervous' church members, fully expecting a happy outcome. He was therefore both perplexed and disappointed at the end of the course to find that the overwhelming majority of participants felt *less* prepared to share their faith than they had done before starting the course.

The sticking point had come when participants were asked to prepare and write out 'their testimony'. Some sullenly refused and 'dug their heels in'; others left the course; the more outspoken tried to explain what it was about the exercise that felt 'not legitimate'. John meanwhile, exasperated by the course members' refusal to adopt a tried and tested evangelistic tool, attributed their hesitancy to a 'lack of faith'.

> That's just a lack of faith thing. That's a thing, that's a sort of sense of 'Well this is just an exercise, because actually no-one's going to ask me what my testimony is.' They can't, they couldn't envisage how they were going to ever create the context at work or be in the context where they could actually share their stories. (Interview 9)

John's frustration at the negative outcome of a well-intentioned training programme reminded me of several other conversations in which informants had expressed a sense of bafflement and inadequacy on finding that their carefully rehearsed formulaic presentations of Christian belief fell upon very stony ground indeed in the workplace setting. This monologic model of personal testimony, shaped and practised for its self-consciously *adequate* narration of transformative personal faith experience within the Christian community, was felt by most of my informants to be outrageously *inappropriate* in the social setting of secular workplace relationships. Hence the stubborn resistance of John's church members to a misplaced deployment of this evangelistic 'tool'.

The idea that a style of Christian discourse based on a monologic genre could be appropriate in the setting of workplace relationships raises enormous

questions about how power is (or is not) being understood. The intricate relationship of various speech genres to social power has been studied in depth within the Bakhtinian school of literary criticism. A genre-based critique of a monologic set piece, such as the religious testimony, shows how it is organized according to complex inherited patterns of shape and style which generate a set of strong expectations which are instantly recognizable to the hearer. Lynne Pearce explains how we learn to apply the powerful communicative force of distinctive speech genres:

> Speech genres organize our speech in almost the same way as grammatical (syntactical) forms do. We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others' speech, we guess its genre from the very first words; we predict a certain length [...] and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is, from the beginning we have a sense of the speech whole, which is only later differentiated during the speech process. If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible. (Shukman 1983; in Pearce 1994 p. 73)

The ability to select the appropriate genre for a given social situation and then to communicate in it is, according to Pearce, a skill commensurate with social power. Conversely, where the speech genre selected is out of place in a particular social situation, then the inappropriateness of communicating in this fashion will be judged either as foolish and immature, or as arrogant and manipulative, depending on the direction in which the contextual power relations are misjudged. For the participants in John's training course, the application of a 'testimony' speech genre to everyday informal conversations at work felt embarrassingly inappropriate, and their sensitivity to this obvious social miscalculation undermined their confidence in the entire training programme. John's failure to understand and respect this discursive sensitivity (and still worse, to represent it as a 'straightforward lack of boldness') resulted in a pedagogic disaster.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides some useful insights into the sensitivities of certain speech genres in particular settings (see Section 5.2 above, pp.77-79). Fairclough suggests that CDA is concerned with how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in society: it is 'about ways of analyzing language which can reveal these processes, and about how people can become more conscious of them, and more able to resist and change them'

(Fairclough 2001, p.viii). In studying the practice of discourse within a particular institutional setting, he proposes several levels of consideration for a critical reading: *transactional*, *relational* and *discursive* (Fairclough 2001, p.122, and see pp.78-79ff. above).

In my case study, John presumed that his church members could be trained to practise and then perform a narrative of personal conversion to their work colleagues, just as he had practised and successfully performed the telling of his own testimony to students as a newly trained campus missioner. At the *transactional* level the activity was directly evangelistic, with the aim of persuading the hearer to embrace the Christian testifier's frame of reference or, at least, to show sufficient interest in the narrative such that he or she may be encouraged to hear more about their 'gospel'. The appropriateness of this kind of activity is very different amongst colleagues in a work place setting, where people contract to work together during agreed hours for primarily economic reasons, than in the looser setting of a student campus or the domestic setting of the church neighbourhood, where people freely associate in their own time, unconstrained by the structural necessities of earning a living. It is for such reasons that many companies seek to protect their employees from the unwarranted intrusion of proselytizing behaviour into the workplace with carefully drafted harassment procedures (Hicks 2003, p.174).

As John reflected with me about what was going on in the practice of personal evangelism, he drew many parallels with the practice of marketing. He made frequent references to the discourse of 'selling' and 'advertising' and 'promoting' a 'brand', in ways which revealed his central aim of persuading people to 'buy in' to what his church had to offer. He seemed unaware of any economic conflict of interest in seeking to harness his church members' working time and working relationships for the interest of furthering a church mission which was represented in predominantly commercial terms. Whilst priding himself on his inside knowledge of contemporary marketing approaches – he had even undertaken a course in marketing some years ago – John nevertheless assumed an air of innocent other-worldliness in justifying to me the integrity of his evangelistic approach. In crude CDA terms, what was going on at the *transactional* level was a programme of ecclesial expansion manned by someone else's staff.

If CDA reveals concerns at the transactional level of John's project, then even more questions are raised in considering the subjects of evangelistic discourse and their relations in the workplace. John failed to see the *relational* distinction between his own role as a pastor relating to people who voluntarily 'came under' his ministry, and the role of a lay Christian working alongside colleagues and clients who have made no choice to bring themselves into the orbit of a religious preacher. Whilst it may be perfectly legitimate for a Christian professional to stand up and preach his gospel to those who have gathered freely for the purpose of religious instruction in their own time, and whilst it is also not merely legitimate but pastorally desirable in evangelical churches for lay people to stand up and recount a personal 'testimony' for the edification of their fellow-worshippers, there is no such social legitimacy for the proclamation of religious narratives in a secular work space; and for a lay person to presume this right is seen to be at best gauche, and at worst appallingly arrogant.

More seriously, when a Christian seeking to practise his testimony at work deliberately seeks out colleagues or clients who are in some way subordinate to, or indebted to him through the structures of his work, then the imposition of 'evangelism' becomes even more manipulative and potentially abusive (Hicks 2003, p.174).

A third aspect revealed by Fairclough's approach is the connection between the questionable transactional and relational aspects of John's project and the particular *discursive* form of the testimony itself. As a monologic speech genre, the testimony promotes a unilateral form of power. According to Sampson, 'unilateral power is the capacity to define reality, influence, adjust, manipulate, shape, control, or transform the human or natural environment in order to advance one's own purposes' (1993, p.ix). All social groups observe clear rules of behaviour by which men[3] are permitted only under special circumstances to take the floor and deliver their party piece, or tell a joke, or recount a gripping personal story. Unless the monologic performer can claim a higher status than his hearers, these rules demand a significant payback of entertainment or some other desirable value. Otherwise, any breach of this social rule is considered grossly improper, and even more so when the subject matter of a non-consensual declamation is religious. No wonder that John's church members felt deeply uncomfortable

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[3] Interestingly, these rules commonly give preferential permission to men more than women in this regard.

about the preparation of a 'set piece' monologue whose delivery in the workplace context would inevitably provoke resentment and deep embarrassment.

7.2   Faith-talk at work: Pragmatic problems

As a mode of discourse, I have shown that faith-talk at work cannot be regarded as a simple extension of Christian testifying in church. I have taken a CDA approach in my first case study in order to draw out some of the key *pragmatic* factors which bear on the social legitimacy of personal religious talk in the secular workplace. The challenge of these pragmatic problems, in respect of *power* and *privacy* and *propriety*, is considerable; and, as the first case study exemplifies, it is typically underestimated by Christian clergy who operate as professionals in a very different occupational and social milieu. For this reason, I will now examine in some detail the ways in which these pragmatic dimensions operate within the 'small politics' of everyday working life (Sarangi and Coulthard 2000, p.xxiii), and how they reflect on the challenge of voicing an effective Christian witness in that context.

7.2.1 Respecting power

The neglect of the concept of power in much ecclesiological reflection on Christian institutions (Percy 1998, p.75) is in marked contrast to a persistent and sophisticated attention to the workings of power in contemporary secular organizational theory. Building on classical Weberian typologies of the sources and practices of power (Weber 1947), modern management theory is informed by immensely subtle interpretations of the relationship between the enactment of power and the skills of communication.

I have already emphasized the crucial importance of power in the enactment of an appropriate Christian witness in the workplace, and have discussed how a careful reading of the lines of power both *behind* and *within* the use of language in the workplace is an indispensable requirement for effective communication, both professionally and politically (see Section 5.2 above, pp.77-79, and Fairclough 2001, p.38). Such political astuteness is not universal amongst Christians, however, and I have found that an unbecoming level of naïveté is

sometimes apparent in those who indulge the kind of spiritual hero-fantasy which sets aside prudent considerations of discernment and respect.

> Greg was a very junior physicist in the radiology department when he found himself taking a lead position in the hospital's Christian fellowship. Excited by the vision of influencing the entire workforce for Christ, he contacted the Chief Executive to invite him to confide his pressures and anxieties in the praying fellowship. A more senior Christian colleague gently explained why it was unlikely that senior managers would choose to share their organizational 'pressures and anxieties' with junior employees simply because they were well-meaning Christians 'offering prayer support'. (RJN September 2005)

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. The skills of effective witness, in a power-saturated milieu, lie not in a heedless disregard of the realities of local power structures but rather in a determination to engage those powers with critical discernment and, where necessary, with resistance (Wink 1992; Pattison 2000). For this task, the ideological tools of CDA to probe the workings of power both *behind* and *within* discourse are invaluable.

The immense power *within* discourse has been recognized by many critics of the all-pervading 'management-speak',[4] as noted at a recent training event for spiritual care practitioners in a local general hospital.

> The guest preacher spoke of the dominance of 'management-speak' in the modern hospital, with its use of words such as 'input' and 'output', 'purchaser/provider', 'effectiveness', 'efficiency', 'internal markets' and so on, raising the question as to how eager the chaplains and other carers should be to go along with this 'local and technical language', and whether they might not rather develop 'a defiant language system' which affirmed the counter-cultural values of their faith, and their readiness to wait upon mystery, passivity and a willingness to suffer. (Herbert 1998)

A critical and suitably ironic sensitivity to the inordinate pretensions of managerial and professional jargon has become an essential survival skill for many sectors of contemporary working life, as satirical television programmes such as '*The Office*'[5] nicely portray. The deconstructive task of exposing shallowness and subterfuge in corporate language can be a highly enjoyable and relatively undemanding pastime. The more challenging constructive task, however, for Christians and other critics is to generate 'an alternative, evocative,

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[4] See for example Pattison (1997) and the discussion in Section 5.3 above (pp.79-82).
[5] '*The Office*' is a popular BBC 'mockumentary' based on the work of a small paper company in Slough and starring Ricky Gervais and Mackenzie Crook.

imaginative rhetoric which can be used to counter harmful rhetorics (in this case, particularly, those drawn from financial metaphors which conceive relationships only in terms of the bottom line)' (RJN March 2004).

Here the tools of CDA can be illuminating and empowering as they 'reveal our participation in patterns of the linguistic dance of which we are not conscious, and that have consequences which we find undesirable.' (Barker and Galasínski 2001, p.22). Whether our criticism is aimed at the reductionist jargon of popular managerialism or the self-congratulatory rhetoric of the evangelistic monologue, these tools can expose the hidden power interests that are at stake. Thus, for a deeper excavation of the power *within* discourse as it may be encountered in the practice of a Christian witness in the workplace, I return to the sharp questions put by Fairclough.

At the *transactional* level of analysis Fairclough puts the question, 'What is going on?' (2001, p.122). A full-blooded evangelical pattern of Christian witness, such as that exposed in my first case study, is conversionist in its aim, and will have as its primary objective the recruitment of new people into the life of the church community. To the majority of secular employers, such activity within the workplace could present a serious potential conflict of interest. Not only is the promotion of an external institution something of a distraction in the course of daily work, but the potential for perceived harassment of unsympathetic colleagues and/or customers could represent a real risk to business – whether that be commercial, or educational or service-related in its focus. At the transactional level, therefore, any style of Christian witness which seeks actively to change the beliefs and behaviour of workmates is likely to be perceived as confrontational.

A milder and more mellow approach to Christian witness, which centres first on personal integrity and engages others as partners rather than targets, is less likely to threaten the proper interests of a secular institution. Other things being equal, it might even be recognized as something of a service, contributing a sense of healthy diversity to a workforce team, and encouraging the enlightened aspiration that staff should 'bring their whole selves to work'.

CDA can thus help to inform a critique not only of the pretentious and dehumanizing aspects of managerial discourse, but also of certain ill-placed and even unethical aspects of Christian witness. At the transactional level, I suggest that a Christian in the workplace needs to ask whether her witness presents a service or a challenge to the legitimate interests of the business. If it is the latter,

then a very careful discernment is required as to why and whether that challenge is morally justified.

At the *relational-political* level of analysis Fairclough asks 'Who is involved?' and 'In what relations?' (2001, p.122). The networks of working life introduce numerous occasional and/or ongoing relationships between Christian people and their more or less immediate colleagues and customers/clients. All of these relationships are significantly inscribed by power, and often to an extent that is not immediately recognizable.

In general, I have found that members of the caring professions, who are trained in and accountable to ethical codes of practice, are acutely aware of the power inequalities in their relationships with clients. Teachers and social workers, doctors and nurses, have an instinctive feel for the vulnerability of those in their charge and are typically cautious and reflective about the ethical propriety of introducing any religious element into their caring relationship. Thus a senior social worker spoke of 'needing to be careful' and not 'overstepping a boundary' of respect.

> We mustn't be seen to be influencing particularly children and families that we're working with, and putting our faith and beliefs onto them. It's different if they ask, then we can explain. But we mustn't be seen to be actually, you know, trying to lead them one way or another. It's about supporting what they value and believe, and that could be Hinduism, it could be Jewish faith, I've had some Jewish children, and it could also be Islam, of course. It's about valuing them. (Interview 14)

Such professional restraint can be intensely demanding as Christian workers have to find a balance between the desire to express what is of immense value to themselves with the discipline of refraining from any abuse of their powers. When I asked the same social worker if there were times when she wished she was able to express more of her faith, her voice broke with tears.

> Yes, I think when children are struggling with all the abuse and [*voice breaking*] all the pain they actually experience. I wish then [*with great feeling*] that I could say, 'I want to pray with you.' But I can't. I can pray for them. So those are the times. But sometimes, sometimes they do allow me to give them a hug [*becoming more controlled and professional*] and, there again, you have to be very careful how you do that. And I would never do that without anybody else being around or without someone there. (Interview 14)

If relationships with vulnerable clients require sensitivity and restraint, then in working relationships between equals the initiation of risky topics of conversation also requires careful negotiation. Mitroff and Denton describe the typical game of 'you go first', in which 'each player is waiting for the other to make the first move, and neither is willing to make the first move' towards disclosing their personal religious beliefs (1999, p.44). The introduction of controversial views within a working relationship could have serious economic implications beyond the risk of merely social embarrassment. A fear of negative reactions is a common preoccupation of those voicing minority beliefs (Lips-Wiersma and Mills 2002), and many people have understandable anxieties about the career consequences of provoking possible offence.

> We face some deaths by being overt about our Christian faith – death of reputation, of image, of career prospects. Maybe death of a friendship. (Group 15)

The courage to speak out when necessary, however, despite the fear of negative consequences, is seen by almost all Christians as an essential part of their commitment. Evangelical Christians typically see this challenge in terms of being 'bold' in their everyday pursuit of personal evangelism.

> I keep thinking, well perhaps it's about being a bit bolder for the Lord because I might be, I might just be the only person who might ever bring this into the conversation, to get people thinking about their spirituality. They might not have thought about it. (Interview 14)

Other Christians may judge that they are only occasionally called to 'be prophetic' (Interview 10) in addressing systemic issues of injustice, or to exercise the Quaker discipline of 'speaking truth to power' (Interview 18). But in either case, the *critical* aspect of CDA can help Christians to face up to honest questions about their use (or non-use) of the power vested in them through their working relationships and responsibilities. At the relational-political level, then, I suggest that a Christian in the workplace needs to ask whether her expression of religious beliefs represents an expression of *power-over* others, or a more authentically Christian expression of *power-with* or *power-for* those with whom and for whom she works.

At the *discursive* level of analysis, Fairclough considers the connections between the patterns of language use and the practices of power (2001, p.122). In

the workplace, these links have long been recognized by skilful managers who have learned how their communicative methods of 'relating the feelings and wishes of individual employees to the fate of the enterprise are key elements in the fabrication of new languages and techniques to bind the worker into the productive life of society' (Rose 1989, p.60).[6]

> They [the managers] get really fired up when their annual results come out. You know and you go to these ra ra sessions, and they're all there, [*laughing*] giving it the ra's. I'm sitting there thinking, 'Yeah, when's coffee?' But it's the expectation that you need to be fired up. (Group 3)

The language of operational power – not necessarily (though frequently) authoritarian and oppressive – was famously dubbed by Ursula Le Guin, the 'father tongue'. This is the language which 'makes something happen, makes somebody – usually somebody else – do something, or at least it gratifies the ego of the speaker'. The 'father tongue' is a language which distances the speaker from what is spoken of, in order to offer a 'disinterested' analysis of situations. It is a language which does not expect an answer; 'It goes one way,' and it depends on the energy that comes from fission, 'the forcing of a gap between Man and his World.' It is the language you go to college to learn. 'It isn't anybody's native tongue' (Le Guin 1989).

The more relationally focussed 'mother tongue', on the other hand, is 'inaccurate, unclear, coarse, limited, banal [...] repetitive [...] earthbound, housebound.' It is essentially conversational, it always expects an answer. 'It goes two ways, many ways, an exchange, a network.' This is the language constantly ignored or belittled by speakers of the 'father tongue', regarded as 'primitive' (Le Guin 1989; cited in Williams 2000).

Although the distinction between these modes of speech is not based on any essential distinction between men and women, Le Guin's reflections suggest how the cultural and historical situation of most women has meant that they are more likely to be at home with the 'mother tongue'. What has made Le Guin's analysis a rallying cry, in certain circles, is her refusal to covet or compete with the historic political powers of the 'father tongue'. 'This is what I don't want: I don't want what men have. I'm glad to let them do their work and talk their talk.

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[6] Moore (1994) draws attention to the extent to which modern managers have aped and developed the arresting and theatrical styles of old-time revivalist preachers to direct and influence their audiences. See also Pattison (1997) and Greatbatch (2005).

But I do not want and will not have them saying or thinking or telling us that theirs is the only fit work or speech for human beings.' Instead, she urges a powerful public re-assertion of the 'mother tongue'. 'That's what I want – to hear you erupting' (1989). The parallels between Le Guin's 'mother tongue' and the intimate language of the spirit have not escaped the notice of Christian commentators.[7]

For Christians to give authentic voice to their faith in the workplace there exists, therefore, a discursive tension between the practical claims of the public 'father tongue' and the inner pull of the 'mother tongue' of faith. To some extent, there can be a real necessity to use the 'right' language as 'the price of admission to being taken seriously by others in [one's] profession' (Nash and McLennan 2001, p.45). Since fluency in the jargon of managerial or professional discourse will be judged a key indicator of executive competence, just as the ready sharing of team banter and office chit-chat is regarded as a badge of belonging for less skilled workers, a willingness and ability to display a full range of discursive skills in the 'right' language of the loco-public arena is an indispensable prerequisite for any credible Christian presence. The choice of words, therefore, at a very detailed level, can become an exquisitely delicate balancing act.

> 'Although terms such as [...] respect, trust, wisdom are used freely' in organizations with a strong values base, Mitroff and Denton found that 'words having any hint of a religious or spiritual connotation are rejected outright.' In their study of American business culture they found an underlying and strongly held belief that some religiously 'loaded' words possess the power to do more harm than good. 'Certain words are thought to be outright turnoffs, capable of turning people away from [...] universal values [...]. Certain words are also declared "too hot", "too emotionally laden", or "carrying too much emotional baggage"' (Mitroff and Denton 1999, p.155).

My second case study (in Section 7.3 below, pp.150-154) will illustrate the sheer resourcefulness required for a successful introduction of religiously rooted language into this kind of workplace culture. In judicious, fragmentary and contextually accessible ways, 'bilingual' Christians have to learn how to permeate their professional speech with religiously inspired meanings and motifs, so that their workplace discourse might be evocatively 'sprinkled with salt' (Colossians 4.6).

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[7] See my discussion in Section 6.2.3 above (pp.117-120) of Brueggemann's sectarian hermeneutic in Nation and Wells (2000).

It is at this fine-grained discursive level – 'sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase' – that a Christian worker will sometimes wonder whether her witness is becoming 'lost in translation' (Hoffman 1998, p.211). To what extent would a wholesale adoption of the secular 'father tongue' of workplace culture represent an abdication of personal spiritual responsibility? Is it possible for church words like 'freedom' and 'stewardship' to be translated into world of work phrases like 'autonomy' or 'responsibility' without remainder (see Table 6b above, p.114)? And how serious is the evasion of moral duty hidden behind such smooth executive euphemisms as 'leaner and fitter' and 'letting people go'? However pragmatically appealing it may be to embrace the workplace vernacular unreservedly, a Christian can never rest content without a scrupulous critical awareness of the spiritual and ethical agendas which its language promotes.

I have argued in this section that a clear-sighted understanding of the discursive ramifications of *power* in the workplace is essential for an authentic expression of Christian witness. For this purpose the tools of CDA are a potent guide in reflecting on sociolinguistic issues such as speech genre and lexical choice. I will now examine how the related pragmatic issues of *privacy* and *propriety* bear upon the appropriateness of personal religious talk in this setting.

7.2.2 Respecting privacy

Some notion of 'privacy' will feature in most discussions of the proper boundaries of a contractual working relationship, and can be found to underlie many of the concerns that seek to ring-fence the workplace as a thoroughly 'secular' domain (see Section 4.2.2 above, pp.61-64). In contemporary western societies, our preoccupation with privacy is a predominantly negative matter: privacy is something which is to be protected and safeguarded from unwarranted intrusions and incursions. Yet behind this superficially defensive concern is a deep-rooted positive valuation of a private realm which, according to Hannah Arendt's vision, guarantees psychological and social depth, containing and preserving things which cannot withstand the constant presence of others on the public scene. Thus the presence of a private realm undergirds the public by establishing boundaries, and it preserves the sacred and mysterious spaces of life (1958, pp.22-78). A healthy sense of privacy is therefore to be respected for the nurturative protection

that it affords to individual flourishing, and thence to the good of the wider community.

Such is the regard for privacy as a normative value in western societies that it is protected not only through national legislation but also by international convention as a fundamental human right. Yet broader cross-cultural studies of privacy, and historical analyses of its scope and meaning, reveal a wide and confusing range of valuations, within which contemporary western sensitivities are seen to be quite unusual. There are several sceptical readings of the right to 'privacy' based on legal and economic arguments; but the critique which carries most moral force is that mounted by feminists who argue that 'privacy' may function as a social control mechanism to maintain the dominance of those in power whilst enforcing silence and helplessness on others, particularly in the domestic setting.[8]

I have found McClean's analysis of the intrusion of privacy helpful in approaching the social functions of 'privacy' in the workplace (1995, pp. 47-60). He identifies four functional types of privacy in terms of *access control* (controlling personal boundaries, secrets, masks); *room to grow* (cultivating interior processes for understanding, enrichment, and integration of character and personality; and sharing the same with trusted others); *safety-valve* (for rest and recuperation from the public arena); and *respect for the individual* (insisting that one is more than a cipher and respecting others similarly) (McClean 1995; cited in McDougall 2001).

These benefits of privacy are secured in the main by the clear political lines which are commonly drawn between life at home and life at work or, in Habermasian terms, between lifeworld and system (1988). Yet the spheres of private and public life for most people are not so tidily compartmentalized, and the permeability of the workplace to some of the roles and relationships more typically associated with our 'own time' can be part of what makes work worthwhile. So we like to draw fuzzy social boundaries around the edges of the working day, when colleagues go off to the pub together after work, or enjoy a relaxing conversation in the course of a weekend business trip. And we find lacunae of intimacy within the loco-public space of the institution, where women share confidences in the ladies' toilet, and men exchange titbits of gossip in the

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[8] See for example MacKinnon (1989), and the summary of feminist arguments in Section 4.2.2 above (pp.63-64).

corridor. The full human benefits of privacy as outlined by McClean are achieved not so much by the erection of an impervious 'Chinese wall' around the workplace (Hicks 2003, p.52), as by a more subtle and complex negotiated control over how and with whom delicate private matters such as religion might safely be admitted.

It is within and amongst these 'private' interstices in the working day that sensitive questions of appropriate faith-talk typically arise. Is it any more 'intrusive' over coffee on a Monday morning for an office worker to enthuse about her weekend church activities than for her colleague to rave about his football team? How can a secular organization justify such intolerance of spiritual interests that employees are effectively asked to 'park their religion at the office door?' (Mitroff and Denton 1999, p.4). What are the dynamics around the incursion of Christian witness into the workplace that make this kind of private-public leakage such an exquisitely sensitive issue?

> Hugh spoke of how as a young single man he had appreciated the warm hospitality of an older Christian couple in the local church. But he grew increasingly uneasy when the man of the household, who worked in the same business, found frequent occasion to visit him at his open-plan workspace, where many churchy conversations took place at the desk. Hugh felt that the import of these conversations, which were conducted in hushed tones, would not have been appreciated by his secular colleagues. Reflecting some years later on his discomfort, he resented the manipulative aspect of the older man's behaviour, which seemed to trade on his social indebtedness outside of the workplace, and felt that his enthusiasm to 'witness' amounted to a stealing of the firm's time. (Interview 8)

The negotiation of social transitions – from business to pleasure, for example – is a very subtle and sensitive affair (Glenn and Knapp 1987; Drew and Heritage 1992). According to Goffman's well-known model of self-presentation (1959), the problem entails a shift in social distance which carries potential threats to face for each party (Ingram 1989). The negotiation of a shift from a businesslike working frame to a more intimate frame of sharing personal issues inevitably jeopardizes the existing understanding of roles and situation which sustains the trust and safety of the relationship. To negotiate this shift, careful overtures should be made, recognizing the risk that they might be rejected (Guirdham 2002, p.224). Any miscalculation in the process of this negotiation could result in an embarrassing transgression of privacy.

> A recent convert to Christianity recalled his eagerness to share his faith with colleagues in the staff rest room. 'The first thing I did, I was so excited, I used to get people into corners and you, you could see the *fear* in their faces. [...] They'd back off. And I realized that wasn't the way to approach people at work, and after a lot of prayer I just seemed to calm down a lot and let the Lord deal with the situation and things that arose.' (Group 1)

When Christians decide to broadcast their personal faith in the workplace, the crossing of a conventional boundary carries risks to all parties. For the Christian witness, the social risks of religious self-disclosure in a secular context can be on a par with the dangers for gay and lesbian people of 'coming out' to their colleagues (Lips-Wiersma and Mills 2002).

> It sounds funny to say this, but it is rather like the way a gay person decides to 'come out'. It's almost equally controversial these days. (RJN August 2006)

Whilst the religious person himself may suffer prejudice, being considered odd or extreme in the nature and manner of his self-disclosure, his colleagues also may suffer embarrassment and anxiety at the unsolicited intrusion of their own privacy. When things go wrong, it may become a matter for the management to intervene to protect and reassert appropriate boundaries of behaviour.

> A broadcast email was sent [by a group of Christians] to all desktops in support of the 'Stop the Afghanistan War' campaign. The strength of reaction to this unsolicited blanket invitation to a march in London led to a new internal corporate email policy being developed concerning the use of IT systems for personal use. This cited religious solicitation as being one of the banned areas. (Group 15)

The social dynamics of Christian witness therefore require careful handling. Glenn and Knapp suggest that a transition from 'work to 'play' is best managed incrementally, making only small overtures at a time, using ambiguity and guarded disclosure, and using hints and non-verbal signals to prepare the ground for a safe, or non-threatening, shift in social distance (1987). 'Gently does it,' becomes the guiding rule. Lips-Wiersma and Mills similarly find that as people of faith 'come out of the closet' they learn to interpret the subtle cues and signals of their colleagues in ways that help them to avoid negative reactions in the future and to balance their concern for group acceptance on the one hand and spiritual self-expression in the workplace on the other (2002).

Simple judgements about time and place are contextually important. The potential risks of a 'private' conversation will be more readily contained in the physically 'private' spaces of the workplace. Pastoral conversations often take place in toilets. Theological discussions are initiated in the car. Curious questions surface when colleagues are away together on off-site visits. Most of my own conversations with informants took place either off the premises, or in a quiet and unobtrusive corner of the canteen. The safety of the location makes it easier to regard any conversation, in some sense, as 'off the record'.

> A moment of privacy. The structures of hospice working with a constant entourage of junior doctors, ward nurses and specialist nurses preclude intimacy with patients and their families much of the time. This evening I called in to review a patient. Although I was on call it felt like I was going in my own time, and therefore on a more social and less professional footing. His wife and son were there. We were not likely to be interrupted by the usual business of the working day. He talked of more and more personal issues and then raised questions about my faith. I was aware how much both of us needed the protection of privacy to tread on such personal ground. And yet also, how much the trust built up over weeks of more public interactions had prepared for an honest sharing of things that matter very much. (RJN July 2003)

A consensual exchange of intimately held beliefs is a rare privilege in the necessarily wary environment of the secular workplace. It will be remembered as an oasis of candour and vulnerability, perhaps even as a moment of revelation. A Christian at work can only hope and pray to be invited (explicitly or implicitly) into such an intimate space, for to barge in uninvited would be an unwelcome trespass, even a violation. In a working community of diverse sensitivities, the Christian seeking to witness to her faith needs to consider carefully how her adventure on the boundaries between 'public' and 'private' might encourage and empower or, conversely, threaten and intimidate those in her discursive vicinity.

It is arguably a legacy of unwarranted intrusiveness on the part of representative Christians that has contributed to a political correctness of almost paranoid proportions in some institutions, which diminishes the quality of working life for everyone by disallowing large areas of personal and religious discourse from the public space. In such a jittery context, Christians need to be very gentle in reasserting the value of judicious self-disclosure, working to create the environmental conditions of trust, safety and respect where anyone may venture a private opinion without anxiety or peril.

7.2.3 Respecting propriety

> **Propriety** (n.)**.** 1. the quality or state of being appropriate or fitting. 2. conformity to the prevailing standard of behaviour, speech, etc. 3. (*pl.*) **the proprieties**. the standards of behaviour considered correct by polite society. (Collins Dictionary, 2004)

The social principles of appropriate discourse use are so deeply ingrained in everyday human behaviour that it can seem strange to bring them out for examination under the microscope. The detailed disciplines of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, however, grew out of attempts to understand the ways in which people grapple with the finer points of appropriate speech and conversation, particularly in cross-cultural settings (Cutting 2002). Beyond the simple transactional function of any form of talk, which is concerned with the expression of content and transmission of information of a factual nature, there is always in addition an interactional function focused on showing solidarity and social cohesion, or on the display of status and a readiness to compete (Brown and Yule 1983). It is these interactional dynamics of speech which have been studied in depth by sociolinguists, and whose theories have helped to inform my reading of the subtleties of expression required for an effective performance of Christian identity in the secular workplace.

Politeness theory was developed to offer a general explanation for the detailed conventions of language use (Brown and Levinson 1987), and to propose frameworks for rules and maxims of polite behaviour that could be applied across cultures (Leech 1980). A central concept in understanding the interactional strategies concerning politeness is 'facework': where 'face' describes the person someone projects themselves as being when dealing with others. The concept is directly related to the folk expression, 'lose face', and reflects the intrinsic value of 'face' as 'something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction' (Brown and Levinson 1987, p.66). Nowhere is the building and preservation of 'face' as crucial as in the demanding and, at times, threatening domain of the workplace.

Facework, in this context, is the process of using speech tactics to support face claims – in other words to maintain or save face, recover from face loss or support another person's face. In any interaction, there are negative or defensive face claims, relating to the protection of one's own (and/or another person's)

space, privacy and right not to be imposed on; and there are positive or constructive face claims, relating to the desire to be accepted and approved of by others and/or to understand and respond to another person's similar desire (Guirdham 2002, p.220). Because of the extensive power operating in workplace relationships, the potential for infelicitous speech to convey aggression or humiliation is considerable; and, conversely, the potential for well-pitched conversation to express solidarity and to build up the productive community is enormous. A facility for politeness, in its broadest sense, is thus an essential requirement for effective self-presentation at work.

The decision to disclose or, more strongly, to assert one's own values and beliefs has the potential to threaten the face of another person depending on the level of equality and the extent of social intimacy in the relationship. In the enactment of Christian testimony, not only is self-disclosure *per se* a potentially face-threatening act, but the import of the private beliefs and values expressed may also have a particular impropriety in a public and secular environment. Tacticality in speech therefore entails a wider repertoire of skills and sensitivities than mere politeness (Pearce 1994, p.37), demanding constant vigilance in the interaction between topic and timing, genre and intonation.

All of this is especially complicated in the workplace (Holmes and Stubbe 2003), where the interplay of local personal, professional and political-economic forces may suggest highly specific and contextual ways of 'doing power' or 'doing friendship' or, for my purposes, 'doing witness'.

> The bald promotion of scripturally based advice to secular business men is unlikely to sell books to a mass market. Nash and McLennan report how in the publishing business religious content may be disguised in secularized form. Thus some programs 'translate' biblical wisdom into a contemporary business presentation and disguise the source of their content. Said one successful publisher of religious books about its popular business book list: 'They may be reading Isaiah and finding it common sense, but we leave out the references.' (Nash and McLennan 2001, p. 203)

> Fear of conflict is never far beneath the surface when religious issues are voiced in a pluralistic environment. Douglas Hicks argues that the hard work of addressing difference in the workplace is most frequently avoided by a bland renaming of theological issues in inoffensive language. Thus 'spirituality' becomes a very popular, and utterly polite way of (not) saying 'God'. (Hicks 2003, p.54)

Respecting propriety involves reducing unnecessary threats (to individual and commercial interests) in the performance of Christian witness and maximizing social rapport and collegial shared interest. In this respect, the genres of *humour* and of *small talk* are of especial interest in sociolinguistic terms for their usefulness in building and maintaining solidarity within a working group (Holmes and Stubbe 2003, p.15).

Humour, nicely performed, can have a wonderfully disarming effect. Some of the most devastating parables of Jesus were able to be delivered, and arguably preserved, only because of their superbly comic quality. Humour in the workplace can be used to hedge or to attenuate face-threatening acts. So a Christian may judge that it is safe to be explicit about her faith if it is done 'in a funny and jokey way' (Interview 5). Shared humour is one of the distinctive features of workplace culture which offsets many of the alienating aspects of working life, expressing and consolidating a sense of trusted and affectionate camaraderie.

> A personal example of how playfulness and humour opens up a potential space for relationship occurred in the departmental meeting a few months ago. Melinda was talking about lost people wandering around the building trying to find the way out. I rejoined: 'And that's just the staff!' Laughter all round. Melinda said very warmly, 'You've not been here long enough to be cynical.' I knew from then on that I'd been accepted into a new level of trust and friendship within the team. My willingness as the chaplain to put aside any pretensions of moral superiority was signalled in a gently humorous way, which undercut any suspicions that I might see myself as taking some moral high ground above and beyond my secular colleagues. (RJN February 2006)

In the workplace, Holmes and Stubbe notice how humour is used to punctuate meetings and conversations, often at strategic points and where a change of topic is being negotiated. Most distinctively it is useful as a safety-valve in a difficult area, because 'humour releases tension, reaffirms group solidarity when it has been tested or challenged and provides [...] a momentary mental vacation' (2003, p.109). Without exception, my informants recognized the value of humour in offering any acceptable Christian witness in their work: showing that they were not taking themselves too seriously, whilst sharing their perspectives sincerely, but always 'in a very light-hearted sort of way' (Interview 1).

If humour is of particular value in reducing the discursive threat of religious intervention, then *small talk* is an invaluable skill in establishing a level of discursive friendliness, trust and everyday intimacy within which matters of personal belief and commitment can more readily be shared. Rather like the physical and temporal 'interstices' of the working day (see Section 7.2.2 above, pp.142-145), the exchange of small talk represents one of those boundary markers where the public space becomes more permeable to 'private' concerns. Getting the tone of small talk right is crucial to achieving acceptance within a group, and it becomes an essential sociolinguistic skill in negotiating the recognition of a distinct identity as a Christian person within a work group of diverse and potentially conflicting beliefs.

My second case study (in Section 7.3 below, pp.150ff.) will illustrate how an artful 'naturalness' in the use of humour and small talk can generate such a warmth of trust and acceptance within a working group that a striking level of religious discourse can be ventured without threat.

I have argued in this section that the performance of Christian religious talk in the secular workplace engages a range of pragmatic language skills, demanding a high level of contextual sensitivity to *power*, to *privacy* and to *propriety*. A careful, even scrupulous, attention to these dimensions will necessarily constrain the free expression of personal beliefs and values in ways that may curtail and restrict the presentation of Christian witness whilst aiming to respect the context in which that witness is expressed. To the extent that faith-talk is envisaged in transactional terms, there will be unavoidable loss in translation. In the next part of this chapter I will turn to a dialogical-hermeneutic model of witness to draw out possibilities for a more creative expression of Christian faith which is not merely appropriate to the constraints of its setting but is richly adequate to the open and expectant sharing of Christian truth.

7.3   Case study: "What would the Vicar of Dibley say?"

Karen is the deputy head of an early years learning centre. She is also an Anglican ordinand, training to be a minister in secular employment, and at the time of our conversation I was one of her course tutors. Since hearing of my research area Karen had shown a keen interest in the project, inviting me to visit her in the workplace and, somewhat unusually, insisting that I should also speak with her colleagues.

When I arrived at the centre for our research conversation, Karen first showed me round the building. The atmosphere was immediately inspiring – bright, open spaces; cheerful colours; attractive play areas; and, everywhere, smiling staff. As we walked I was introduced by name to Karen's colleagues who responded to my presence with friendly interest. It was clear that Karen was immensely proud of the ethos and the facilities of this centre at the heart of a chronically deprived urban area, and delighted at the investment in the local community made possible from European regeneration funding. I felt like a guest of honour being welcomed to a celebration of surprising human worth and achievement.

The ideological basis of the centre was articulated at every point. It was a 'deliberate' and 'focused' educational philosophy founded on respect and the cultivation of self-esteem – and it was unashamedly direct. I noticed numerous slogans – on cards and posters and displays – underlining the message to staff and children and carers alike of respect and positive encouragement.

> The most important thing you can give someone is a chance.

> This is a no put-down zone.

> All meaningful and lasting change comes from within.

> And on the way out of the centre:

> The most important resource a country has is its children.

These slogans had been intentionally chosen by the staff, and carefully positioned, to reinforce a simple and coherent message in ways that would communicate verbally to the children whilst being modelled consistently by the staff.

So we seek things out that enhance what we believe. Things like the sayings. Yes, we look for them. We pick them out, and people will go on holiday, or go out for the day and find things that you think, 'That would be fabulous in the centre.' And all of us do it. And all of us come back and say, 'Oh I couldn't resist this. Where can I hang it?' And often it isn't things that are about your particular area with them, it's about being able to say, 'Oh I know who'd love that, and I know that'd really support the work that so-and-so's busy with.' And it switches to their being tuned into each other, and having a common philosophy. And maybe something actually doesn't fit anyone at the moment, but it fits the philosophy, and somebody at some stage – even if it just little verse cards, or if it's little celebration cards, so that [the manager] and I will often buy those things together or independently, because if staff do something particular as a team, or as an individual, then we like to give them a card that celebrates that. And so we often give little cards and give little gifts that have inspirational sayings and things like that on. (Interview 5)

Karen has a keen sense for the governing role of language in the outworking of their educational philosophy. She also strongly repudiates any cynical parroting of politically fashionable sound bites that do not spring from the authentic commitments of the centre staff.

I know that some places [...] look for things and think, 'Oh that looks rather good. Ofsted would like that!' Yes we have to face Ofsted too, but we've got lots more important things to please in terms of little lives running around upstairs. And if, I think if we base our philosophies right that comes across. So we start off from having developed our philosophy and then we find things to support that. So things like 'we want high quality', 'we want people to feel their worth'. We look for material that supports our feeling on self esteem and our ability to teach that and pass it on. Because we may believe it, but we might not know how to pass it on, so we look for ways in which to do that. (Interview 5)

Karen's concern for authenticity of expression and her passionate desire to communicate a consistent philosophy reflect personal commitments that are deeply embedded in the humanistic and apparently non-theological values of her profession. When I asked her if the Christian basis of her practice was something she felt able to address explicitly with her colleagues, her initial response suggested that this would be deemed inappropriate.

Work isn't usually the setting to explore that in. (Interview 5)

Yet on further reflection, all kinds of incidents emerged in which she had found herself responding to the need or curiosity of clients and colleagues, where they had sought out a religious contribution from Karen in highly explicit terms.

Chapter 7: Speaking in Tongues

In each situation, Karen was attentive to the power dynamics at work, taking care not to overreach the appropriate boundaries of the relationship, and working wherever possible within a shared repertoire of language and understandings.

A mother sought Karen's help after a stillbirth. Karen had been the nursery teacher for her oldest son, and their relationship went back many years. After the stillbirth, the mother asked Karen if she would help with the funeral. First she asked Karen to help her dress the baby, because she couldn't bear to do that on her own. Then she asked if Karen would write some prayers for the baby and for herself, because she was 'good at that'. It was a significant learning experience for Karen to write the prayers, not using her own language and thought-forms, but in collaboration with the mother. 'You know, your prayers are equally as valid. They don't have to be special prayers. They have to come from your heart, and that's what counts.' It was important for Karen not to impose prayers that were written 'from our perspective, because I think sometimes that would be my temptation [...] and actually that wasn't what she wanted [...] She didn't want my prayers, she wanted prayers she could pray. And that's just given me a whole different focus.' (Interview 5)

The mother of one of Karen's close colleagues died of cancer, just after Christmas. She rang Karen at home over the Christmas break to let her know 'this is happening, and I just need to talk.' After the holidays it was hard for the employee to face up to returning to work so Karen visited her at home, as her manager, to see how she might be able to help with a phased re-entry programme. The employee tackled Karen very directly, asking for her Christian ministerial perspective. 'So I went with the aim of getting her back through our door, and got there to an invitation of: "I want to talk about the funeral. What would you have said? What do you believe? What does death actually mean?" [...] And I was able to use coincidentally the same kinds of language here about individuality, about being able to celebrate Mum's life, about being able to build and move on and grow through what she'd been through, about experience, about her journey [...] like, you know, we say to the children.' (Interview 5)

Despite her critical provisos about the inappropriateness of bringing a covert ministerial agenda into the workplace, Karen demonstrated a remarkable resourcefulness in expressing her faith in consensual ways that were freely accepted within an espousedly secular milieu. This high level of acceptability, which was evident not least in the relaxed manner with which her colleagues welcomed my own intrusion into their working community, owed much to the respectfulness with which Karen approached conversations involving matters of faith. From the many snippets and anecdotes she shared, I noticed a constant attentiveness to issues of power, privacy and propriety.

- Faith-related conversations were almost without exception initiated by another;

- Typically they were moderated by an oblique approach or light-hearted genre and intonation;

- Often they took place in more or less private spaces and times;

- Always they proceeded in measured steps, so that the spiritual agenda remained open and non-coercive;

- At each point Karen remained alert to potential personal or positional sensitivities;

- Her self-monitoring included an awareness of subtle and non-verbal signals of appropriateness or threat;

- Her use of language was deliberate and reflexive, creative and analogical;

- She picked up the threads of the other person's questions and interests, language and thought-forms.

This strongly consensual style of everyday witness laid the foundation for some remarkably creative discursive developments. Most memorable from our conversation were the funny, poignant and penetrating ways in which Karen could give explicit voice to her faith-perspective through allusions to the Vicar of Dibley.

> Explicitly if it's sometimes funny and jokey. Like we always have a vision-setting day at the beginning of September, for the beginning of the term. We always sit together as a team, we often have a facilitator in, and we sometimes work in the various area teams, but we work as a whole team as well about, you know, what are we signing up to this year, what are we signing up to this term, and we set ourselves an affirmation, a statement about where we're going, what we're giving to children and families, that term and that year, and that sustains us for that year. And often at times like that it'll be, 'What would the Vicar of Dibley do?' And that, that I've learned is the clue to, they actually want to know what your thought is on this, but can't ask you what you really feel as a Christian, they have to make a joke about it by bringing in the Vicar of Dibley […] so they use that very constructively as a 'What would the Vicar of Dibley do?' That, that actually usually means, 'What, what do you think about this aspect?' And sometimes that isn't about influencing a decision, that's just about their interest in what I'm doing. (Interview 5)

Karen has some physical similarities to Dawn French, so she had taken it all in good part when her colleagues bought her a doll of the Vicar of Dibley,

presenting it to her with mock-seriousness whilst serenading her with songs from '*Sister Act*'.[9] Recognizing the value of humour in negotiating awkward social transitions (see Section 7.2.3 above, p.148), Karen cheerfully played along with the game of invoking the Vicar of Dibley as an *alter ego* so as to avoid the potential threat of presenting herself directly as a self-appointed religious expert within an established secular group of work colleagues. Preferring lightness to earnestness, and engaging all her discursive skills in an intertextual borrowing from shared popular culture, Karen was able to use the external, fictional and comic mouthpiece of Geraldine, the Vicar of Dibley, to contribute a potent Christian critique to the centre strategy without overreaching the tacitly agreed boundaries of her secular role.

I observed in Karen's habits of everyday witness not only the self-critical pragmatic sensitivities of a mature professional alert to the constraints of power, privacy and propriety in the workplace context, but also a joyful and creative freedom to express and embody new and poetic forms of Christian witness in dialogical relationship with her secular colleagues. Through a kenotic translation of herself in the playful and pastoral rough and tumble of the learning centre, Karen found a new voice with which to express her good news in ways which were abundantly suited to their secular context.

7.4   Faith-talk at work: Poetic possibilities

What language is sufficient to the task of voicing a Christian witness in the workplace? Throughout my explorations into faith-talk in the workplace I have grappled with the discursive tensions between a sense of appropriateness or social legitimacy on the one hand, and a sense of adequacy or missiological necessity on the other. This tensive energy of voicing a delegitimized, yet potent vision of reality is captured in Rebecca Chopp's evocative phrase, 'the poetics of testimony' (2001). It is the force of faith which insists that a testimony should be uttered; and it is the lived experience of hope and love which enable its poetic, transformative power.

In the final part of this chapter I will suggest the outlines of a 'poetic' or hermeneutic model of witness in which a kenotic-creative-pentecostal style of

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[9] The Vicar of Dibley is the lead character in a long-running television comedy starring Dawn French. '*Sister Act*' is a comic film in which Whoopi Goldberg, playing Sister Mary Clarence, breaks the mould of conventional religious life.

translation of the self becomes the matrix for a rich new discovery of grace and truth.

7.4.1 From monologue to dialogue

> Gerry [Karen's doll of the Vicar of Dibley] sits with me in the office and everybody loves Gerry and they'll come and see her, and have a session of chatting to Gerry! (Interview 5)

> In the best conversations there is a genuine interchange between two people. (Peter Shaw)[10]

The central finding from all my explorations into religious expression in the workplace is that the most authentically Christian model for witness at work is the conversation.

The liberative and transformative potential of dialogic discourse has been increasingly recognized in recent decades, largely due to a multidisciplinary engagement with Bakhtinian insights (Pearce 1994, p.5). Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), and the school of literary criticism associated with his name, was deeply concerned with the oppressive character of monologue, 'that is, the capacity of a single authority to monopolize meaning, to rule out all competing voices' (Gergen 1999, p.130). His experience of living under a totalitarian regime led to a fierce critique of oppressive discourse, which contributed to his own imprisonment and exile. His countervailing vision of 'dialogism' as loving, unpossessive communication was tacitly rooted in the Christian concept of *agape* as a style of unpossessive love which accepts the separateness and individuality of the loved one.

Bakhtin delights in the play of many voices in the novel form, in stark contrast to the monologic style of epic poetry. His concept of *heteroglossia* reflects the social diversity of speech types found in any dialogic text which allows its own internal polemic to disrupt and destabilize the ideological agenda of monologic discourse. Wherever the dialogic imagination is unleashed, a potential space is opened for the subversive play within which genuinely new meanings are released from captive, stale allusions (Bakhtin 1987).

Beyond its original field of literary criticism, dialogism has developed a momentum of its own, informing a wide range of cultural analytics and

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[10] (Shaw 2005, p.173).

suggesting ways both to engage difference and to express meaning for the self-in-relation, without conceding an inevitable post-modern fragmentation. The radical integrity of this style of engagement depends on a willingness to forgo monologic formulations of reality. In Bakhtin's view, all truthful language:

> [...] lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [...], but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin 1987, p.294)

This borderline between oneself and the other is a particular concern of feminist theologians, who have theorized in a number of ways the interplay between a dialogic mode of speech and a relational ontology of the self (see pp.50-51 above). Rebecca Chopp, for example, highlights the emancipatory potential of language which proclaims God's presence and activity in the world through words which are 'full of Word, and, as such, words of grace, healing, wholeness, new possibilities, and crucifixion and resurrection' (1989, p.12). This liberating word is inherently dialogical, incarnate in the world, defying the pretensions of either worldly or ecclesial structures of domination.

> As proclamation leaves its ecclesial prison, speaking now of the Word for and with the world, so it loosens its confinement in the preached word, becoming now the fullness of discourse: the images, stories, voices, symbols, interpretations, and aesthetic productions that Christianity offers in solidarity with a world so desperately seeking to speak of freedom in new ways. (Chopp 1989, p.4)

But such freedom is not won without a struggle, and many analysts have been quick to challenge any naïve idealism in the Bakhtinian agenda. Pearce, for example, quotes Bauer whose first reaction to Bakhtin, like many of us:

> [...] was to become seduced by his theory of dialogism since it seemed to offer a utopian ground for all voices to flourish; at least all voices could aspire to internal polemic or dialogism. Yet Bakhtin's blindspot is the battle. He does not work out the contradiction between the promises of utopia or community and the battle which is always being waged for control. (Bauer 1989, p.5; in Pearce 1994, p.100)

It is the battle for authentic dialogue in the workplace which has marked indelibly many of my informants in their attempt to voice a Christian identity.

> I'll never forget the first time I outed myself as a Christian at an academic conference. The theme was bodies and how they matter: brilliant, cutting edge stuff, mostly from lesbian speakers in English studies. Religion, if it existed at all, was on the perimeters of the debate. One of the speakers was about to read a parody of the Lord's Prayer.
> 'Is anyone religious here?' she asked, jokingly. 'I don't want to offend.'
> 'Yes,' I said. There was an awkward silence, and I saw people looking at me.
> 'I am a Christian,' I clarified. 'But I won't be offended.'
> For the rest of the conference, fellow academics eyed me strangely, avoided me in the corridor. Ouch, I thought. Why do I do that to myself? (Kidd 2004)

Feminist writers are not alone in recognizing the tragic risks of conversation. Dialogue is difficult and costly, martyrial stuff, particularly when it is a prevailing rationality that it opens to scrutiny. 'In this world, where discourse is too often darkened by hegemonic monologues one must neither give way to "despairing of the possibility of healing human speech" nor to "the illusory supposition that healed speech, true conversation, is ever easy or lies within our grasp"' (Jeanrond and Rike 1991, pp.53,61; in Fodor 1995, p.34).

Whether it is at the macro-level of the church's public dialogic engagement with the economic powers of society or at the micro-level of negotiating a Christian contribution to the everyday cut and thrust of loco-public workplace discourse, genuine conversation can be hard to achieve. As Nicholas Lash observes in a piece ominously entitled '*Conversation in Gethsemane*':

> [W]hat really renders conversation so rare and fragile an occurrence is the far darker and more deadly fact of sin. What we have, in place of conversation, are the deafness of self-interest and terror, the lies of "official spokesmen", the distorted apocalyptic of the new right, and, around and underneath all other voices, almost inaudible, the whimpering of dying children. (1991, p.52)

How many Christians, then, are prepared for the difficulty of dialogue? Above and beyond the utopian requirements of Habermas' 'ideal speech conditions' (1988) – or, perhaps I should say, beneath them and much closer to home – are a host of more proximate conditions for genuine conversations. Those who live and work on the boundaries of language and 'make impromptu meanings' in order to establish dialogue know that there are countless necessary (though scarcely sufficient) practical conditions for meaningful dialogue to

emerge in the crowded and competitive circumstances of daily work (Anderson 2003). There needs to be sufficient time, and a freedom from interruption, along with a minimum of mutual respect and interest to sustain the willingness and attentiveness in which true listening can take place. In the course of authentic dialogue, the pain and difficulty of genuine engagement means that many will lose heart before any satisfactory outcome can be achieved.

> It's not always easy to answer a question which is regularly put to me by one particular person: 'Have you any good news?' And he knew that he was hitting me on a raw nerve, because my good news was not good news for him. (Group 4)

Yet for others, a discovery of genuine mutuality and surprising concern can override considerable differences in religious perspective.

> There's another lady at work who is Muslim who got pregnant. And she'd had difficulties with her first child: I think she'd had a couple of miscarriages and things like that. But she knew my faith. We'd had discussions in the car about each other's faith, which was quite interesting. And she actually came and asked me if I would pray for her. And I thought that was absolutely brilliant, knowing that she has a different faith, but recognizing that my faith was important to me. (Interview 14)

In the goal-oriented climate of the contemporary workplace, the freedom of authentic conversation is not something which may be naturally or effortlessly attained. 'It has to be worked at, striven for, guarded, protected, subjected to unrelenting vigilance' (Fodor 1995, p.35). More than anything, it has to be earned through the skills and commitments of habitual listening. Yet this possibility of a liberative conversation and the transition from monologue to dialogue is experienced by Christians first and foremost as a gift – since it is only by means of God's self-communication to us, of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, thereby taking up the word of this world into his eternal Word, that the trinitarian possibility of true communication exists in the first place.

However partial and provisional our discernment of the presence and activity of the eternal Word in our work, we can participate through dialogue in a new discovery of spiritual freedom and joy. This was the happy experience of one of my informants, a bus driver, who thought he had been caught by a speed camera.

I heard through the grapevine that the bosses had received a thing from the police saying somebody's gone through a speed camera. And I thought, "Oh no, it's got to be me!" So I went in to see him and [...] I said, "I think I've gone through a speed camera." So he said, "Well what bus were you driving?" And I said, "It was a double decker." And he said, "Well it's not you, it was a single deck!" So when I came out I said to the inspector, "No," I said "It's not me. There's the power of prayer!" You know. So he said, he said, "There's only God could change it from a double deck to a single deck." [*laughing*] And I thought, you know it's good, you know you can bring God into situations! (Group 1)

7.4.2 From rhetoric to poetry

We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric,

but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry. (W. B. Yeats)[11]

The daily dialogue conducted by the Christian expressing her faith at work is performed in the power-inscribed space between the hegemonic discourse of the workplace in one compartment of her life, and that of the church in another. Out of this lover's quarrel, can she fashion something new and poetic for God?

The audaciously 'poetic' character of religious testimony need not be limited, in terms of genre, to poetry proper. Rather, as Chopp insists, there is a vitally poetic quality in any discourse which 'speaks the unspeakable' and tells of the 'hope of particular communities who have not been authorized to speak. [...] Such discourse is an invention, for it must create language, forms, images to speak of what, in some way, has been ruled unspeakable or at least not valid or credible to modern reason.' (2001, p.61).

It is the open inventiveness of poetics which enables it to call into question the representations of dominant discourses, be they ecclesial or managerial. In contrast to rhetoric, which seeks to argue and persuade in order to maintain its definition of reality, poetics aims to refigure and re-imagine reality in ways that enlarge and refashion the 'social imaginary'.[12] In this way poetics, rather than aiming to maintain its grip on power through fixed meanings, opens new channels for power to flow through a centrifugal outpouring of potential meanings.

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[11] (Yeats 1959, p.331).

[12] The 'social imaginary' (a favourite term of Julia Kristeva and Homi Bhabha) has recently been defined by Charles Taylor (2004, pp.91-106) as what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society and it is often conveyed not in theoretical terms but rather through 'images, stories, and legends'.

Chopp's vision of the poetics of testimony is profoundly informed by the work of Paul Ricoeur on the relation of rhetoric, poetics and hermeneutics (Chopp 2001; Ricoeur 1989). Ricoeur's own war-time experiences gave him an exquisite sensitivity to the conflictual or creative potentials of human meaning-making, suggesting a sharp distinction between the rhetoric which aims to persuade in an ideological way, 'aspiring to conquer the assent of the audience', and poetry, whose aim is 'the conversion of the imaginary' (Ricoeur 1989, pp.139,143).

I have found in many cases that informants turn to poetic forms of expression in their attempts to re-narrate and re-imagine the sometimes destructive realities of their workplace experiences. One such poignant poem was created at the end of a story-telling workshop in which healthcare workers had been invited to reflect on the values (espoused and enacted) underpinning the NHS.

> Let's all introduce ourselves and tell each other tales,
> About who we know's been crucified,
> And what they used for nails.
> About wheeler-dealer politics, what your job title is today,
> And who remembers the little things,
> And on whose side it's best to play.
> 'Always tell the truth,' she said.
> A fanciful idea she'd taught her.
> I don't think I'll be trying it,
> till I've learnt to walk on water. (Maltby and Pattison 1990, iii)

Others draw on the resources of poetry for its power to nourish and resource a jaded spirituality. For them, the ability of poetic testimony to 'pour language back into the world' (Fodor 1995, p.1) becomes a vital point of connection between a traditional biblical genre of prayerful reflection and their everyday discoveries of the grace of God.

> Psalm of Work
> 1   I enjoy my work, for you have given it to me:
>   you are a God who works, and I work with your blessing.
> 2   You are there when I go to work in the morning:
>   I meet you in my friends as we greet one another,
> 3   as we prepare for the day, you speak to me through others:
>   you are in the new ideas and the training we share,
> 4   my concentration reflects your loving care:

your creative power inspires my thoughts and actions.

5   When I help another it is you that I meet:

as I serve a customer, I am serving you;

6   when I am called to give account to my superiors:

it's your judgement I face, and you will judge in fairness.

7   If others treat me harshly, I am only your servant:

Jesus was also the servant of others;

8   his work was to make your love visible:

in my successes I too am completing your work of creation.

9   Long ago monks were told that to work is to pray:

help me see my task today as part of our purpose.

10   My achievements I offer to you:

exhausted I give you my life. (Hammersley 1994, p.26)[13]

The enlivening power of such poetic testimony can be understood with reference to Ricoeur's highly generative work on the significance of metaphor. In contrast to structuralist views of language which tended to fix and determine the meaning of a text, Ricoeur envisaged an interactive relationship with the linguistic text which stressed the radical openness of the productive imagination. The richness of metaphor, according to Ricoeur, does not spring from a simple adornment of language or enhancement of rhetorical performance. Rejecting the substitution view of the metaphor, 'which considered metaphor as merely a decorative or ornamental use of language in principal replaceable with an exhaustive paraphrase', Ricoeur stressed the power of metaphor to bring together new conjunctions of meaning, pushing language to its limit and beyond. 'Metaphors thereby create new meaning by redescribing reality, by bringing to language aspects and values of reality which cannot be captured in direct description' (Fodor 1995, p.119). The dynamic of metaphoric language is thus surprising and transformative. Metaphors disrupt and disturb the symbolic structures of meaning, shattering 'not only the previous structure of language, but also the previous structures of reality' (Valdes 1991, p.85; Ricoeur 1976).

Beyond this semantic shock lies a rich 'surplus of meaning' generated in the tension and interplay of difference and resemblance. 'It is precisely from this tensive apprehension that a new vision of reality springs forth, which ordinary vision resists because it is attached to the ordinary use of words. The eclipse of the objective, manipulable world thus makes way for the revelation of a new

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[13] John Hammersley's poems of work were written out of his experiences as Chaplain to the Metro Centre in Gateshead.

dimension of reality and truth' (Ricoeur 1976, p.68). The essential characteristic of poetic language is then, according to Ricoeur, 'a creative gain in meaning' (Valdes 1991, p.35).

Both the critical and the productive aspects of Ricoeur's philosophy of language are pertinent to the task of Christian witness. An alertness to the power of metaphor is essential in bringing a hermeneutic of suspicion to bear on the shrinking and reduction of language encountered in many spheres of work. 'The temptation towards an instrumentalization of language, or a reduction of language to communication at the lowest level, or to a vehicle for manipulating things and people, spells for Ricoeur a grave danger for present culture' (Fodor 1995, p.133).

The language used in any sector of work is crucial to the ideological imagination which controls it (see Section 5.1 above, pp.74-77). 'Awareness of this requires ceaseless mental fight,' writes Larvor of the battle for Higher Education. 'We cannot take charge of our own thoughts, let alone speak truth to power, if we do not examine the metaphors that pass among us' (2006).

> We must pay attention to the metaphors we use to talk about pedagogy. We should stop talking about 'delivery' of 'provision'. When a new fridge is delivered to a house, the householder stands by while the deliveryman does all the work, heaving it out of the van, up the steps and through to the kitchen. In other words, the 'delivery' metaphor encodes and approves of student passivity. Gardening metaphors (such as 'cultivating the intellect') are more accurate. (Larvor 2006, p.227)

Paying faithful attention to the use of metaphors is part of the brave calling of contemporary prophets who yearn to breathe 'poetry into a prose-flattened world' with their 'shattering, evocative speech that breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always toward new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities' (Brueggemann 1989, p.6). But the in-breaking of religious language into a working discourse strait-jacketed by oppressive managerialism may require some considerable daring as well as discursive fluency.

> God-language is not like any other language. Don't underestimate the force of it. Don't pretend it's innocent. (Group 13)

The moral and imaginative effort to speak truth to power draws frequently on the use of vivid metaphorical language. Many of my informants related how the brave and beautiful images of the scriptures could find a place in everyday

working exchanges, or how they had coined new and apt turns of phrase to break through the linguistic turpitude of their workaday world.

> I was invited to lead a workshop for health service managers on the ethics of resource allocation. The audience was dully attentive as I charted recent rapid escalations in health care spending, and reviewed the economic debates over concepts of scarcity and rationing. Interest picked up when I suggested that our decision-making roles as individual and corporate agents could be reframed in relation to a set of possibly controversial historic role models. One by one I introduced the audience to a series of striking figures from the New Testament: the careful *steward*, the willing *servant*, the wise *shepherd*, and the blame-bearing *scapegoat*. The effect was riveting. Months later, colleagues still reminded me how much they identified with that scapegoat. (RJN March 2005)

Very often it is only in the heat of the moment that creative connections are made. One interviewee explained to me how the worlds of religious language and secular language ran together in her mind on parallel lines, 'like the moving tracks of a skier on the piste'.

> Then sometimes, just occasionally, something sparks a connection across the two tracks. And it's, it's like a lightbulb comes on! [...] All those levels of meaning – it's brilliant! (Interview 4)

Many of these occasional 'connections' are forgotten. They come into being of and for a particular moment of conversation, and are gone. Others find an enduring place in the corporate discourse, appreciated for their wit or wisdom, funding and nurturing fresh poetic insights into the realities of the local work situation. An apt metaphor or 'theological fragment' (Forrester 2000, pp.152-7; Forrester 2005) thus becomes a catchphrase of creative Christian witness which others can pick up and weave into their own shared workplace vernacular.

> Just call me *the skip that people dump their rubbish in*. (A workplace chaplain speaking of his role as an informal 'confessor'; Group 2)

> What matters is being prepared to live with the *squidginess* of it all. (A Christian in business speaks of grappling with the ambiguities of organizational failure and corruption; Group 12)

> *Permission to be human*. (One informant's everyday slogan of forgiveness; Group 15)

Earthy, colloquial, playful images are the stock in trade of the workplace witness. As a theologian-in-residence, the Christian in her work makes a daily contribution to the loco-public discourse and vernacular theology, 'stirring up "the sedimented universe of conventional ideas"' and 'shaking up "the order of persuasion"'(Chopp 2001, p.66; Ricoeur 1989, p.143). It is the fecundity and freshness of her language at home within, yet pointing achingly beyond, the confines of her workaday horizons, which speaks of grace in the mundane and a glorious anticipation of the coming transformation of all things in Christ.

7.4.3 Translating myself: Theological reflections

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? (Psalm 137.4)

Poetry is what gets lost in translation. (attributed to Robert Frost)

The task of voicing a Christian witness in the secularized culture of the contemporary workplace requires a high level of discursive skill, but may not be reduced simply to a matter of linguistic competency. As Eva Hoffman found amidst the challenges of life in a new culture, there is a difference between merely speaking a new language with accuracy and appropriate sensitivity, and being able to inhabit it such that we come to speak out of our ownmost selves. Just as the musician cannot create a melody from theoretical knowledge and technical skill alone, so Hoffman realizes:

> I have to make a shift in the innermost ways. *I have to translate myself*. But if I'm to achieve this without becoming assimilated – that is, absorbed – by my new world, the translation has to be careful, the turns of the psyche unforced. To mouth foreign terms without incorporating their meanings is to risk becoming bowdlerized. A true translation proceeds by the motions of understanding and sympathy; it happens by slow increments, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase. (Hoffman 1998, p.211 - italics mine)

The ontological implications of language for the self-in-relation become fully apparent in both Bakhtin's dialogism and Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self (see pp.42-47 above). Both theorists reject any disconnected or atomistic view of the self, but without going so far as to lose the self entirely in its sociality and dialogue. Whilst the native language of the self must often centrifugally, and at times ecstatically (in the self-giving sense of that word), become 'lost in translation', there remains an abiding sense of the self which, whilst inherently

intersubjective, nonetheless retains an authentic moral responsibility (Stiver 2001, p.179).

For Bakhtin this self is incomplete and unfinished without dialogue, since there is an imperative of social life which requires dialogical interaction with others for the sake of understanding ourselves. For 'in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time what he is, and we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well' (Bakhtin 1984, p.363; Anderson 2003). Similarly for Ricoeur, an important aspect of the hermeneutics of the self is a hermeneutic of an identity inscribed in language (Stiver 2001, p.171); and the poetic expression of oneself 'as another' through the tenuous link of a shared language is regarded as the most momentous attestation of personal, moral responsibility (Ricoeur 1992). This hermeneutic of the self can only ever be a translation, an interpretation, 'but of the most serious nature, for it is the interpretation of one's life' (Stiver 2001, p.177).

A critical point in Eva Hoffman's self-understanding is the way that the interpretative process of translation changes and affects all aspects of her subjectivity. As she reflects, there is no chance of returning, in any of the languages we speak, to a 'point of origin'. This is as true of her 'Polishness' as it is of her childhood sensibilities:

> Experience creates style, and style, in turn, creates a new woman. Polish is no longer the one, true language against which others live their secondary life. Polish insights cannot be regained in their purity; there's something I know in English too. The wholeness of childhood truths is intermingled with the divisiveness of adult doubt. When I speak Polish now, it is infiltrated, permeated, and inflected by the English in my head. Each language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilizes it. Each language makes the other relative. (Hoffman 1998, p.273)

The parallels for the interplay of religious and secular language are obvious, and theologians have not been slow to take up the implications of the work of Ricoeur in particular as a source for contemporary reflections on the theology of revelation,[14] eager to contend that there is a good news for humanity which can only ever be 'found' in some process of translation. For Chopp, this discovery of the openness and creativity of shared language as a locus for

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[14] See especially Fodor (1995), Williams (1986) and Chopp (1989). Ricoeur himself, somewhat surprisingly in light of his profoundly interrelational understanding of epistemology, maintained a clear distinction between the tasks and methodologies of philosophy and theology. See the discussion in Newlands (2004, p.51).

revelation reflects on the dynamic nature of the Trinity as a relational and open community, within which the Word/God 'in full openness, creativity and gracefulness creates, sustains, and redeems all words in their ongoing process of signification' (Chopp 1989, p.32-3; Moltmann 1981).

7.5   Faithfulness and fluency

What language is sufficient to the task of voicing a Christian witness in the secular workplace?   I have shown in this chapter what a wide range of sociolinguistic skills and poetic sensitivities are entailed in the practices of an appropriate and adequate articulation of faith in the workplace.   Yet within and beyond these questions of *language*, I have argued that recurring questions of *identity* and *power* must also be faithfully embraced.

Based on a fully trinitarian understanding of the Christian good news, then, I suggest that the adequacy and appropriateness of everyday *fluency* in the workplace will be seen in the enactment of a spiritual as well as sociolinguistic generosity or *kenosis*, a personal as well as poetic inventiveness or *creativity*, and a hermeneutic openness to discovery or *revelation*.

In taking up a secular role, the Christian worker is required to undergo a kind of *kenosis*.   Dispossessed of her mother tongue, she must learn to make her home in the public language of the professional, institutional milieu, to know its rhetoric, to follow its cadences, and to take them into her heart.   This calls for a certain dying to the self, a certain poverty of spirit, which forgoes the claim to any totalizing Word in favour of the more modest offering of 'theological fragments'.

> Perhaps we should learn from Foucault and other post-modernists that systematic discourse is often both exclusive and coercive.   Perhaps the task today is not to present a sustained theory or a comprehensive account of the human condition, as much as to confess the faith in the public realm by offering "theological fragments" of insight, in the hope that some of them may be recognised as true, and interest may be aroused as to the quarry from which they come.   And fragments, modestly presented, can indeed provide illumination in the public realm.   (Forrester in Brown and Sedgwick 1998, p.53)

Like the hero-figure of Daniel, whose story explores the limits of flexible faithfulness in a public realm opposed to religion, she will study to become well

versed in the discourse of the ruling powers, even to the point of relinquishing the right to the inscription of her own identity.[15]

The point of this thoroughgoing dispossession is not the negation of the self's ownmost religious identity, but rather a generous entrusting of this Christian self to a state of perpetual intersubjective re-creation in which the kenotic-dialogic subject grows and sheds selves 'like the foliage of a tropical rainforest' (Pearce 1994, p.92).[16]

> But how does one bend toward another culture without falling over, how does one strike an elastic balance between rigidity and self-effacement? (Hoffman 1998, p.209)

Hoffman's hard-won 'elasticity' is a good model for the personal, spiritual and linguistic *inventiveness* necessary for an effective Christian witness in the workplace. From a theological perspective, the 'poetic' vocation to re-imagine and refigure the mundane world is a sign of indefatigable hope, the gift of the true prophet. It is this creative speech of the prophet which 'prevents our world from becoming brutal and coldly closed upon us, [and is] an act of relentless hope, [...] an argument against the ideological closing of life which we unwittingly embrace' (Brueggemann 1989, p.7).

For many who are caught up in the more brutal treadmills of the contemporary workplace, this will indeed require a hope against hope. For it is hope alone which can sustain the inventiveness and flexibility to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land, beckoning us beyond suspicion and critique towards a 'second naïveté' (Ricoeur 1977) within which age-old promises of liberation are once more invited into our weary, workaday world. This transcendent hope is the Christian's fund and resource for her transformation of the loco-public imaginary (Ward 2005, p.172), as she works for and testifies to the city which is yet to come (cf. Hebrews 11.14-16).

In this spirit, the poetic testimony of everyday Christians paves the way for the discovery of new possibilities, becoming a kind of *revelation*.

> But why call it revelatory? Because through all the traits that it recapitulates and by what it adds, the poetic function incarnates a concept of truth which escapes the definition by

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[15] In the Old Testament story, Daniel and his three colleagues in the Babylonian civil service were given – and accepted – new names relating not to their native Jewish piety, but to the imperial gods of Babylonia (Daniel 1.7).
[16] Contemporary philosophical readings of the 'kenotic' pouring out of oneself toward the dialogic other are explored in relation to theological re-readings of the doctrine of kenosis by Keith Ward (in Heelas 1998, ch. 12 'Kenosis and Naming').

adequation as well as the criteria of falsification and verification. Here truth no longer means verification, but manifestation, i.e. letting what shows itself be. What shows itself is in each instant a proposed world, a world I may inhabit and where I can project my ownmost possibilities. It is in this sense that language in its poetic function is a vehicle of revelation. (Ricoeur 1981, p.101)

From a theological perspective, Ricoeur's conversational, hermeneutical model of revelation depends on the generative power of a properly trinitarian understanding of language to support 'its unceasing generative power, which extends rather than limits debate, discussion, interpretation and understanding' (Fodor 1995, p.39). Out of this endlessly creative source, in its interplay with actual and possible worlds, flows a manifestation of new realities whose imagination does not lie ultimately with ourselves.

This is the theological insight which Rowan Williams draws from Ricoeur's poetic concept of revelation, in which the poetic testimony makes manifest 'a possible world, a reality in which my human reality can also find itself: and in inviting me into its world, the text breaks open and extends my own possibilities'. In a trinitarian sense, such language can 'restore to us that participation-in or belonging-to an order of things' manifesting and even embodying 'an initiative that is not ours in inviting us to a world we did not make' (Williams 1986, p.199).

I have examined in this chapter the immensely complex challenge of achieving fluency for what is, effectively, a daily cross-cultural exchange between the worlds of work and Christian worship. This challenge demands not only a sophisticated level of pragmatic skill and hermeneutic sensitivity in relation to language, but also a detailed and critical awareness of power and a radical openness of personal identity. I have suggested that the Christian-at-work, in faithfully 'translating herself', can become a practical embodiment and grace-filled expression of the kenotic-creative-pentecostal love of the Holy Trinity.

In the next chapter I will consider what is needed, ecclesiologically, for the individual vocation at work to be integrally supported.

Chapter 7: Speaking in Tongues

CHAPTER 8

ONLY CONNECT?

THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNION

> For somewhere there is an ancient enmity between our daily life and the great work. Help me, in saying it, to understand it. (Rainer Maria Rilke)[1]

The challenge of speaking of faith in the context of the contemporary workplace has been explored practically in the previous two chapters through an analysis of the practices of *engagement* and of *fluency*. In this chapter I raise the question of how the apostolate of individual lay Christians in working life relates to the wider life and vision of the church through the practice of *communion*. I will argue that a proper respect for lay identity and belonging in the church requires theological and liturgical, pastoral and structural support for the Christian vocation within secular work. My aim in this final practical chapter will be, therefore, to sketch the outlines of an ecclesiological response which is both adequate and appropriate to the apostolic challenge faced by Christians speaking of their faith at work.

The chapter begins with the story of how 'Nigel', one of my informants, sought and found support for his lay ministry at work and in the church (Section 8.1). In the next section I review the evidence for a widely reported sense of 'disconnection' between the worlds of work and of worship, arguing for the need for support to achieve an integrated sense of belonging and identity (Section 8.2). In the following section, I consider the kinds of support – theological and liturgical (8.3.2), pastoral and structural (8.3.3) – which might work to affirm and resource Christians for their weekday apostolate at work within a critical overarching vision of the Kingdom of God. In the final section I reflect theologically on the implications for the whole church of a trinitarian invitation to *communion* (Section 8.4).

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[1] (Rilke 1909).

8.1   Making the connection

Nigel told me how things 'began to connect' through his involvement with the 'Faith in Working Life'[2] project (Interview 3). Nigel works as an accountant for a large charity. He is an active Christian in his local church, and had recently trained as a lay reader. Yet the issue of bringing a faith perspective to his work troubled him, and he felt himself to be a failure in his Christian witness in the office.

Nigel had heard about 'Faith in Working Life' through a poster in the church advertising an event on '*Work and Stress*'. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the pressures of the approaching financial year end, he signed up for the day. It was encouraging to meet up with such a varied group: people from the city and beyond, people from Catholic and Baptist, Anglican and Methodist churches (and others too 'diverse' to classify). The speakers were confident, and knowledgeable about the realities of pressure in the workplace; and the two workshops he joined, on 'overwork' and on 'spiritual resources', left him buzzing with new ideas and fresh perspectives.

Most of all, it was the sense of affirmation that helped him. For the first time in many years he felt valued and understood for everything that he was trying to be and to do in his work. Reflecting on this later, he realized how little interest he had ever found at church for the heavy responsibilities he carried week by week. Although church meant a great deal to him, and his attendance at Communion was deeply important for 'charging his batteries', he often came away feeling that no one knew very much about the rest of his life. His vicar was a kind man, who had supported Nigel when he trained as a lay reader. But he was not the sort of person Nigel could expect to understand much about the financial world – 'judging from the way he handled the church accounts!'

Nigel decided to follow up the day on '*Work and Stress*' with an eight week course for Christians at work. He joined with a group of nine or ten others from very different occupational backgrounds – it was a relief to find that they were not all nurses and teachers – for what was to become an immensely supportive experience.

He was most excited by the opportunity to learn something new 'in an area of previous failure'. It surprised him to find such strength of feeling in the group,

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[2] The 'Faith in Working Life' initiative was run as an ecumenical collaboration between the Diocese of Sheffield and the Industrial Mission in South Yorkshire.

and a shared passion to bring together aspects of life that felt strangely disconnected. Very soon, the group became a safe place where the worries of work could be shared in a Christian way, and that proved remarkably helpful. He was also surprised at the new skills that he was learning. Nigel had never thought of himself in any way as a theologian, but the group gave him confidence to talk about his faith and his values in a straightforward way that connected with the real issues of his professional life.

The session that stuck with him for a very long time was the one about 'power'. It started with a meditation on the story of the paralyzed man in which all the group members were asked to lie on the floor like a paralytic! The discussion that followed (after everyone had found their feet again) was all about the sense of powerlessness at work, and how it was possible to find small points of real power and leverage to begin to work for change.

Nigel would have laughed at the thought of being an evangelist in his work. In my terms (see Section 6.2.3.1 above, pp.120-123), he was more of a *Connector* who drew on deep resources of Celtic spirituality to try to find some sense of God's presence in the ups and downs of his financial career. As the course progressed, however, he found himself growing in confidence to speak more directly about the connections between his faith and his work. At a meeting with the auditors, he was able to explain without embarrassment the Christian values which underpinned the charity's investment policy. In an encounter with one of the young men supported by the charity, he quietly mentioned that he would pray about his situation.

Perhaps most significantly, Nigel started to make connections for the other lay Christians in his own church. He decided to bring little illustrations from the office into his sermons. He made a point of introducing prayers for all kinds of people at work – 'and not just nurses and teachers!' Beyond that, he finds the church painfully slow to change, but he hopes to keep injecting 'a little bit of reality into the proceedings' Sunday by Sunday.

8.2   Working in isolation

> Telling a layperson to go into the modern world and live a Christian life is like telling a
> person to go alone and unprepared to live at the North Pole. (Hendrik Kraemer)[3]

The problem of forging a connection between the discursive worlds of work and worship cannot be reduced to a matter of merely individual motivation or competence. The challenge of 'translating' the faith, which I have considered in the previous two chapters in terms of the missionary understanding and communicative capacity of individual Christians in the workplace, is properly an issue for the whole church to embrace.

Yet sadly, many Christian people find themselves working in isolation with very little sense of being supported by their churches for an apostolic role in the workplace. There is overwhelming evidence from empirical studies of Christians at work of a profound lack of ownership by the churches of the secular ministries which they pursue from week to week.[4] In popular paperbacks and critical reports, in personal anecdotes and formal research studies, the same negative picture emerges: people who try to express their faith in and through the workplace report that their ministry is not recognized, not understood, not affirmed and not resourced by the church. Furthermore, this lack of interest is regarded as normal.

A keen sense of alienation is often voiced – with some feeling – by those who consciously attempt to straddle the two worlds of work and church. Christians describe facing an awkward 'compartmentalization', a disconcerting sense of living divided lives, a 'disconnect', or 'spiritual schizophrenia' (Nash and McLennan 2001), a feeling of 'being out on a limb' or of 'living in two worlds' (Clark 1993). The challenge of bridging this 'great divide' (Clark 1992) is reflected in many of the titles of popular books, tracts and courses aimed at supporting Christians in their workplace discipleship: '*The Monday Connection*' (Diehl 1991), '*Sunday, Monday*' (Powel, Robbins et al. 1998), '*Mind the Gap*' (Higginson 1997).

A strategy of compartmentalization, which I have already named as a sin of broken relationship and failed communion (see p.11 and p.38 above) reflects a

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[3] (Quoted in Wentz 1978, p.16).
[4] It has not been my aim to duplicate this empirical research. I have consulted recent UK surveys of Christians in working life by David Clark (1993), Paul Ballard (1998), Mark Greene (2001; 2003), and the Church of England (1999). US studies focusing particularly on business include those reported by Mitroff and Denton (1999) and by Nash and McLennan (2001).

Chapter 8: Only Connect?

failure of integration not only for the individual Christian but also, more seriously, for the wider church.

COMPARTMENTALIZED	AGONISTIC
WORK and **CHURCH** culture and identity are expressed in mutual exclusion	**CHURCH** culture and identity resists expression of **WORK** culture and identity
ASSIMILATED	INTEGRATED
WORK culture and identity resists expression of **CHURCH** culture and identity	**CHURCH** and **WORK** culture and identity are expressed in mutual embrace

Figure 8.1 Individual and communal attitudes to CHURCH and WORK cultures[5]

Without adequate support for an identity which embraces both the culture of the church and the culture of the workplace, it is not surprising that many Christians resolve the tension of an awkward compartmentalization of their experience in ways that are profoundly maladaptive (see Figure 8.1 above). In some cases, this is expressed in an arrogantly, or even aggressively, *agonistic* stance towards the workplace in which Christian identity is paraded in an overly distinctive fashion.

> When you go to work, you're on a catwalk. They're all looking at your beautiful [Christian] designer outfit. (Group 15)

Rather more often, the tension is resolved in a compliant way through an *assimilated* stance towards the workplace culture which plays down any sense of Christian distinctiveness in order to accommodate to the pressures of the secular workplace culture.

> My faith does not enter the workplace. I just leave it at the door. This is something that bothers me. (A senior librarian)[6]

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[5] Compare Figure 3.1 on p.39 above.
[6] (RJN April 2007).

In either case, an awareness of unacceptable dissonance is never far below the surface.

> I hate to admit this, but you really wouldn't know me on a Monday morning. (Group 15)

My argument is that a position of mature *integration* is extremely difficult to achieve *in isolation* and that individuals who face a marked contrast between the cultures and commitments of their work and church communities *without support* are likely to veer towards a habitually maladaptive position which is *agonistic*, *assimilated* or *compartmentalized*.

8.3 Beyond compartmentalization: The need for support

The need for support for Christians in the workplace has been strongly argued, at a pragmatic level, by exponents of the 'Faith in the Workplace' movement such as Mark Greene.[7] My purpose in this chapter is not simply to repeat their exhortations, but to offer a more critical rationale and theological agenda for that support.

A missiological analysis which is particularly illuminating in this respect was constructed by Shigeko Masumoto (1983) in her influential critique of the British Industrial Mission movement. Masumoto's concept of the 'missiological gap' addressed much more than a simple socio-cultural estrangement between the church and wider (industrial) society (see Figure 8.2 below).

Kingdom of God

'ecclesiological gap'   'theological gap'

The Church ································· **The World**
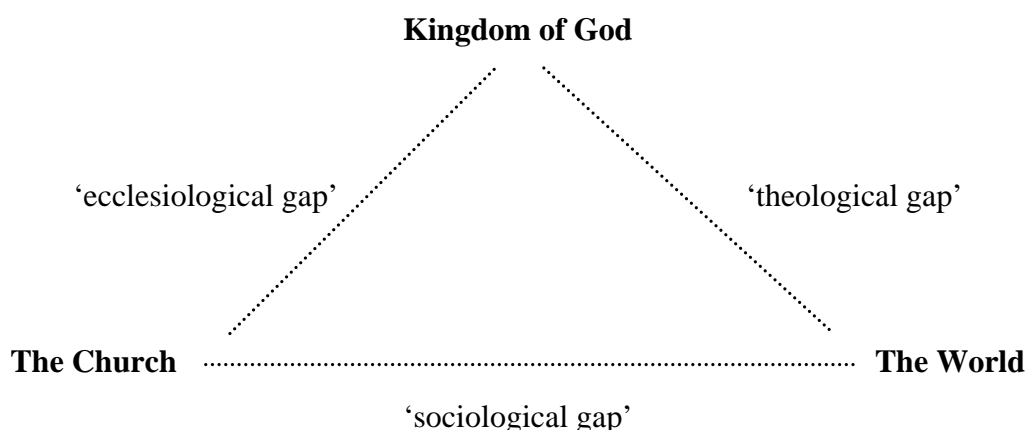
'sociological gap'

Figure 8.2   Masumoto's model of the 'missiological gap' (1983)[8]

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[7] See, for example, Greene (2001).
[8] Adapted from Brown (2004b).

Masumoto observed the concern for IM to 'bridge the gap', but discovered a confusion as to which 'gap' was practically being addressed. Three different 'gaps' could be identified in the triangular relationship which she depicted between the Church, the World, and the Kingdom. A simple desire to connect the Church and the World focuses primarily on the 'sociological gap', in which questions of cultural acceptability and attractiveness are the predominant concerns of mission. However, the critical gap between the values and commitments of the World and the Kingdom, which she named the 'theological gap', and the challenging gap between the practice of the Church and the vision of the Kingdom, which she named the 'ecclesiological gap' are at least as important for a thoroughly Christian missiological analysis to address.

From a trinitarian perspective, I suggest that all three 'gaps' need to be addressed since the 'compartmentalization' or 'socio-cultural gap' which has been identified between Christian identity and discourse in the church and in the workplace represents a sin of broken relationship and failed communion *which also contributes to* the 'gaps' between the church and the kingdom and the workplace and the kingdom. For this reason, I maintain that the 'connections' which must be addressed relate to every dimension of Christian life and worship, theology and practice, both for the apostolate of individual believers and for the communal missionary agenda of the whole church.

It would be well beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt any comprehensive examination of this multi-faceted agenda. My purpose is more limited and more contextual (see Section 1.3.2 above, p.10). I will therefore briefly outline, in relation to key themes recognized in my data, some specific issues for ecclesial practice focused on the need to support Christians for the particularly discursive practice of speaking of faith at work. These issues for ecclesial practice will entail making connections theologically and liturgically, pastorally and structurally.

8.3.1 Connecting theologically and liturgically

In Nigel's story, he told of a new found theological confidence which emerged as he learned how to *articulate* some important connections between his Christian beliefs and values and the practices and challenges of his work (see above, p.171). Of course, he had no aspirations to become a professional or systematic

theologian. But his ability to notice and to express some fragmentary themes and parabolic connections between faith and work started to bridge a troubling 'theological gap' between his experience of 'The World' and 'The Kingdom of God' (see Figure 8.2 above, p.174).

David Welbourn describes this kind of growth in theological confidence as one of the 'core skills' for working Christians:

> *This involves showing that*
> I understand how my work relates to the purposes of God and my Christian faith.
> *I can do this by*
> a) Demonstrating my understanding that God has a purpose for the world of work in general and my role in particular;
> b) Explaining what that purpose is to a fellow Christian;
> c) Explaining my faith perspective to a workplace colleague. (Welbourn 2002)

This kind of skill and confidence was coveted by many of my informants who felt themselves to be ill-equipped as Christians for the complex issues which their work presented. Those who were working every day at graduate level in professional and financial matters found themselves resourced with little more than a child's level of ethical or theological analysis by their church.

> What we need here is some grown-up theology. (Group 17)

I suggest that a mature theology for Christians at work will need to be *critical*, *contextual* and *collaborative*.

For Nigel, the *critical* growing edge of his theology was evident in his ability to question the dualistic operative theology in his church which had given him only a very 'shrunken view of God's interests' (Van Beveren 2005). His reflections focused increasingly on 'a big vision of the Kingdom' and less on 'the agenda of the church'; and his awareness of the scope of salvation enlarged – far beyond a preoccupation with individual religiosity – as he began to appreciate the breadth of God's concerns for the entire created and social order (Interview 3).

The gap which Nigel, and others, struggle to bridge requires a critical determination to overcome some ingrained theological ways of thinking which, according to Larive, 'get in the way of honouring daily work' (2004, p.149). The history in the church of these habitual patterns of thought is long and complex, but it is worth noting here the chief 'theological barriers' which block the

development of a mature integration of Christian faith and work. Larive sets out nine barriers which I summarize below:

> 1. A concept of perfection which elevates the detached and contemplative life above the engaged and working life.
>
> 2. An approach to spirituality which denigrates, or at least fails to appreciate, the efforts of daily work.
>
> 3. A Reformation emphasis on *sola gratia* which devalues the significance of daily work.
>
> 4. A neo-orthodox neglect of natural theology and the theology of culture.
>
> 5. A tacit assumption that the Kingdom of God is coextensive with the church.
>
> 6. A pietist mentality which fails to name, unmask and engage the Powers.
>
> 7. An individualistic atonement theology.
>
> 8. A clericalist mindset which fails to honour the lay vocation.
>
> 9. A church-centred ecclesiology which, to the extent that the lay vocation is honoured at all, constructs laity as helpers to the clergy. (Larive 2004, pp.149-154)

The *contextual* character of the task facing lay Christians is rarely addressed in the theological teaching of the local church. Nigel, for example, reported that his vicar did sometimes preach on issues of political or ethical importance, but that the level of abstraction and generality of such teaching was such as to make little connection with the more specific and proximate concerns of his own sphere of financial responsibility. He had little confidence in his vicar's desire or ability to engage with the particular challenges of his own role, or to begin to interpret what Ian Fraser calls the 'theological underside' of his everyday concerns (1988; in Braley 1996, p.79).

The pressures of secularism which Nigel and others face are highly subtle and specific in relation to the practical and economic realities of their particular working context. A careful and contextual discernment is therefore required in order to engage theologically, both critically and constructively, with these realities (see Section 4.3.1 above, pp.70-71). For Nigel, it was the reflective work in the group which enabled a more precise articulation of the essential points of connection between his faith and his work which was not couched in the abstracted terms of professional theologians, but expressed 'in the vernacular' tongue of his own working culture.[9]

From a trinitarian perspective, it is evident that such challenging theological discernment needs to be approached in a *collaborative* way. In

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[9] See Graham, Walton et al (2005, pp.200-229) for a discussion of theological reflection 'in the vernacular'.

Nigel's experience, the 'Faith in Working Life' group was the first forum in which he had ever found the opportunity to work with other Christians, both lay and ordained, in a shared deliberation on the theological meaning of his daily working experience. Until that time, he had operated on an unsatisfactorily thin level of 'do-it-yourself' theology which, as David Clark noted, is rarely deep enough or critical enough to sustain an effective theological basis for faith in the workplace (1993, p.33).

For other informants, such collaborative opportunities arose in a variety of ways. One person, for example, told how her appetite for theological reflection had been stimulated by her minister's invitation to contribute an article for a church magazine series on '*My Work*' (Interview 6). Several told of the importance of para-church groups and networks in equipping them for ministry at work. Interestingly, it was also clear that for many informants my own research conversation was not merely encouraging and cathartic (see above, p.23), but often quite powerfully educational in its effects (RJN November 2004).

Of course, the articulation of Christian beliefs and values in the church is never limited to purely conceptual or verbal forms of expression and debate. For many of my informants, it was through *liturgical and sacramental* articulations of Christian perceptions that they found recognition and affirmation of the theological meaning of their daily work. Such articulations were often small, but telling. I have mentioned Nigel's decision to bring illustrations from the office into his sermons and to include a wide range of occupational issues in the intercessions offered in church (see above, p.171). Others told of simple ideas which had made a remarkable impact – using tangible objects from a workplace setting as an offertory focus; projecting photographs of workplace scenarios as a background to intercession; introducing specific prayers and blessings that related to occupational concerns.

In each case, the integration of work-related themes into the gathered worship of the church had both critical and constructive aspects. Critically, it functioned as a challenge to the collusive pietism in which clergy and laity sometimes conspire to create and maintain an escapist mood in their worship, so that church can be a 'haven for Sunday that does not remind them of the pressures and difficulties they face during the week' (Church of England 1999, p.3). Constructively, it became a powerful and palpable way of validating and re-

sacralizing the concerns of a seemingly unrecognized and secularized experience of daily work.

The effect of these theological and liturgical connections, however small and symbolic, has been immensely significant for many of my informants. Like Nigel, they have recognized that it was the support of others in the church – whether locally or further afield – which was essential in helping them to overcome that sense of compartmentalization which had undermined their witness at work.

8.3.2 Connecting pastorally and structurally

In Nigel's story, he reflected on the surprising strength of affirmation which he felt as the 'Faith in Working Life' initiative began to address his concerns as a Christian at work (see Section 8.1 above, pp.170-171). A hunger for validation by the church, in some meaningful pastoral way, was a prominent theme in the reflections of all my informants. They needed to know and to feel that:

> Being a Christian at work has validity. It's not something that the church should view negatively in comparison with being an ordained minister. (Interview 11)

In contrast to an attitude and a practice of care which engages thoughtfully with the concerns and details of domestic and family life, it was apparent to Nigel and to my other informants that many *clergy lacked pastoral imagination* in relation to the challenges of workplace discipleship. With the big exception of church schools, where the local minister (at least in Anglican and Roman Catholic settings) is usually invited and empowered to play a governing as well as an educational and pastoral role, it was unusual even for workplaces within the neighbourhood of the church to feature significantly on the minister's pastoral agenda.

> It's a mindset thing. Unless it's something to do with the minister's agenda, you know, I sometimes think they don't give a toss. (Interview 11)

This clergy 'mindset', which all too readily determines the focus for the missionary agenda of the whole congregation, is often marked by an unconscious *vocational dualism*. Contrary to the revolutionary teaching of the Reformers, an implicit understanding of vocation which values work in the church more highly

than work in secular institutions persists in almost every section of the church. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it serves to affirm the vocational choice made by those ministers who have 'left their nets' to follow the call of Christ (Mark 1.18) in what is then often described as 'full time Christian service.'

> That's a joke. As if what we do isn't full time – and much more! (A child care assistant; RJN March 2006)

It may also be the case, as Nigel suspected, that *clergy lack experience and confidence* in the world of work beyond the church. Indeed, in some cases, their initial calling into 'the ecclesiastical show' (Van Beveren 2005) may have been partly motivated by a failure to understand or to succeed in a previous secular occupation. Even when ministers are recruited in mid-life after lengthy experiences of secular work, the rapid pace of change in many modern workplaces can quickly render their experience outdated. Where, by contrast, the culture of the church is 'painfully slow to change', as Nigel found, it is not surprising that ministers quite quickly lose touch with the challenges and complexities which others continue to face.

An inward-looking culture of *unquestioned clericalism* lies behind much of the failure of pastoral imagination which my informants described. In some cases this culture was embraced very early in ministerial training.

> A group of trainee ministers was taken on placement to visit a bus company. The member of staff escorting them round the depot offered to show them a new vehicle that had been purchased as a result of a highly successful funding initiative. He was clearly very proud of this development, and eager to show off the shiny new vehicle to his guests. The ordinands were surly and unimpressed. 'We've seen buses before,' they told him. (RJN March 2006)

More often, as clergy themselves become more totally absorbed in the 'ecclesiastical show', they slowly veer towards a *skewed ecclesiology* which forgets to recognize the importance of the church in its daily dispersion. When the operative ecclesiology becomes Sunday-centred, the church is only seriously legitimated in its gathered form where Christians come together for worship and study, prayer and fellowship. My informants struggled to relate to an enacted ecclesiology in which the Sunday service is regarded as the apex of the whole week, and the church building becomes the primary locus for Christian life and community.

Chapter 8: Only Connect?

The church only gets seen when it's assembled. It's as if we're invisible when we're dispersed out in the world. (Group 13)

Of course, there are other factors in the *clergy-lay divide* which are not always easy for churches to admit. The sheer *busy-ness of the ministerial role*, as clergy struggle to maintain the church's inner life in an environment in which diminished respect and dwindling resources conspire to make them feel overburdened and isolated, can be overwhelming. It is exceptionally hard in such a context for a local minister to maintain a broader pastoral and theological perspective and not surprising, therefore, if lay Christians are sometimes made to feel that their minister has 'too much to do' to take a real interest in their working lives.

There is another factor which, for professional Christians who are kept in the pay of the church and very often in housing belonging to the church, can be awkward to acknowledge. Many clergy feel uncomfortable in the face of the *difference in lifestyles* between them and their families and those whom they perceive to be 'successful' professionals in secular callings. Unacknowledged envy or resentment of this lifestyle can make it hard for the minister to empathize with the challenges facing those in secular employment. Equally, church members in secular employment can feel hesitant or embarrassed to approach a minister whom they perceive to be enjoying a 'protected life' (in terms of level of responsibility and job security) and/or living 'sacrificially' (in terms of income) when, in terms of their place in the economy, it seems as if they are 'living on a different planet' (Group 6).

Although I have focused on the role of the clergy as those who chiefly determine the extent to which the church is able to connect pastorally with issues of working life, it is also the case that core members of the laity will exercise a considerable influence in ways which may reflect and compound any pastoral imbalance demonstrated by their ministers. The *agenda of many older and retired members of the congregation* may thus collude with that of their minister in keeping issues of working life at a safe distance, especially when it is not uncommon for church members in early retirement to feel more appreciated in church-based lay ministry than they did in their paid employment.

The multi-faceted *lack of pastoral imagination* which I have explored in this section, and which had proved so disappointing to many of my informants,

has been noted in several previous empirical studies.[10] It is arguably the biggest contributing factor to the continuing 'ecclesiological gap' which, on Masumoto's analysis, needs to be addressed if the mission and witness of lay people in their working lives is to be adequately supported (see Figure 8.2 above, p.174).

It would be patronizing to assume, however, that the 'gap' can only be approached from one side. David Welbourn emphasizes the role that lay people themselves must play in relation to the church. In his set of 'core skills for working Christians' he includes a proactive role of awareness-raising and networking which might be most appropriately lay-led:

> *This involves showing that*
> I encourage in my local church a wider understanding of mission so as to include ministry to the world of work and support of its own working members.
> *I can do this by*
> a) Reporting back to my local church leadership the main issues and concerns currently being faced in the world of work;
> b) Promoting opportunities for discussion, mutual support, prayer etc. with other working members of the congregation;
> c) Encouraging my church to become a more effective support-base for its working members of the congregation;
> d) Acquainting myself with local, regional and national resources designed to support Christian ministry in the world of work. (Welbourn 2002)

It would be practically and theologically disingenuous, however, to suppose that sufficient support could be mobilized for Christian witness at work on the basis of individual and/or lay-led initiatives alone. The need for new and appropriate structural engagement with the workplace remains as pressing as ever and has been compounded in recent years by three notable social and ecclesiological shifts: first, the greater mobility of working people which weakens both spatial and temporal links with the local church (see Section 4.2.3 above, p.67); secondly, an increasingly congregational model of church life and investment which reduces resources for mission in wider sections of public life; and thirdly, a reduced commitment to formal ecumenical collaboration which depletes and fragments strategic investment in sector ministries.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter the lively debate on 'mission-shaped' structures for the contemporary church, or to review the important

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[10] See Footnote 4 above, p.172. See also Jolley (2000).

historical lessons which have yet to be learned from the rise and fall of the mid twentieth century laity movement and the later twentieth century industrial mission movement.[11] I have noted the growing prominence of the pan-evangelical 'Faith in the Workplace' movement (see Section 6.2.2 above, pp.106-116) which continues to spawn large numbers of mostly para-church networks, publications and websites,[12] and the equally flourishing but largely amorphous 'Spirituality in Business' movement.[13]

Within and beyond such a dizzying assortment of local and global, mono-professional and cross-sector, denominational and ecumenical, conservative and liberal support structures, the passion to connect faith and working life continues to spark innovation at an ecclesial and structural level. Many initiatives – like Nigel's 'Faith in Working Life' group – are small and local and of brief duration, dependent on the fragile coalition of enthusiasm and goodwill of a small number of catalytic lay and ordained people. Others, like the Industrial Mission movement, achieve a national profile and penetration over decades.

Putting to one side a somewhat disconcerting sense that some of the most serious and damaging 'missiological gaps' are those which open up between competing structural expressions of 'The Church' itself, I return to the missiological analysis and agenda set by Masumoto (see Figure 8.2 above, p.174). An appropriate and adequate ecclesiological response to the challenge of speaking of faith at work will require a commitment and effort to making connections at many levels. I have argued in this section: first, that this is an agenda for the whole church and not merely a problem for isolated individuals; secondly, that theology which is critical, contextual and collaborative and liturgy which is inclusive and affirmative can contribute significantly to support; and thirdly, that a deeper pastoral imagination and a more realistic structural commitment is needed to develop and sustain the articulation of a vigorous lay apostolate in the world of work.

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[11] See Church of England (2004), Hull (2006) and Croft (2008) for the ongoing debate on 'mission-shaped' church structures. On the unfinished agenda of the laity movement, see especially the reports by the Church of England (1985; 1987; 1999), from the Methodist Church (1988) and the Roman Catholic church (Pope John Paul II 1988). For valuable critiques of Industrial Mission see especially Masumoto (1983), 'IM – An Appraisal' (Church of England 1988), Davies (1991), Rogerson (1996), Reindorp (2000) and Brown and Ballard (2006).

[12] A recent trawl of the internet revealed forty six nationally active 'Faith in the Workplace' organizations, fifty seven groups operating in local and regional networks, forty seven networks specific to particular occupational sectors and no less than one hundred and thirty seven workplace groups all registered with the London-based organization Transform Work UK (*Workplace Community* 2007). For a recent US study of this well-connected movement see (Miller 2007).

[13] See Howard and Welbourn for a UK perspective on this phenomenon (2004).

8.4 Working-towards-communion

So a fundamental strategy is simply not to disconnect people. (R. Paul Stevens)[14]

My practical theological argument in this chapter is not complex. I suggest that the articulation of work and worship in one voice is the proper concern of the whole church, and that the open dialogue between work and worship embodies the dynamic encounter of God-in-communion with his world. From this trinitarian perspective, I suggest three simple strategies of *communion*.

First, I insist that the identity of a Christian-as-worshipper must never be disconnected from the identity of a Christian-as-worker. Against a practical denial of God's loving involvement in all arenas of human work, a trinitarian understanding of human identity invites us to discern in our different roles and responsibilities both within and beyond the church the eternal flow of God's mission of grace (see Section 1.4 above, pp.11-12). It is in light of this trinitarian mission that pastoral imagination must be deepened and enlarged so that the full dignity of those who are called into communion with Christ may be recognized in their vocation and ministry both in the church and in the world (Pope John Paul II 1988, 8).

Secondly, I insist that the gathering together of the people of God must never be disconnected from the dispersal of God's people into the world. In a time of religious decline it can be hard to resist the perversely inward-looking forces which come into play. A positive trinitarian understanding of mission, however, invites us to an extravagant and overflowing discovery of outgoing love and engagement. It is in the light of this unstinting mutuality of giving and receiving that the practical rhythms of gathering and dispersal of the church should be affirmed, and in faithful response to this dialogical flow of mission that contextually appropriate structures of both 'coming' and 'going' should be developed (Stevens 1999, p.212).

Thirdly, I insist that the liturgical power of the language of worship must never be disconnected from the economic power of the language of the workplace. Against the fearful and contrastive view that one powerful form of rhetoric must necessarily displace or diminish another, a trinitarian or 'polyphonic' view of discourse invites us to a renewed confidence in the dialogue between different economies, and a renewed theological openness to fresh insight (see Section 1.4

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[14] (Stevens 1999, p.211)

above, pp.12-13, and Cunningham 1998, pp.155-164). In this open space of dialogue we are called to share in a maturity of theological reflection which is critical, contextual and practically collaborative.

       I have argued in this chapter that neither the problem of 'compartmentalization' between the worlds of work and worship, nor the challenge of speaking adequately and appropriately of faith at work, should be considered as an issue for the individual working Christian in isolation. In the light of a trinitarian dynamic of mission, I advocate a fresh commitment to a deeper pastoral imagination, a more serious structural investment and a more critical theological endeavour to connect the spheres of work and worship in faithful *communion*.

CHAPTER 9

ENVOI: KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING

> A conversation is a rare phenomenon, even for Socrates. It is not a confrontation. It is
> not a debate. It is not an exam. It is questioning itself. It is a willingness to follow the
> question wherever it may go. It is dia-logue. (David Tracy)[1]

My study presents a theological exploration of the problems and potentialities of Christian conversation in the context of working life. It is a study which has been earthed in many fascinating conversations: personal and theoretical, sociological and theological, academic and practical. And it is a study about which I hope to share many yet more fruitful conversations in the future. The final chapter of my thesis, then, is scarcely the end of the conversation. It is, however, a point of departure: an envoi. My purpose, therefore, in this chapter is to take stock of the conversation so far in the hope of suggesting some interesting, and possibly important, avenues for continuing reflection, research and practice.

The thesis began by setting out the problem which I depicted through the metaphor of 'a life in two languages'. In the first chapter I established the purpose of the study to explore theologically the discursive interface between the world of worship and the world of secular work, and named the research question: *How may a Christian speak adequately and appropriately of their faith at work?* The second chapter gave an account of a methodological approach which was purposefully dialogical in conception and practice. I explained my choice of a research method which employed both the tools of socio-cultural analysis and the disciplines of critical theological reflection from the standpoint of a Christian practical theologian committed to missiological, sociological, theological, contextual, hermeneutic and eschatological criteria.

In the second part of the thesis I introduced a series of theoretical themes drawn from contemporary social studies which emerged as vital perspectives on the research problem. In Chapter 3, I focused on the underlying *question of identity* through a consideration of intercultural perspectives on the self. In Chapter 4, I focused on the crucial *question of power* through a consideration of

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[1] (Tracy 1987, p.18).

the ideological context of secularism within which a Christian witness is framed. In Chapter 5, I introduced the *question of language* to focus on how the performance of discourse intersects with the structures of power in the workplace. These were the questions which I brought into conversation with my data as I sought for a socio-culturally appropriate and theologically adequate interpretation of the practice of speaking of faith at work.

In the third part of the thesis I displayed the analysis of my data in terms of the faithful practices of *engagement*, *fluency* and *communion*. Chapter 6 presented a series of ideal types for Christian missiological engagement in the workplace as a heuristic device for evaluating theologically the appropriateness and adequacy of different positions within the realistic constraints of context and power. Chapter 7 showed, through two extended case studies, how the tools of critical discourse analysis and hermeneutical and dialogical philosophy could be used to investigate the depth and detail of the pragmatic problems and poetic possibilities inherent in the daily conversational work of Christian witness. Chapter 8 exposed the communal dimension of the problem, arguing the need for ecclesial support, and sketching the outlines of an appropriate theological and liturgical and an adequate pastoral and structural response to the needs of Christians engaged in the daily apostolate of working life.

My overarching interpretative perspective in shaping and investigating the question, and in analyzing and reporting the findings of my research, has been trinitarian. I named as a sin of broken relationship and failed communion the socioeconomic and discursive structures and practices which work to disconnect Christian identity and witness through an estrangement of the worlds of work and worship. Drawing from a richly renewed trinitarian theology of dynamic interrelationship, I discerned the resources for an ecstatic overflow of gracious communication in the faithful practices of *engagement*, *fluency* and *communion*.

This is how I have understood the conversation so far. In the next sections I will open up three further angles for discussion. The first is the *reflexive conversation* in which I review critically the methodological process of the research and suggest how it might be strengthened and further developed (Section 9.1). The second is the *academic conversation* in which I assess the theoretical contribution brought by this study to a practical theology of work (Section 9.2). The third is the *practical conversation* in which I outline the implications of this study for Christian practice and consider the possibilities for dissemination and

practical evaluation of the research findings (Section 9.3). The chapter ends with a brief theological reflection (Section 9.4).

9.1   The reflexive conversation

There is, it seems to me, a rich irony in presenting a study of speaking and conversation in the form of a mono-authored text! As I sit before the computer screen, calmly composing the well crafted words with which I hope to commend my argument, it is easy to forget the particular circumstance in which a practical issue was encountered or the material and relational setting in which a tract of speech was articulated. Even as I write about the importance of attention to context and my commitment to a complexification which displays the depth and detail of intricate social realities, I retain the freedom in practice to tell a tidy story which smoothes over the disappointment of methodological misjudgments and the embarrassment of analytical dead ends.

In the spirit of reflexivity, then, I need to consider the dynamics of power which have played out in the pursuit of my research and to reflect on the adequacy and appropriateness of my own engagement with the lives of those who have been my co-informants in this study.

It has been particularly salutary to reflect on the extent to which my own agenda and that of a particular co-informant has, or has not, overlapped. In the process of a research conversation which has itself been shot through with more or less overt power plays on different levels, I have had frequent cause to consider the integrity of my agenda, and to reflect critically on the appropriateness of my enactment of a *role*, my pursuit of a *question* within an interpretative *framework*, and the decisions which I subsequently made about *representation*.

In a series of pre-planned interviews my *role* as a researcher was made explicit (see Section 2.4.2 above, pp.22-23). I had negotiated in advance my right to pursue a particular agenda, securing an agreement in writing to use the resulting 'data' for my own academic purposes, through a process of 'informed consent'. In Reinharz' terms I offered a seemingly uncomplicated 'research-based self' (Hertz 1997, p.5). Yet things could become less straightforward if another role intruded in the conversation. Sometimes, my 'brought self' might raise issues for a conversation partner. I realized quite soon that if I enacted a double role I could be situated in confusing ways. In more than one instance my informant was also a

current student of mine. How could I be sure that she was not dressing up her account in order to impress her tutor? In other interviews I realized that my informant had weighed me in the balance and found me wanting in some way. Sensing that I needed to be taken in hand, some particularly assertive interviewees took the opportunity to test out whether or not, on their terms, I was theologically sound.

I discovered that often my role and my agenda would shift as I grew into a 'situationally created self' (Hertz 1997, p.5). For example I decided to embrace, within reasonable limits, the various pastoral roles which developed in the course of a conversation as I played, by turn, the part of confidant, comforter or informal educator. In these situations I learned less about the answers to the questions that I had brought with me, but far more about the questions which weighed most heavily on my informant.

In other unplanned conversations it was a pre-existing role as colleague, or friend, or teacher which gave me access to a setting where the role of the researcher could be pursued, as it were, beneath the counter (see Section 2.4.3 above, pp.23-24). In these opportunistic encounters I noticed that although my freedom to pursue a research question in depth was restricted, yet the naturalistic setting of the encounter suggested a wealth of meaning which was not always apparent in the more abstract setting of a pre-arranged interview.

I had not expected to learn so much about dialogical openness and the fine details of co-reflexive learning through these simple social intricacies of engaging in research conversations.

More seriously, perhaps, I had to reflect on the use of power to control the agenda in relation to my *question*, my interpretative *framework* and my subsequent *representation* of reality. It became uncomfortably clear in some conversations that my informant's agenda was very different from my own. Perhaps his question was different from mine, and one or other of us would soon become bored. More often, his interpretative framework would turn out to be at odds with mine as I engaged with someone whose theological understanding of Christian mission was significantly different from my own. In such a case, I faced a double dilemma. How far should I pursue a line of questioning which might threaten a cherished understanding of the faith? And how critically should I then evaluate a model of Christian practice which I found, to some extent, offensive?

In retrospect, I should not have been surprised at the depth of feeling which some of these interviews generated. In one instance a particularly penetrating interview contributed to a breakdown in working relationships with a colleague. I learned not to underestimate the phenomenal force fields which come into play when the cloak of privacy is withdrawn from religious convictions in the power-saturated milieu of relationships at work. The surprising sensitivity of some of the research conversations has helped to sharpen my overall analysis of the potent interplay between language and power when faith-talk is brought out into the open (see Section 7.2.1 above, pp.134ff.).

I have also come to a much deeper recognition of my responsibility towards my 'data' and my 'interpretations' – because not far behind these representations are the faces of people who have put their trust in me. As far as possible, I have tried to honour that trust by a careful attention to accuracy and confidentiality in my reporting, and by a collaborative process of interpretation which has challenged my inevitable prejudices and authorial interests (see Section 2.5.3 above, pp.27-29 and Table 2a on p.28). What I have not done in this phase of the research is to return a full account of my interpretation to those who have been my informants. Although, in informal ways, I have shared parts of the analysis with a wide range of co-interpreters, I recognize that a more formal and comprehensive feedback of the research findings would require a specific action-research phase in the programme, and would demand an additional major project to bring to conclusion (see Section 2.5.4 above, p.30).

What I present, then, at this exploratory stage in the research is an interpretative map which I hope will be richly suggestive both academically and practically, whilst remaining open for further strengthening and critical development in the future.

9.2 The academic conversation

The main contributions of this study, at an academic level, can be recognized in relation to four areas: in contributing to a *fresh perspective* on work; in using *fresh resources* from socio-cultural theory and pursuing a *fresh analysis* of the experience of Christians at work; and in forging a *fresh synthesis* of theoretical concepts and practical analysis for a *fresh interpretative map* of the challenge of speaking of faith at work.

First, my work opens up the field of theological reflection on work by specifically addressing the communicative dimension of working life (see Section 1.3.2 above, pp.10-11). Traditional theologies of work developed over the last half century have concentrated largely on the material realities of work: the nature and processes of production, the terms and conditions of employment, and the overarching economic framework in which the experience of work has been wrought. In this study I have turned my attention instead to the relational and expressive dimensions of the working experience which are acknowledged to play such a crucial role, both managerially and operationally, in the contemporary post-industrial experience of work (Hage and Powers 1992; Casey 1995).

The importance of culture and diversity in the workplace has never been so prominent, nor so problematic (Albrecht 2001). Yet the predominant managerial focus on the needs of perceived minorities in the workforce has not always been matched by critical consideration of the cultural needs and values of Christian workers (Soor 2006). In this changing climate the need for theological reflection on the issues of identity and culture, and the skills of communication and relationship in the workplace is of considerable missiological as well as pastoral importance.

In these areas, my study presents a fresh slant on work which extends the agenda for theological reflection into a critical consideration of Christian discourse, identity and culture in the profoundly secularized and increasingly diversified contemporary workplace. Within this wider field of reflection on workplace life and behaviour, which is growing in managerial and political as well as pastoral and missiological significance, my work suggests a critical and creative agenda for faithful Christian witness.

Secondly, my study brings fresh theoretical resources to bear on the interpretation and evaluation of Christian practices in the workplace. My use of contemporary cultural theory together with insights from hermeneutic philosophy and dialogics to theorize the expression of Christian identity in the world of work represents a new and suggestive synthesis which has informed my practical interpretation of the challenges to authentic discipleship.

The insights of critical discourse analysis are now being embraced in studies of religious language (Heather 2000) and are being applied to good effect in a wide range of pastoral settings (Heather 2002; 2004; 2007; Savage and Boyd-Macmillan 2007). Little attention has been paid, however, to the ways in which

religious language operates as 'discourse' in settings outside the cultural enclave of the church. Building on the analysis of Callum Brown (2001), which presents modern secularization as a significantly discursive phenomenon, my work shows how the insights of discourse analysis might bring fresh resources to bear on the understanding of one particularly powerful sphere of contemporary secularist hegemony.

Thirdly, my study presents a fresh analysis of the experience of work by subjecting the practices of faith-talk to sustained and critical examination. Whilst the practice of Christian witness in the workplace has become the focus of a very vigorous popular movement, and books on 'spirituality and business' and 'faith@work' are now being produced, as Larive puts it, 'like sausages' (2004, p.4), there has been little critical exploration of the depth and detail of the articulation of Christian witness in a working context which is so heavily inscribed with power.

For this new field, which is of growing interest in the churches, my work contributes a carefully observed study of the sociolinguistic, hermeneutic and missiological dimensions of the practice of Christian witness in the workplace which will provide some useful analytical starting points for further theoretical and practical research.

I have suggested that my work contributes to a fresh perspective on work, using fresh resources from socio-cultural theory and discourse analysis to pursue a fresh analysis of the challenges of speaking of faith at work. Finally, then, my work offers a fresh synthesis of theoretical and analytical perspectives which have been drawn together in the light of an overarching trinitarian hermeneutic (Figure 9.1 overleaf).

My theoretical work has exposed questions of *identity* and *power* and *language* as essential themes for theological reflection on the practice of speaking of faith in the workplace. These were the questions which I brought into conversation with my data as I pursued a socio-culturally appropriate and theologically adequate account of the contextual practices of Christian witness. In the light of a trinitarian understanding of Christian identity and mission, I suggested the evaluative themes of *engagement*, *fluency* and *communion* as an interpretative basis for a creative individual and corporate Christian practice of addressing the world of work.
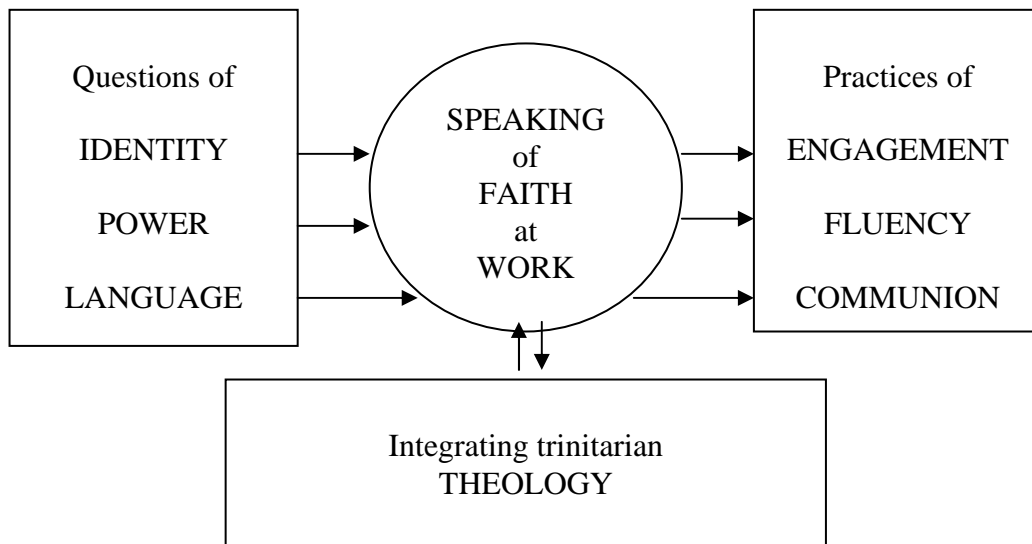
Figure 9.1   Conceptual framework for the study

'The Trinity remains an under-developed doctrine in theologies of work,' according to Andy Jolley (2006, p.106).[2]   Whilst not intended as a systematic treatment of work (see Section 1.3.2 above, p.10), my study offers some pointers towards the development of a more comprehensive account of work based on a renewed theology of the Trinity.   Looking beyond the material and functional dimensions of work and its economic context, I have reflected theologically on the personal and cultural, discursive and interrelational dimensions which are of such significance for the contemporary working experience.   In this area I have discovered some profoundly pertinent resources from practical theologies of the Trinity.

In relation to identity and relationship, I have looked to a trinitarian model of being to resolve the alienating disconnection between person and role which underlies the compartmentalization and fragmentation of a life straddling the religious sphere of worship and the secular sphere of work.   Developing a theme of radical openness, which embraces otherness in a spirit of self-giving hope, I have outlined a practice and work of engagement which is marked by a passionate presencing and a kenotic outpouring of the self.

This trinitarian vision invites a way of being-in-conversation which Hoffman describes as 'translating myself' (1998, p.211).   The kind of personal and discursive fluency which I advocate is not, however, uncritical or innocent of

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[2] See Footnote 11 in Chapter 1 (p.11) for recent theological treatments of work which include some exploration of trinitarian themes.

the ambivalent realities of power. For a Christian called into relationship with the Other, her work and witness must remain acutely sensitive to self-suspicion and watchful critique. The prophetic mandate, which is so vital within the roles and relationships of economic life, requires a constant, shrewd attention to the political dynamics and intricacies of workplace communication. For this purpose I have found the resources of critical discourse analysis to be invaluable.

The trinitarian complement to a critical, or prophetic mandate is the constructive, or poetic vocation. As an agent of good news, the Christian at work is called to participate in the endlessly expressive love of God-in-Trinity. Drawing on an imagination which does not ultimately lie within herself, she labours to articulate a freshly-shaped and faithfully-placed testimony amidst the daily dialogue of working repertoires and relationships.

But how is she to be sustained in this work? A truly trinitarian understanding of mission can scarcely be enacted by isolated Christians engaging their daily apostolate in the workplace with no reference to the worshipping community which feeds and nurtures their 'mother-tongue'. I have argued that the faithful practices of *engagement* and *fluency* in the daily articulations of witness at work are inherently bound up with the ecclesial practice of *communion* in the open dialogue between work and worship which embodies the dynamic encounter of God-in-communion with his world.

These are the outlines of the trinitarian hermeneutic which I have begun to discern. Against the background of a powerfully 'communicative turn' in the post-industrial experience of work, and in the light of a vigorously interrelational emphasis in contemporary trinitarian theology, I suggest that there is a rich potential field for further academic study and development towards a fully contemporary theology of working life.

9.3   The practical conversation

The practical and *missiological* purpose of this study has been highlighted from the outset (see Section 2.1 above, p.17). How can I enable a faithful expression of Christian identity in the discursive dominion of the secular workplace? I have become increasingly aware through the course of the research that any practical response to this missionary challenge must be both highly *contextual* and also profoundly *corporate* in nature. I cannot, therefore, offer any abstract or

individual blueprint for immediate implementation of this research in 'a workplace near you'. Rather, the potential for the application of my research needs further exploration in ways which will honour the communal nature of Christian mission (see Chapter 8 above) and which will engage seriously with the highly particular demands and opportunities of specific workplace contexts, roles and relationships (see Chapter 6 above).

My study has prepared the ground, both theoretically and through analysis of carefully observed practice, for the development of critical educational resources for reflective practice in both church and workplace settings. I realize, of course, that the thesis which has been developed for a primarily academic purpose would almost certainly be 'lost in translation' if it were to be shared in its current form with lay Christians or local clergy. My aim, following the completion of this exploratory study, is to work collaboratively with educational specialists and local ministers to produce some pilot materials for a shared learning initiative which could be evaluated as a piece of further action research.

Because I am a practical theologian by heart, and not merely by training, I hope very much not to abandon this conversation. It has been for me a rich opportunity for personal and professional growth and integration, as well as a wonderful stimulus to engage with the voices of countless friends and colleagues in a conversational process which has been endlessly fascinating and full of the surprising fruitfulness of the inexhaustible and indivisible Trinity.

The last word…? I hope not.

9.4 Envoi

> The end is where we start from. And every phrase
> And sentence that is right (where every word is at home)
> [...] is an end and a beginning. (T.S. Eliot)[3]

We end where we began with language, love and labour
And these three shall testify
And these three are one

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[3] From 'Little Gidding' (Eliot 1963, p.221).

Chapter 9: Keeping the Conversation Going

Sunday by Sunday the honeyed scroll is consumed

Each fragment slow-released within the mind

And savoured upon the lips

Here at this board of blood and Benediction

The sacred dance from one to Other flows

And leaps from word to Word

How many baskets have you gathered?

How many fragments?

Enough to feed my people?

For labour is hungry work, holy work

Ecstatic work, eternal work

That ends in a cry

Let us breathe then, let us pray

Let us push, let us prophesy

Let us commune

And the Word will embrace the work

And labour among us

Full of grace and truth

Wield well your tools in this your workshop

For workers' words are roughly-hewn

And cry for beauty

Come singing, surplus Spirit, self-consuming

Pour out your living, longing flame

Baptize our tongues with fire

Engage, empower, enchant, embolden

Inflect, impel each phrase, each word

Lost in translation.

Chapter 9: Keeping the Conversation Going

APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Christian Witness at Work

I am undertaking doctoral research in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of Glasgow University. My research concerns the nature of Christian witness in the setting of secular work. As part of my research, I plan to interview people from a variety of working backgrounds to explore their experience as Christian people within the context of their working lives. The aim of the research is to develop adult education resources for use in the church.

I will use a guided interview format consisting of seven question areas. The interview will last approximately one hour. The questions will address ways in which you express your Christian identity in the context of your work. I will take brief notes during the interview to inform my questioning. The interview will be tape recorded to facilitate subsequent analysis of the data, and a written transcript will be prepared by me. The tape will be kept in a secure place by me for approximately one year, and will be destroyed when the study is complete.

- If you agree to be interviewed, you may withdraw from the process at any time.
- Your name will not be used in the study, but rather a pseudonym will be used to designate your remarks. Details of your place of work and employer will also be anonymized.
- You will have the right to review the written transcript of your interview and to delete any portion which you feel does not reflect the veracity of the process, or which you wish to be deleted for reasons of personal or commercial confidentiality.
- The material generated will become part of my doctoral dissertation, and may also be presented at conferences and used for future educational publications. You will have the right to peruse any publication deriving from this research on your request.
- Given the nature of my subject, and the procedures for ensuring confidentiality, I cannot foresee any risk to research participants.

After an initial interview, I will invite some participants to consider further involvement in the project by means of completing a brief journal, joining a focus group, or agreeing to a follow-up interview. Your participation in the initial interview and in any subsequent research activity is entirely voluntary, and you are free to participate or not to participate in any activity without prejudice.

Thank you for considering my request. Please retain a copy of this letter for your records.

Margaret Whipp

I understand the conditions of this study and wish to participate in an initial research interview as described above.

Signature…………………..Name………………..………...Date……………………

I am willing to be contacted with an invitation to participate in further research activities connected with this project.

Signature……………..........Name……………….…………Date…........................

Appendix I: Informed Consent Letter

APPENDIX II

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