Christians
in the
Workplace

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by D. Gareth Jones

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Nature of the pluralistic workplace

Today's workplace is replete with ethical dilemmas. Not all are of dramatically major proportions, although the range of dilemmas and challenges is considerable. All workers are affected, regardless of where in the hierarchy they fit - employers, employees; those with considerable leadership responsibilities, those with few; those who give orders, those who carry them out; senior managers, shop floor workers. Christians are affected just as much as are Muslims or unbelievers.

We live in a pluralistic world. It is a world of ethical vertigo, a world that lacks any authoritative moral tradition or vision, and hence a world without horizon or balance (Thiemann, 1991). In this world, different visions of what is good and acceptable compete for adherents, the danger being that the end-result is ethical relativity, in which all points-of-view are equally justified. However, if ethical relativism is true, no

one ethical principle can be preferred over any other, leading to a moral vacuum in which issues will be decided by expediency and possibly coercion (Childs, 1995).

Consequently, it is not surprising that the overview provided by some writers, Christians included, is grim. In a perceptive and wide-ranging analysis of the British scene, Sir Fred Catherwood, doyen of evangelical Christians, with a vast range of experience in industry, politics and the Church, paints a depressing picture of today's moral and social order (Catherwood, 1997). While this is offset to some extent by his own Christian perspective, one cannot escape the emphasis he places on the destructive forces rampant throughout the workplace, of which greed features high on his list. For him, it is greed which has corrupted the ideals of professional management. It is greed which has led to merger mania, and it is greed which keeps taxes low and interest rates high, crippling the industrial recovery needed to restore full employment. Ordinary workers see that they are being treated differently from senior managers. The result is lack of loyalty on their part; relationships break down, and morale suffers at all levels. When there is a lack of integrity in leadership, ethical standards are placed in jeopardy.

Others also view the present-day workplace as unappealing. For some, workplaces (especially corporate ones) are riddled with favouritism, with an all-consuming desire on the part of staff for promotion and positional advantage, where pragmatism rules the day, and expediency is rampant. Manipulators and unscrupulous operators are everywhere to be found, as are deception and dishonesty. Injustice is never far from the surface (Jackall, 1988). Contracts are drawn-up with exceedingly generous termination clauses for managers, golden handshakes are so lucrative as to be scandalous, and pay rises for senior executives are vastly in excess of the annual pay packets of most employees. It would be misleading to suggest that this unflattering picture is the only picture, but it depicts currents that are undoubtedly far more characteristic than one may wish to admit, whether it be in corporate management, universities, or factories.

In today's postmodern society the workplace, like most other aspects of society, has become globalized. The mobility and dynamic interaction of societies throughout the world, the nature of the communication systems which dominate our existence, the market forces that transcend national boundaries, and monetarism as a new force ruling every aspect of society, have had profound implications for every workplace. Together, these factors have conspired to render the ethical challenges and problems encountered in New Zealand very similar to those of many other countries. Internationalization has become a part of the fabric of our society, with immense implications for ethical perspectives at all levels. All are affected, no matter what ethical perspectives they espouse: Christians as much as anyone else .

The intrusion of cyber space into all our lives has brought about a revolution difficult to comprehend at this very early stage in its unfolding. The internet, electronic mail, digitization and virtual worlds have transformed the nature of time and place, bringing immense challenges for workplaces, for our conception of what it means to be human, and for our relationships with each other. The ethical dimensions of cyber space have barely been explored. It is already clear that these will touch on issues of property and ownership, justice and accountability, as well as on privacy and the protection of information (Board for Social Responsibility, 1999).

Changes such as these impose pressures on people, pressures that may have ethical overtones and for which we are ill-prepared. For instance, those who once felt assured that they had a job for life, now know this is illusory. Even in universities, those who function efficiently and well over many years will find themselves made redundant if insufficient students enrol in their discipline areas. The old certainties have disappeared. Closely associated with this is the increasing emphasis placed on competition - in the case of universities, competition for students between universities, between departments within universities, and even between sub specialities within departments. While many people thrive on competition, what is new is artificially imposed competition. What applies to universities applies equally to health services, other educational providers, bus services, and electricity suppliers. Competition is believed to increase efficiency, and increased efficiency saves money. That is a worthy objective for a society based upon monetarist ideals and the financial imperative.

Even the ways in which we organize ourselves within institutions has changed. Many within universities complain bitterly about what they perceive as the managerialism of the 'new university'. The world of the past was one where equals debated the merits of new policies, and hence had a role in determining those policies. This has given way to a new order in which policy comes down from the top - from senior managers, who are generally no longer functioning academics. Even if the change is less dramatic than depicted here, and even if the nature of the change is not as grim as made out by some, the perception among many is that the character of relationships within universities has changed for the worse. And what is true of universities is just as true of other organizations.

Trends such as these raise numerous ethical queries. What is the driving force of these 'new' organizations? Are the stakeholders (clients, students, patients, customers) being adequately catered for? Do these trends lead to the emergence of an elite managerial class, functioning by different rules from that governing all subordinate workers, with vastly different earning power and less accountability? Is there contrived competition, and does this waste resources by redirecting them towards competition and away from more constructive activities? Is the welfare of employees being factored into the uses being made of cyberspace? Are the consequences of cyberspace even being thought about?

The Other Side

This is one side of the story - the perplexing one, and yet there is also another side which appears to represent a diametrically opposing direction. This is the enormous emphasis now placed by many organizations on ethical standards, far more so than 30 years ago. It is not unusual to find companies with statements of business principles, which are in effect moral codes. Take the following (an example adapted from Higginson, 1993):

* we will operate with the highest ethical standards and integrity, both as individuals and as a company;
* we will operate in a safe and environmentally acceptable manner;

- we will work to achieve superior profit performance;
- we will operate as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible;
- we will strive for complete customer satisfaction;
- we will encourage and reward personal initiative and team effort;
- we will encourage career development and individual growth;
- we will treat all vendors fairly and equally.

This is an excellent list of ethical objectives, even if some of the principles sound unduly idealistic. However, what do broad principles like these mean in practice, and do they have any effect on the actual manner in which business is conducted? Without knowing more about the company, one can be highly sceptical about these principles in isolation: they have to be fleshed out in far more explicit ethical terms if they are to begin to inform the way in which the business operates. This particular company has done precisely this:

In all cases, profit performance is secondary to operating safely in an ethical and environmentally responsible fashion and observing all laws and regulations. Profit performance must never compromise the fundamental principles under which we operate. . . . . Safety and environmental protection usually go hand in hand: a safe practice is also likely to have environmental advantages.

This is an unusually explicit set of principles, which lays out very specifically where priorities are set, and the nature of those priorities. One still has to ask whether these priorities are implemented, and what processes are in place to ensure that this is done. Nevertheless, the principles are admirable, in that they demonstrate an awareness of the competing ethical forces at work within this industry.

Values appear regularly in charters and the like. For instance, the University of Otago (in its Charter), outlines values such as:

- academic freedom and integrity: individual and institutional
- accountability: for implementing the university's mission and educational purpose and for ensuring effective management of its resources
- equity: in employment and educational opportunities
- ethical standards: at the highest level in teaching, research and in personal behaviour
- freedom: from discrimination

The specific New Zealand context is provided by the value of :

- partnership: with the tangata whenua, through honouring the articles of the Treaty of Waitangi

These are supplemented by policies, spelling out some of the values in far greater detail. Those with ethical components include:

- academic grievance procedures for students
- statement of educational purpose and values

- guidelines for responsible practice in research and procedures for dealing with allegations of misconduct in research
- policy on ethical practices in research and teaching involving human participants
- equal educational opportunities policy
- affirmative action policy
- equal employment opportunities policy
- good employer policy
- guidelines for the use of non-sexist language
- policy on ethical behaviour

The ethical behaviour policy is based on the general principles that:

- no member of the University community will unduly interfere with the work or working environment of any other member of the University . . .
- services, benefits, opportunities and facilities provided by the University be offered to those qualified in the University community without discrimination
- those with supervisory authority use such authority . . . solely for the purposes explicitly stated or implied in University policies . . . . .

Specific principles cover: abuse of supervisory authority, sexual harassment, racial harassment, and discrimination.

While these principles are not all-embracing, they are commendable in their scope and intent. It would be easy to despise values such as these as being little more than high sounding rhetoric, even when structures are in place to implement these as far as this is possible. The challenge is to create an ethos in which these are translated into meaningful attitudes and behaviour, that transcend the politically correct and actually transform the workplace. But this is true of all ethical codes and standards. Obtaining agreement on the moral values relevant to a workplace is just the first step, albeit an important one. Christians need to be active at this level, even as they realize the preliminary nature of what is being accomplished. What this step provides is the 'legal' framework by which the workplace seeks to operate. If it actually is to operate in this manner, what is required is a community of morally aware employees. And this is where Christian contributions with their emphasis on the importance of character come into their own.

Case studies

Number 1

Stuart was made redundant two months ago, on the grounds that his boss thought he was difficult to handle. He was always in the factory on time, he never had a sickee, and the standard of his work was very high. On a number of occasions he had represented the other workers on issues where many people thought they were getting a bad deal. He knew at the time he was putting his job on the line. But as a Christian he felt he had no option, because the workers were being treated like dirt, there was no justice in the factory, and the workers were being sacrificed to what he regarded as the

great god of money and profit even though the firm was doing very well. He is unable to get any alternative employment in the small country town where he lives.

Stuart has suffered injustice, because he refused to be compliant and toe the party line. But was he justified in acting like this, since the same fate can overtake an employee who is awkward and generally obnoxious? Stuart's actions take on serious ethical dimensions because his fellow employees were treated with a lack of respect and dignity. Regardless of the employer's motives for acting like this, people were being degraded and it was this that Stuart objected to. His own actions which led to his unemployment were especially meritorious on account of the seriousness of the consequences for his own well-being.

Number 2

Claire has been head of a university department for two years, and she is finding the job very demanding with the level of stress increasing at an alarming rate. There has been a marked deterioration in the university's funding position, and this is placing immense pressures on the department. This may be bearable, but Claire feels her position is being made intolerable by senior management which is autocratic and allows her little room for manoeuvre. She is unable to make the sort of decisions she feels would be best for the staff of her department, since she is regularly overruled by the senior managers. The situation becomes almost intolerable when she is obliged to make two staff redundant, a decision she considers unwarranted. However, she decides to remain in her position, and to make her views known as vigorously as she can to senior management. She spells out as clearly as she is able what she sees as their unjust policies, thereby jeopardizing her own reputation. However, she does this carefully and in a very well thought-out way, since she has no wish to appear insolent. At the same time, she does everything she can to support the staff concerned, and to ensure that redundancy procedures are meticulously and fairly carried out.

Claire finds herself in an unenviable position of compromise, because her hands are tied by the excessive managerialism of her workplace. Not only this, it is managerialism that forces her to take an action with which she strongly disagrees. She could have shown her disagreement by resigning 'on principle'. In this instance, however, she decides to remain in what appears to be a very difficult compromise situation, but with the determination to make clearly known what she views as a preferable way. This could have led her into considerable difficulties, and she was prepared for these. However, her stand allows her to bring some good out of what is basically an evil situation. Her accomplishments are limited, but they do lead to some protection of staff .

Number 3

Sophie works in a large company, which says all the right things; it's an equal opportunity employer, and it has a smoke-free environment. On paper there are no obstacles to women or members of any minority racial group reaching the highest levels in the company. In practice, though, things don't work out quite like this, as

Sophie - a branch manager - has discovered. She finds there is no place for serious discussion of company policy, since it all comes down ready-made from the top. She knows of examples of discrimination within the company, and yet all her efforts on behalf of these individuals come to nothing. And so, while she is able to put Christian principles into practice in many aspects of the running of her office, her hands are tied on some important issues and she can do nothing to rectify what she regards as serious wrongs in some facets of company policy. She's unhappy with this, since she doesn't want to be seen as promoting unethical practices.

Sophie's predicament has much in common with that of Claire, except that she has freedom to act in her own immediate area of responsibility. This enables her to demonstrate what she considers to be the Christian way here, even though she is surrounded by another way with which she disapproves. The ethical standards in her area shine out as being different from those around her, and for her this is the redeeming factor in her situation.

Number 4

Ian has been appointed to his civil engineering company's Auckland office at a time when business is at a low ebb and the outlook is even worse. He has no illusions that his main task for the next few years will be to make staff redundant, something he has never done before and something that appals him as a Christian. On top of this, there is a personality conflict with the regional manager, whose office is next to his. Inevitably, their roles overlap to some extent, and since Pete's style is quite different from his own, Ian's problems are compounded. To make matters even worse, Ian has concerns about the firm's past EEO record, with very few senior female staff. Ian has only been in his position for a few weeks when the sole female senior administrator makes a formal complaint of sexual harassment against Pete.

What we have here is a mixture of personnel and ethical issues. The ethical issues are harassment and ignoring equal employment opportunities. Different as these are, they have a common base, namely, the unequal treatment of different individuals and groups, and therefore disregard for the dignity of some people. In practice, all are not equal. It may be that the overall ethos of the office lends itself to harassment. Whatever the case, Ian's position in having to make some redundant will be doubly difficult since he is working against a background of inequality and hence suspicion that the redundancy exercise will be carried out in the same vein. He will have to work very hard to establish an ethos engendering high moral values, especially when the office manager is himself so involved in the unethical ethos .

Number 5

Stephen is CEO of an allegedly non-profit organization that obtains human tissue from bodies that have been donated to hospitals and medical schools for research purposes. Unknown to the donors' families or general public, this organization processes tissue and body parts which it then sells on to dentists and plastic surgeons. In this way, it makes considerable amounts of money, and the CEO is extremely well-paid. In fact, his

earnings are around twenty times higher than those of the technical staff. He justifies this salary on the grounds of the success of the company. Not only this, the burns units of hospitals find it difficult to obtain enough skin because most of the supply is going to Stephen's organization which pays handsomely for it, and then sells it on for cosmetic surgery.

Stephen's business is riddled with unethical practices. In the first instance, human bodies that have been freely donated for research are turned into profit-making entities - not for the families of the donors, but for himself and his directors. The intentions of the donors have been thwarted, the families have been deceived, and the dentists and plastic surgeons who are paying for the tissue they receive have little idea of the deception involved. In addition, he creams off the bulk of the profits for himself to support what has become an ostentatious and self-centred lifestyle. Finally, to compound this litany of wrongs, those in desperate need of the tissue, burns victims, are frequently denied what is potentially available because it is being sold to the highest bidder for legitimate but lower priority treatment. In other words, both the dead and the living are being despised by this series of events.

Where do we start?

As one looks at this range of cases, with the inevitable issues raised by them, one has to ask where Christians fit in. Do Christians have any distinctive contribution to make? Are there underlying thrusts and drives within the Christian character towards ethical practices, or are Christians as much driven by circumstances and context as are those of different persuasions? One executive is said to have commented that, while the church talks in terms of absolutes, those in business deal with compromise on an hourly basis.

Look again at the illustrations provided by Stuart, Claire, Sophie and Ian. Each of these wants to act Christianly in their workplaces, and each is confronted by problems inherent within their places of work. Not one of these is exceptional, neither is any one of them especially bad. Nevertheless, they are places of tension and challenge. Injustice is present to varying degrees, some workers are treated with a lack of respect and there is discrimination in some cases. There are examples of harassment and personal conflict. The aim of these four people is to improve their workplaces, and depending on where they are within the organizations some are able to do this in limited ways, although some compromise is essential.

By contrast, Stephen represents a diametrically different way. For him, the considerations that drive the first four of these individuals do not exist. He appears to have no concern for any of the ethical standards we have encountered up to this point, and he is also feathering his own nest in financial terms. He illustrates the complete opposite of anything for which I believe we should be striving from a Christian angle, or even from the angle of a society concerned to uphold commonly held ethical principles.

One starting-point is to ask how we view employees, since this will tell us a considerable amount about our view of human nature. We may consider that employees basically dislike work, so that they will do everything they can to shirk both

it and their responsibilities. They will always tend to look after themselves, placing security above all else, always needing to be coerced, and displaying little ambition (Hill, 1998). This view downgrades the value of human beings, and so leads to polarization between management and labour. There is little trust when managers expect so little of their workers, and ethical debate concentrates on two justice concerns - property rights and contractual obligations. While these are important considerations, they do not provide an adequate basis for coping with the broad scope of human relationships.

On the other hand, this view emphasizes the need for accountability. Everyone, from time to time, needs to have someone to whom they are answerable. Mutual accountability features repeatedly in the New Testament, especially in terms of the relationships between Christian believers, with the underlying theme that they were to subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5: 21). Even in the case of slavery, there was to be mutual accountability between master and slave, both of whom were to be evaluated by their conduct towards each other (Ephesians 6: 5-9; Colossians 3: 22 - 4:1).

An alternative view is to regard work as natural. It is an integral part of human existence, and as such is to be welcomed. From this basis employees are expected to exercise self-direction and self-control. The average person can learn to accept responsibility, so that the ability to make good decisions is not a prerogative of managers alone, but is dispersed throughout the working population. In these terms, all workers will be viewed as individuals to be respected and accorded dignity, regardless of how far down the hierarchy they are. All have a place within the organization, which will function less well if any of their expertise and contributions are ignored. This fits in with the Christian perspective that all are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 26,27; 5: 1; 9: 6; James 3: 9), which inevitably leads on to the view of the church as the body of Christ (Romans 12: 4-8; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31; Ephesians 4: 7-16). This picture of the human body is a helpful one for any organization, with its reminder that the absence of any part will have detrimental effects on its overall functioning.

Unfortunately, everyone does not function in this idyllic manner. Some are lazy and self-centred, some act far more along the lines of those in the first view, loathing work, doing as little as possible, and refusing to accept the most basic responsibility. This is the negative side of the human condition, with its reflection of sin's impact on human character (Amos 8: 4-14; Jeremiah 22: 13-17; Habakkuk 2: 9-11; James 4: 1-3). Appropriate forms of control and accountability have to be built into management structures, since absolute freedom is helpful to neither individuals nor organizations.

Underlying Threads of a Christian Perspective

What emerges from the preceding discussion is that ethical principles relevant to particular workplaces have to be well-defined and clearly specified, but these by themselves are insufficient to ensure that there will be ethical behaviour. This is where the moral character of the people involved emerges as significant, and it is in bringing together these two facets that Christian input is important. James Childs has written very helpfully that "there are Christian ethics that shed light on issues of

business ethics and, in so doing, give expression to the faith from which they flow. Moreover, there are, of course, Christians in business whose moral vision is shaped by their faith and whose responsible ethical practice is a witness to the hope that is within them" (Childs, 1995). This points to the very strong linkages between the impetus provided by a Christian understanding of work and behaviour, and ethical forms of management.

In developing a Christian perspective one approach is to look to a covenantal model for management, which according to Laura Nash, has three predominant characteristics (Nash, 1991). One's ethical commitments are an integral part of the total decision-making process of the organization, in order to avoid conflict between what is ethical and what is profitable. Its focus is on delivering created value, and a driving assumption is that it creates mutually beneficial relationships through service to others. Second, other's needs constitute the major thrust of business, since this is what other-directedness (rather than self-interest) leads to. Caring leads to concern and service for others. Third, the ethos is a relationship-oriented one. Concern for ethics is integrated with concern for economic success, since service to others is the spur for innovative and competitive business initiatives .

The aim of a covenantal emphasis is to get beyond the legal and economic aspects of the employer/employee or the manager/worker relationship, in order to focus on the relationship between people. Emphasis on relationships points to the notion of an agreement or contract basic to a covenant. This model is based on the premise that those involved in any organization or business can be encouraged to see themselves as having comparable value. All are one in the sight of God, and hence all view each other as images of the one God (Jones, 1999). Although their positions within the organization will vary, as will their gifts and contributions, nevertheless, in a fundamental sense, all are essential to the well-being of the organization (1Corinthians 12: 12-31). Such a perspective is crucial if mutual trust is to be developed, and if relationships are to mature and flourish. If management focuses on relationships rather than simply on bottom-line efficiencies, workers will be treated with dignity, rather than as pieces of expendable machinery (Hill, 1998). From this it follows that ordinary employees will be encouraged to make significant contributions to improving products, processes and services. As individuals' gifts are recognized and encouraged, the people themselves can develop and grow. This should come as no surprise to Christians, since as far back as Exodus, craftsmen were recognized as having creative abilities, to be used and enhanced (Exodus 35: 30-35). In Romans, Paul considered that talents such as leadership, administration, service and oral communications may come from God and are to be harnessed and utilized in his service (Romans 12: 6-8).

Recognition of the dignity of all workers is fundamental to a covenantal approach. One of the consequences of this recognition is the notion of reciprocity, which points to a relationship that acknowledges mutual duties and accepts mutual accountability. This is a two-way process, with its mutual respect and shared obligations. Interestingly, we can detect elements of this even in the sometimes troubling master-slave relationship in the New Testament world, where Christians who were either masters or slaves were instructed to act out this principle of mutual accountability (Colossians 3: 22 - 4:1). It is also found in the Old Testament account of Joseph (Genesis 41: 33-49), which led to fair treatment and respect, fair pay, and due process.

Another consequence of the dignity motif is recognition of the diversity of a human community. Instead of seeking homogeneity, the widely divergent contributions of people at different levels and with varying abilities are welcomed. Individuals have legitimate expectations to be needed, to be involved, to influence their own destiny, to know where they stand, to do their best (De Pree, 1989), and to be accepted as an integral part of the whole enterprise no matter how lowly their position.

Diversity, in its turn, has repercussions. If people are valued for what they are, and hence the contribution they can make (whatever that may be), employees will no longer be judged entirely on merit. This is not to downplay merit, neither is this a plea for mediocrity, but it is an attempt to view diversity alongside merit. If we contend that diversity per se has value, we will cease insisting that value can only be measured quantitatively, whether this be in volume of sales, number of jobs completed or papers published, successful grant applications and the like. There may be those who carry work loads others are loathe to carry, and there are encouragers and helpers whose presence makes the workplace a far richer place. These should be protected rather than despised.

An additional aspect of diversity is what Childs (1995) has called androgyny: celebration of the role of women in business and universities, alongside the role of men. Androgyny encourages a workplace that takes account of the distinctive contributions of women as well as men, with their complementary decision-making processes and communication patterns. Competitive elements need to be balanced by caring elements, with both seen as essential prerequisites for genuinely human workplaces. With this emphasis on androgyny, the community aspects of workplaces can be developed and enjoyed, and each worker can begin to sense that they can be true to themselves and their own commitments.

Underlying all aspects of a covenantal relationship, is servant leadership which anchors every feature of Christian behaviour. Jesus was the perfect example of this, since he came to serve and not to be served (Luke 14: 7-14; Philippians 2: 3-11). Quite specifically, he taught that whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant (Matthew 20: 24-28; Mark 10: 42-44). In the Old Testament, Nehemiah saw that while the usual leaders lorded it over the people, that was not his way, since he reverenced God (Nehemiah 5: 14-16) .

This is the Christian way, with its emphasis on humility, acceptance of the unlovely, and forgiveness of one's enemies (Luke 14: 7-14; Romans 12: 3; Philippians 2: 3-8). It entails doing good to those who don't do good to us, and acting justly to those whose actions are unjust. It entails praying that the unjust will be changed, and praying that God will deal with those who are misusing us and treating us unfairly (Matthew 5: 43-46).

The contrast between secular and Christian perspectives was clearly expressed by Jesus himself: According to him, the usual run of rulers within society lord it over the people, and high officials exercise authority over the people. By contrast, those who want to be great among his followers must learn what it means to serve those for whom they have responsibility - as though they were to become slaves (Mark 10: 42-

44). For Christians, the challenge is to reinterpret secular expectations by functioning as servants to those alongside us.

With service as the starting point, our service to others in love is an outcome of God's self-giving love in Christ (Ephesians 4: 32). Christians are to be agents of reconciliation in the workplace (Matthew 18: 15-35; 1 Peter 2: 18-23), aiming as far as they can to be peacemakers. This is inextricably linked with hope, the hope Christians have of a better world; and that God's kingdom will come (Matthew 6: 9-13). In the world of work we get occasional glimpses of this when exciting transformations take place (Higginson, 1996). These may be the change of a workplace ethos from hostility and lack of trust to one that encourages individual creativity; or the gradual rekindling of enthusiasm and commitment of a PhD student previously shattered by disillusionment and anger; or the establishment of confidence and goodwill between previously antagonistic workers. Glimpses of this nature are akin to the beginnings of the new creation (Revelation 21: 24 - 22: 5).

Ethical solutions such as these are doomed to failure if those involved do not have a character displaying integrity, honesty, and wholeness (in biblical language, uprightness and righteousness - Job 2: 9; 31: 6; Psalm 7: 8; 25: 21; 26: 11; 85: 10-13; Proverbs 11: 3), all of which are based on holiness, justice, and love. While none of these will be displayed in their entirety by any single individual, nevertheless, a person's overall character may well display these characteristics, with their strong reminders of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22). These characteristics are essential for ethical conduct, since they imply high moral standards, and simply being straight with people so that they know where they stand. There is no deviousness or double-dealing, or making deals behind people's backs.

These are not theoretical matters, since in leaders they lead to openness and accessibility towards others, care and compassion for others, empathy with others, and a desire for reconciliation and forgiveness when required. They also breed an atmosphere of trust and consistency, and have a reassuring effect on staff. This is not to say that pragmatism is never required in such a leader; it is, but it fits within a framework provided by such positive virtues as integrity and honesty. A biblical expression that captures this tension is: "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10: 16), with its combination of idealism tempered by realism, and principle laced with shrewdness and astuteness.

But where does compromise enter the picture? Those in positions of leadership cannot simply think of their own ethical purity, since they also have to consider the basic goals of the organization. The reality is that leaders cannot afford to be so bound up with questions of integrity that they take their eyes off these basic goals (Higginson, 1996). Decisions often require delicate balancing acts.

Compromises may involve attempting to see that justice is done to the range of different groups for which one has responsibilities: shareholders, employees, customers, business partners, and the wider community. In universities, it would be students, grant awarding bodies, one's academic peers, the university's senior management, colleagues in other universities and industry, and the community. Higginson (1996) comments: "To some extent, we are constrained by the forces and

standards which operate in the world around us. We may reluctantly have to accept some things which are not satisfactory, which we would like to change, but where it is outside our power to do so". We frequently experience points of tension, a situation also encountered in medical ethics, and yet in the latter, absolutes are repeatedly put forward as central to a Christian position (Jones, 1999). However, Christian commentators more readily accept points of tension in ethical debate in general workplace ethics. This leads me to suggest that it is essential to develop more dialogue between Christians engaged in ethical debate in different areas. The same powerful strands link all workplaces in which we function, namely, the value of people, and the respect to be accorded them.

Conclusions

Throughout this discussion a number of ethical values have emerged repeatedly. These are the centrality of human relationships, with their basis in serving others, justice, equality, and the dignity and respect to be shown human beings, leading to mutual accountability. Underlying all these in practice is the importance of character centred around integrity, honesty and compassion. In seeking to act in these ways, the emphasis is on doing good and not doing harm, respecting people rather than using them, seeking not to harm innocent people, and ensuring that a professional relationship is never exploited. Over against such ethical and associated imperatives are inequitable policies, contrived competition, harassment, dishonesty, discrimination, the abuse of authority, injustice, uncontrolled pragmatism and expediency .

In the midst of competing and sometimes apparently irreconcilable demands, a better way has to be mapped out. For Christians this is the way of reconciliation and redemption, however, limited our efforts may sometimes turn out to be. The ethos of servanthood has to be balanced by a prophetic voice, so that love and judgement are both brought to bear on situations demanding ethical analyses and solutions (Jones, 1996). As Christians seek to integrate what is ethical and what is profitable or successful, they witness to the ultimate community of love in God's promised reign. In the words of Childs (1995): "When Christians seek justice, equality, and dignity for all people, they anticipate the fulfilment of these values in the fullness of God's future reign. They act out a hope rooted in the promise of Jesus for that reign". Herein lies the way of hope.

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