

## *Sacred or secular?*

*Paul Wilson*

Do you remember, not so long ago we had Quiet Times, now we are encouraged to spend "quality time with God". We used to talk to God but now we "engage with Him". And how about bible study, or shouldn't it now be, "unpacking the Word of God"? If you've managed to avoid these instances of ecclesiastical correctness then I'm envious! Another phrase that's been doing the rounds over recent years is, "the sacred / secular divide" and this, I think, is different and may actually have something to say to us. Well it's certainly something I've been thinking about recently, although the more I think the less I can claim to really understand. My instinct is, however, that it's important and something that I want to grapple with and see what it's all about.

Going back many years to the 70's as a young Christian, (the 1970s that is!), I have a vivid memory of working at an evangelical hotel and enjoying some fun parties on a Saturday night involving staff and guests. At the end of these parties we were exhausted and ready for bed but had to wait for the manager or chaplain of the hotel to deliver the "epilogue" or "biblical thought for the night". I accepted it at the time but looking back it's as if almost subconsciously we were being asked to validate or vindicate what we had been doing and in so doing restore us to the spiritual realm. Yes, it was OK to have fun but we didn't want to get carried away and a biblical thought would help us re-focus on the higher things of life. This image has stayed with me years later and I wonder if I still think along those lines. I could write reams on this but a few un-related thoughts will maybe shed some light on my thinking, which is still in an embryonic stage.

The older I get the more I understand that God made the world as a good place and we were meant to enjoy it. Rob Lacey in the Street Bible translates God's comment at the end of Creation as, "*Fantastic, I love it!*" Yes, we are faced on a daily basis with the results of sin and man's rebellion and with natural disasters we cannot explain. This is a huge subject and I don't wish to gloss over it or trivialize it but I am convinced that there is much in Creation to enjoy and as those who are redeemed we can in fact appreciate the good things of the world in a different and more fulfilling way to those who do not yet enjoy that relationship with God. Yes, Creation is straining to be redeemed as Paul says, and one day this will happen, but in the mean time we as Christians are uniquely placed to glimpse the world as it could be and to enjoy the good things available to us. Recently I've praised God for beautiful Christmas music, a football match, a *Delirious?* concert, good food and wine etc trying to remember that one is not more sacred, secular or spiritual than the other.

In a similar way, I like the idea that we start being the Church when we leave the building not when we enter it. It may be nit-picking but I dislike the phrase, "going to Church". Yes of course everyone knows what this means but at a basic level it conveys and even encourages a misleading concept. Hey!, we are the Church wherever we are and whatever we do. I think it can encourage a divided view of life and that when we're doing what may be seen as secular activities these are in some ways of lesser spiritual worth in the great scheme of things. I think it's too simplistic to just say that we should, "do everything unto Christ", (and yes, that's not easy to say working for Logistics!); it's almost as if we have to consciously remind ourselves that certain things we do that we don't always like doing are "for The Lord".

Again as a young Christian I can remember being reminded of this when moaning about work - but I was rarely told that when playing sport or enjoying myself that this was "unto the Lord" or that He provided these things explicitly for me to enjoy.

Following on from the above, I am increasingly attracted to ways of living that draw both inspiration and practices from Celtic spirituality. An example of this is the Northumbria Celtic Community – (no, not northern monks – they do in fact, amongst many other things, lead worship at Spring Harvest). Here there is no divide between things sacred and secular but rather a realization that everything we do, whether it be worship, our work, time with families, chilling out or whatever is part of our overall life hidden in Christ. They express it on the website far better than I can – it's well worth a visit: <http://www.northumbriacommunity.org/index.html>

As a Community of the heart, all Companions (wherever they may be) are united on this inner journey of seeking God, knowing self, in order to learn how we can better live with others and serve the world of our influence whether it be great or small, 'wherever the Father leads'.

It is this blending of 'a prayer that is quiet and contemplative and a faith that is active and contagious', lived out in the ordinariness of everyday life, which forms a foundational basis for our growth and development.

Finally, I'm trying to see God in the everyday. He's not contained in a building and not only present when we worship. As the Celtic saints said, Christ in front of us Christ behind and Christ to our left and to our right. A modern song puts the same the thought differently; it begins "Jesus be the Centre.... Be the wind in these sails....". I find it good to slow down sometimes and see Him, (no, not seek Him"), in what we sometimes call the ordinariness of life. One way of doing this is to adopt the Celtic approach and stop throughout the day to say prayers, meditate and road. We do not have this luxury; well I don't anyway! Again this is a big subject and perhaps can be summed by referring back to the WWJD bracelets that were fashionable a couple of years back. I sometimes try to ask What Would Jesus Do? in the seemingly numerous mundane decisions we make each hour and day. It's involving God and then seeing Him in other people and things around us.

And that probably draws this to close on the right note. I try not to over-spiritualize life but to see God and involve Him in all I do! Easy isn't it? No, Ok, well I suspect it will be when we see Him face to face!