

**Lutheran Church of Australia:
Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions**

ETHICAL CONCERNS OF CHRISTIAN WORKERS IN A NON-CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

By Rev P W Boesch for the Commission, September 1993

Biblical Principles for Working in a Non-Christian Context

1. As Christians, we are people of God's kingdom living in societies which are not specifically Christian, and very often not sympathetic to Christian beliefs and ethical concerns. St Peter well describes Christians as 'God's elect, strangers in the world' (1 Pet 1:1). In view of this, it should come as no surprise that our distinctive Christian moral and ethical concerns will appear as 'foreign' to those who do not share our hope in Christ. Disagreements and even conflicts may be expected, not only in the workplaces of our lives, but even in our homes, if family members do not share a common faith in Christ. In fact, Christ asserts that this will be the case (Matt 10:34-39).
2. In such circumstances Christians will sometimes be confronted with situations in which they must choose between what is right before God and what is often expected of them in the workplace. To choose to act ethically may mean loss of money, business opportunities, chance of promotion, or even one's own job. But to act unethically is to disobey God and to compromise with what is evil and destructive, which amounts to a refusal to bear one's cross, a denial of Christ rather than of self. Here the warning of Christ should be heeded: 'You cannot serve both God and mammon' (Luke 16:13).
3. The Christian in such a dilemma may be tempted to escape the secular workplace and to have as little to do with it as possible. But we cannot escape from the world. The workplace is where Christians should be. Work is not the secular side of our lives but part and parcel of our vocation from God. Indeed, Christians will 'catch glimpses of God in their work'. We express our service to God by the way we go about our work. It has been said that 'work done with competence and virtue is spiritual work'. Furthermore it is in the workplace that we are to be 'salt' and 'light' (Matt 5:13-16). It is also in the workplace that we find opportunities to bear witness to Christ as Lord and Saviour.
4. Sometimes Christians in the workplace face relatively straightforward, single-issue problems such as dishonest business dealings, petty theft from company supplies, or the active promotion of false, pornographic, or anti-Christian literature. Often, however, the problems are more complex and not easy to solve in a Christian way. These may include: promoting a product with integrity, determining what is a reasonable profit, fair play with respect to

competitors, and balancing responsibilities at work with those at home, to mention but a few.

Guidelines for the Workplace

1. The first concern of Christians in the workplace should be to grow in dependence upon God and to trust his word and promises. Christians need to study the word and take time to reflect on God's message for individuals and for the workplace so that they will understand God's will for them and learn to trust in his goodness. Prayer will help them to make hard decisions and to be confident that in all things God works for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28).
2. When faced with ethical problems in the workplace, Christians should not seek confrontation, which may lead to misunderstanding and quarrels, but rather they should seek understanding and peace (Heb 12:14). Problems can often be avoided by a well-reasoned explanation of our concerns, offered in a courteous and friendly manner. Such an explanation can also be a testimony which helps others to consider their own situations and to act ethically themselves. However, in endeavouring to follow Christ's way in the workplace, Christians may have to face strong opposition, which may result in personal abuse, stress, and even loss of employment. In such circumstances Christians will need to ask for a special measure of grace and help from God.
3. Faced with difficult ethical problems in the workplace, Christians need the support of fellow-believers, particularly of those who best understand the situation. For this reason Christians are well-advised to discuss such concerns with other Christian businesspeople or those involved in similar work situations, with their family, and with their pastor or a competent Christian counsellor. In some cases Christians in the workplace have banded together in organisations, or meet informally, to provide mutual support for one another.
4. An important consideration for Christians in the workplace is the effects of their actions on others. Any decisions should take into account things like the effects of work practices on their own and other's families, and the effects of aggressive business behaviour on neighbouring businesses, which may be disadvantaged or even bankrupted as a result. The Golden Rule (Matt 7:12) applies in business relationships as it does in personal relationships.
5. There are, of course, other ethical concerns for Christians in the workplace. They cannot be treated in detail here, but include such things as: recognising differences between Christian ethics and the ethics of those who do not base their ethical views on Christian foundations, or who have few ethical scruples of any kind; the difficulty of teaching and training employees concerning ethical behaviour in business when they may not be accustomed to considering the ethical implications of their behaviour; and the need for Christians in the workplace to draw up their own ethical guidelines.
6. Some books and other written material on the subject of ethics in the secular workplace include:
William Droehl, *Business People* (ACTA Publications, Chicago, 1991).
William Diehl, *Thank God, it's Monday* (Fortress, 1982)

William Diehl, *In Search of Faithfulness* (Fortress, 1987)

William Diehl, *The Monday Connection* (Harper, San Francisco, 1991)

Wally Armbruster, *It's Still Lion vs Christian in the Business Area* (Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1979)