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Working with God: the practice of connecting Christian faith with everyday work

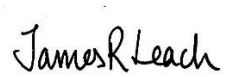
Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Chester for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology

by James Roger Leach

August 2022

Declaration

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

Signed: 

Date: August 13, 2022

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

LICC	London Institute for Contemporary Christianity
FWS	Faith at Work Scale (see Appendix 4)
TIB / TIP	The Integration Box / The Integration Profile (see Appendix 4)

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My parents, John and Rosamund (in loving memory).

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Abstract

Against the background of moves, especially in the Church of England, to close the so-called Sunday-Monday gap and encourage whole-life discipleship, this thesis explores the ways that Christians connect their faith with their everyday work in practice. The research is based on analysis of semi-structed interviews with thirteen self-identifying Christians in non-faith-based paid employment who were associated with an evangelical Anglican church in the South East of England. Working with the theological consensus that sees work as co-operation with God, I found that the dimension of closeness, or proximity, to God and God's purposes characterised the most salient connections between faith and work. Using categories from David Miller's The Integration Box/Profile, participants tended to experience their work most strongly as co-operation with God when they could perceive God's purposes being achieved at the closest, micro, level of their everyday activities. This tended to be more salient than a perceptually more distant connection at the mezzo (corporate) and macro (societal) levels of the overall activity and purposes of the enterprise. Such micro level connections were reinforced by experiences of God's presence and providential activity at that level, framed as personal encounters with God. The more that participants experienced these close connections in their workplace experience, the more they felt that they were working with, as opposed to merely for, God. This suggests that teaching an overarching, macro-level, theological framework within which daily work finds a place will not be sufficiently salient to overcome the Sunday-Monday gap on its own. In several cases the experience of close co-operation with God was associated with deliberate practices of attentiveness and reflection. The evidence suggests, however, that further encouragement and training in such practices, perhaps especially in a workplace group setting, could have a significant impact on workplace discipleship. In identifying the significance of proximity to God and God's purposes and connecting the experience of proximity with particular Christian practices, this thesis resources practitioners aiming to nurture workplace discipleship.

Portfolio Summary

I came into the Professional Doctorate programme in 2014 initially interested in the idea of worldview and its relationship with Christian discipleship. At the time I suspected that weak or impoverished discipleship could be traced to the absence of a fully Christian worldview, or to a failure to connect everyday life with a Christian worldview, and therefore that worldview transformation was crucial to mature discipleship. This was a belief based partly on my experience in parochial ministry in the Church of England and partly on my reading of literature advocating a worldview approach to discipleship, mostly from North America but also from the UK-based London Institute for Contemporary Christianity.

This research interest took me through the Literature Review, in which I surveyed what the literature has to say about the concept of worldview, what contributes to it, how it may be changed and how such change might be measured. It carried on into my Publishable Article, in which I argued for the value of a worldview focus in Adult Christian Education curricula in local churches while addressing the potential difficulties of such an approach.

At this point in the programme, I came to the Research Proposal and was influenced in my choices by a couple of factors. First was the slipperiness, or contestedness, of the idea of a (or indeed 'the') Christian worldview. While I remained convinced that there was such a thing, and that it was important in Christian discipleship, I realised that defining and explaining it is a significant task, not least outside the evangelical circles in which it has become relatively common currency. Second was the need to narrow down the focus of my research, recognising, with the help of my supervisor, how important it is to keep the research focus as simple and manageable as possible, especially for a beginner.

For these reasons I dropped the initial idea I had had of trying to assess the impact of an intervention, such as a course, on people's worldview. This would have involved the extra complication of devising such a course, or choosing from existing courses, and devising or choosing an assessment method. Instead, I would limit myself to researching existing experience of workplace discipleship. I also chose to narrow down my focus to the area of work, specifically paid employment in non-faith-based organizations. This was an area where I knew there was a sizeable literature and where I had experience in my professional context.

In the same academic year as producing the research Proposal I also produced a Reflection on Practice in which I reflected on my experience of joining new and overlapping communities of practice as a practitioner-researcher on a part-time professional doctorate programme. I reviewed the benefits that I had received from membership of these communities as well as the challenges of

belonging to a community that is geographically distributed. I also considered my different levels of participation in the various communities and pondered how membership might change after the completion of this doctoral programme when I am no longer a university-affiliated researcher.

Chapter 1 Work and the whole-life discipleship agenda

1.1 Introduction – Mind the Gap[1]

> I particularly was acutely aware of when I joined [company name] at that time when I was getting particularly fired up in my faith, was people coming to … to work and leaving their sort of faith coat at the door … on a Monday morning and not picking it up until Friday evening, or probably Sunday morning actually.
> (Harry[2] – management consultant)
>
> The Sunday-Monday, faith-work gap must be bridged.
> (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization Marketplace Ministry Issue Group, 2004, 7)

These two quotes, one from a research participant and one from Lausanne Occasional Paper no. 40[3], set out and illustrate a challenge to the living out of Christian faith that is the context for the research described in this thesis. Whether it is termed the 'Sunday-Monday gap' (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization Marketplace Ministry Issue Group, 2004; Miller, 2007), or the 'sacred-secular divide' (Greene, 2010; Greene, 2021) there is a perceived gap in both mindset and practice that can separate the lives of Christians into two disconnected domains. Roger Walton describes the effect of the resulting fragmentation felt by many Christian disciples:

> '[t]hey are more aware of the discrepancies and inconsistencies between their professed faith and their lived experience than they are of the continuity and coherence of their discipleship' (Walton, 2012, 82).

According to survey data and ethnographic research (Care, 2009; Ammerman, 2013; Strhan, 2015), one of the contexts in which this gap, and the resulting fragmentation, is especially keenly felt is the workplace. While the research just cited may be recent, this is not a new phenomenon. The Lausanne Occasional Paper cited above quotes G.A. Studdert Kennedy, former army chaplain and early missioner with the Industrial Christian Fellowship, describing the same 'conflict' in the 1920s (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization Marketplace Ministry Issue Group, 2004, 8)[4]. Since the 1980s, however, and the beginning of what David Miller terms 'the Faith at Work Era' (Miller, 2007) there has been a renewed focus in both parachurch organizations and institutional churches

[1] The use of the phrase 'Mind the Gap' in the context of the Sunday-Monday gap goes back at least to Richard Higginson's book of that title (Higginson, 1997).
[2] As explained in chapter 2, I have used aliases for the participants' names.
[3] The primary author of the first three chapters of Lausanne Occasional Paper no. 40 is Gordon Preece.
[4] The quote in the Occasional Paper comes from The Anglican-Catholic Congress (1923) *Report*. London: Society of Saints Peter and Paul, cited in Leech, K. (1992). *The Eye of the Storm, Living Spiritually in the Real World.* London: Harper Collins, p. 2

on the expression of what is often called 'whole-life discipleship'[5]. As we shall see later in this chapter, this has resulted in a rapidly expanding number of books, courses, conferences and other resources aiming to bridge the Sunday-Monday gap.

The research project described in this thesis arose from my own engagement with the Sunday-Monday gap within the professional context of ordained ministry in a Church of England parish church. At the time when the project was being developed and initial research carried out, I was in a role that was focussed on adult faith formation in a church that aimed to be encouraging whole-life discipleship. Despite a plethora of courses, events and attempts to promote whole-life discipleship from the pulpit and in less formal contexts, I had a sneaking suspicion that the Sunday-Monday gap was still very real for a lot of our church members, not least in their working lives. This coincided with my own observations as well as my own experience. Prior to ordination I had spent seven years working in IT roles in a multinational company in the oil and gas industry and during this time I had experienced the gap first-hand, though in hindsight without much reflection.

For these reasons, I wanted to delve into the actual lived experience of Christians in daily life by taking a step back from teaching church members a theology of work or a Christian worldview and by making the effort to hear their stories and see what I could learn. Given the challenge of the Sunday-Monday gap, how were Christians in the church where I was serving, and particularly Christians working in non-faith-based contexts, making connections between their faith and their everyday work?[6]

While not initially prompted by it, my research was carried out against the wider background of the Church of England's ongoing Renewal & Reform programme (see Archbishops' Council, 2016) which has identified discipleship as a major area of focus for the denomination. Two key General Synod papers, GS 1977 *Developing Discipleship* (Croft, 2015) and GS 2056 *Setting God's People Free* (Archbishops' Council, 2017), both promote the idea of whole-life discipleship in this context. According to GS 1977 the church's witness and mission have been impoverished by a lack of clarity about discipleship '… as Christians are neither encouraged nor sustained in the living out of their

[5] 'Whole-life discipleship' is a phrase popularised in the work of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) (see explanatory article at Jolley, 2022) and used in a number of Church of England documents (e.g. Archbishops' Council, 2017, 21). At the time of writing, the Church of England's current initiative in this area uses the label 'everyday faith' (Church of England, 2022a)

[6] While my focus is on paid employment, I am aware that work as fully defined has a far wider scope than that, at least encompassing unpaid work. However, for the purposes of this thesis I use 'work', as does David Miller in *God at Work*, to mean 'that activity that is undertaken in a paid job, occupation, position, function, or profession and the place in which one performs that work' (Miller, 2007, 5-6).

Christian faith in daily life' (Croft, 2015, 7). GS 2056 goes further in arguing that equipping the laity for 'whole-life discipleship' is crucial for developing lay leadership.

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I first give an overview of the issue of workplace discipleship, especially in the context of the Church of England, and locate this research within that landscape. I then survey the various literatures that relate to the subject of this research project. In that survey I highlight the understanding of work as co-operation with God that features in theologies of work in a variety of Christian traditions, and which underlies this thesis. I also introduce the key strands of social science research that have informed both the design of my research and the analysis that led to the formulation of this thesis. Finally, I identify the contribution that this thesis makes to ongoing research into the practice of Christian faith in the workplace.

1.2 Supporting workplace discipleship – a brief history

In this section I shall give some historical background to the contemporary state of play of Christian engagement in workplace discipleship in order to locate my research in its context, drawing on the work of David Miller, Elaine Graham and David Clark. While the specific language of whole-life discipleship may be relatively new, the contemporary focus in the church on empowering and equipping the Christian laity to live out their faith in the workplace and elsewhere in everyday life is the latest development in a movement that dates back over a century. In his influential book *God at Work* (Miller, 2007), David Miller, a US theologian with a business background, identifies three waves of the modern Faith at Work movement, namely the Social Gospel Era (c. 1890s-1945)[7], the Ministry of the Laity Era (c. 1946-1985) and the Faith at Work Era (c. 1985-present). Miller's focus is on the US context, but he is cognisant of the global dimensions of the movement, including its expression in the UK. He also points out that reflection on faith at work in the Judeo-Christian[8] tradition goes all the way back to the Old Testament and can be traced through subsequent centuries (Miller, 2007, 5). Nevertheless, he locates the start of the modern movement in the 1890s with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical on capital and labour *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891) and Protestant writings at the time on economic justice (Miller, 2007, 26).

A UK perspective comes from Elaine Graham in her 2015 Annual Chester Cathedral Lecture, entitled *Whatever Happened to the Laity?* (Graham, 2015). Responding to the Church of England's latest initiative to empower the laity, Graham expresses a sense of déjà vu when contemplating GS 1977, as well as frustration that so little has come of the theological work done in preceding decades. She

[7] This was the era that saw the founding of The Industrial Christian Fellowship, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, which was formed from the Navvy Mission and Christian Social Union in 1919 (Studdert-Kennedy, 1982).

[8] 'Judeo-Christian' and 'Old Testament' are the terms used by Miller (2007, 5).

focuses on what she calls the 'heyday' of theological thinking from 1945 – 1985, a period that corresponds to Miller's Ministry of the Laity Era. During this period a theology of the laity emerged as a result of various factors including the end of Christendom, secularisation, 'a more educated and globally-aware laity, and the beginnings of a sense of the removal of the Church from the centre of people's consciousness' (Graham, 2015, 10).

This was the era of Hendrik Kraemer's seminal *A Theology of the Laity* (Kraemer, 1958/2005). It also included Karen Bliss' *We the People* (Bliss, 1963), Mark Gibbs and T. Ralph Morton's *God's Frozen People* (Gibbs & Morton, 1964), as well as Gibbs' later writings, and Vatican II in the Roman Catholic church. All of this effectively came to very little, however, at least in the Church of England. By the time of the Church of England's 1985 report *All Are Called: Towards a Theology of the Laity* (General Synod Board of Education, 1985), there was a sense of having to 'go back to the drawing board' (Graham, 2015, 20).

Focussing on the workplace in the UK context, Methodist deacon and missional theologian David Clark paints a similar picture of the church's active engagement in the world of work from the 1940s to the 1960s, an era of Industrial Missions and workplace chaplaincies[9], followed by what he sees as a period of disengagement by the institutional church from the 1970s onwards (Clark, 2014, 1-3). He does identify a 'considerable quickening of interest in so-called 'workplace ministry' within the evangelical wing of the church' since the turn of the millennium (Clark, 2005, 255). Overall, however, he concludes 'few evangelical workplace associations and agencies of any kind are getting the active support of an institutional church itself shaped by the legacy of Christendom' (Clark, 2005, 264).

The roots of the 'quickening of interest' identified by Clark could be traced back to the 1980s and the beginnings of Miller's Faith at Work Era. Several parachurch initiatives begun at that time continue to operate today, offering a variety of resources for workplace disciples. LICC was founded in 1982 by Church of England minister John Stott and friends to assist Christians in facing contemporary life issues. According to the LICC website there was a strategic shift in the noughties towards helping local churches to equip members for whole-life discipleship (LICC, 2022d). LICC's Work Forum now offers a variety of programmes and resources to promote 'whole-life discipleship' in the workplace (LICC, 2022e). Coming from a similar theological stable, and concerned to impact society with Christian values, the Jubilee Centre was founded in Cambridge in 1983. According to its website, It is 'working with Christians, churches and other partners to build a national movement for good business, a fair economy and dignified work' (Jubilee Centre, 2021). LICC and the Jubilee Centre both

[9] See also Torry (2010). For the current picture of workplace chaplaincy in the UK, see Workplace Chaplaincy Mission UK (2022).

had an influence on my own context of practice and research, as I shall describe in the next chapter. Other notable UK organizations from that era working in this area include Faith in Business[10], originally founded at Ridley Hall Cambridge in 1989 and now an independent organization. A more recent addition is God at Work[11], founded by Ken Costa, former senior figure in banking and past chairman of Alpha International.[12] Finally, to bring the picture up to date, many places of work have Christian fellowships, with hundreds listed on the Transform Work UK website (Transform Work UK, 2022b). These continue to proliferate, despite a legislative climate that means that such groups have to negotiate equality and diversity policies with some care (Transform Work UK, 2022a).

The cumulative picture of workplace discipleship prior to 2015 (the publication of GS 1977) painted so far by Miller, Graham and Clark is one of renewed vigour in parachurch organizations since the mid-1980s that had not been matched by an equivalent interest in the institutional church. Writing a project bulletin editorial in 2018, Clark helpfully summarises the different strands of church engagement in the workplace while expressing frustration in its lack of focus on his own particular priority, namely developing missional workplace communities:

> The church seems unable to decide whether mission in this context is about individual salvation - making disciples; concerned with pastoral support - a ministry of care and counselling; or about institutional transformation - seeking the redemption of the workplace and those economic and social forces which impinge upon it. Thus Christian engagement with the world of work oscillates blindly between setting up work-related groups for prayer and nurture - with the focus on making disciples; putting more and more resources into chaplaincy - with an increasingly pastoral emphasis; or, by far the most neglected of these missiological approaches, equipping lay people to be kingdom community builders in the workplace - mission as communal transformation. (Clark, 2018, 1)

In very recent years, however, one could argue that this situation has moved in Clark's desired direction, particularly given the LICC's significant involvement in the Church of England's latest initiative in the area of lay discipleship[13]. The Church of England's resources in this area now routinely use the language of kingdom and of community transformation. For example, *Calling All God's People*, though not envisaging the building of kingdom communities in the workplace in quite

[10] https://www.faithinbusiness.org/ Retrieved 23 February, 2021
[11] http://www.godatwork.org.uk/ Retrieved 23 February, 2021
[12] For an extensive, though not exhaustive, list of organizations in this area, see Workplace Chaplaincy CIGB (2022)
[13] Mark Greene, Executive Director of LICC at the time, was a member of the Lay Leadership Task Group that produced GS 2056 (Archbishops' Council, 2017). See also the *Growing missionary disciples in the Church of England* webpage on the LICC website (LICC, 2022c)

the way advocated by Clark, does talk about the church being 'transformatively present throughout political, social and cultural life' (The Church of England, 2019, 18) and gives examples of Christians 'kingdom building' in a business context (16) and 'transforming communities' through social action (19).

As mentioned earlier, this latest surge in the Church of England's engagement with lay discipleship in everyday settings was coming to fruition at the same time as the research described in this thesis, with my research interviews being carried out in 2018. At that point the Everyday Faith initiative had not yet produced all the online and print resources that exist at the time of writing, but whole-life discipleship was firmly on the agenda of central church organizations as well as many dioceses, including the diocese where I was working at the time[14]. The church/parachurch gap in relation to engaging with workplace discipleship was closing and the rapidly growing number of resources already available since the beginning of the Faith at Work Era were now being joined by institutional equivalents. Whatever the actual state of workplace discipleship, the subject of my research, there was no lack of resources, at least in terms of literature, training materials and advice.

1.3 Reviewing the literature

Having located this research in the historical context of Christian engagement with lay discipleship, especially in the workplace, I now turn to the literature from various disciplines that informs the study. In this section I shall survey first the Christian literature, both academic and popular, that provides the study's theological framework. In this literature there are several strands that often overlap, particularly in contemporary books in the whole-life discipleship and faith at work genres. Next, I shall give an overview of social science research relating to faith at work. This again is a vast and expanding area and I shall focus on the research areas that are most directly relevant to this thesis, those that informed my project design, data collection and analysis. Finally, I shall review church and parachurch research that relates to faith in the workplace, along with recent research that falls into the specific category of Practical Theology, in which this thesis is also located.

1.3.1 Theologies of work and vocation

Several of the more recent academic and more popular treatments of the theology of work and vocation helpfully begin with historical surveys of Christian approaches to the subject. The historical starting points vary, but all tell much the same story, which I summarise here (see especially Hardy, 1990, 3-76; Ryken, 1995; Cosden, 2004, 19-77; Ray, 2011, 37-99). In the Hebrew Scriptures God is

[14] In fact, some dioceses were already ahead of the curve. For example, the report *Called to New Life* (Church of England Board of Education, 1999) includes learning from an initiative that took place in the Diocese of Peterborough in the 1990s. The organization and online resource *After Sunday*, which aims to help people integrate faith and work, originated in a similar mission initiative in the Diocese of Durham in 2005 (After Sunday, n.d.).

presented as a worker (see also Banks, 2008) and humankind, created in God's image, is given work to do, both in stewarding creation and developing it by drawing out its potential. Although, as depicted in chapter 3 of Genesis, work has become corrupted in the Fall and is often now experienced as toil and drudgery, it retains its fundamental dignity and is treated as such in the rest of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. A contrast is often drawn here with Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, for whom the life of manual labour is far inferior to the life of contemplation. Despite the biblical testimony, however, by the time of the Middle Ages the life of contemplation was also being seen in the church as superior to the life of labour. While manual labour did have its place within the monastic movement, as evidenced in the Benedictine motto of *ora et labora* ('pray and work'), it was primarily valued as an antidote to idleness and was increasingly outsourced to 'lay brothers'.

A major turning point in Christian thinking about work came with Martin Luther, who contended that all Christians were called by God to be his providential agents, through whose loving service he provided for his creatures' material needs[15]. Thus, for him, the idea of vocation extended across all kinds of work and, crucially, included lay occupations. Luther's theological vision of work and vocation was based on a static view of social structures, with vocation being linked to one's given station in life, or *stand* in German. Calvin, thinking and writing in a slightly later period of European history when social structures were more fluid and dynamic, placed greater emphasis on discerning vocation through one's gifts and was more inclined to question the divine givenness of existing social structures. As Hardy summarises,

> For Calvinists … it is not so much serving God within the station one finds oneself as it is serving God by one's station. (Hardy, 1990, 67)

Following in the Reformed tradition, the Puritans continued to affirm lay vocation, distinguishing between one's primary vocation, shared by all Christians, and one's more specific secondary vocation to particular roles or occupations, echoing Luther's *vocatio spiritualis* and *vocatio externa* (see Volf, 1991/2001, 105-116).

After the Puritans, historical surveys of thinking about work tend to jump to the Nineteenth Century, and especially the thought of Karl Marx[16] which, though not overtly part of the Christian tradition, forms a significant part of the intellectual landscape in which subsequent Christian thinking has

[15] An extensive treatment of Luther's theology of vocation can be found in Wingren (1957/2004), one of Hardy's key sources.

[16] Two other key Nineteenth Century thinkers who feature in historical surveys in the Christian work literature are Sigmund Freud (Hardy, 1990, 38-43) and Adam Smith (Volf, 1991/2001, 48-55)

taken place. Indeed, in addition to Hardy (1990, 29-37) two of the major theologies of work in the last 30 years engage significantly with Marx in their introductory chapters (Volf, 1991/2001, 55-65; Cosden, 2004, 13-17). As these writers explain, for Marx, 'free productive activity' is both what distinguishes humans from animals and what leads to self-realisation. Work for Marx is not simply a means to an end but is '… a way of being which constitutes our humanness' (Cosden, 2004, 16). Central to Marx's critique of capitalism was the contention that it had made work become alienating and dehumanising rather than the means to full humanness. This was partly a result of the division of labour, by which workers had become a means to an end and work had become repetitive and mechanical. It was also partly because, within capitalism as Marx saw it, people pursued only their own interests and not the common good, something that should characterise fully human activity (see Volf, 1991/2001, 59-61). Echoes of Marx's ontology of work and critiques of capitalism can still be found in Christian thinking about work today in writers like Volf and Cosden, and Ryken is in good company when he says that '[i]n its diagnosis of the problems of work in the industrial society, Marxism deserves to be taken seriously' (Ryken, 1995, 80). We shall see in chapter 3 how two of the participants expressed their own ambivalence about capitalism.

Against the same societal background as Marx's writings, with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891) the late Nineteenth Century also saw the beginnings of new Roman Catholic thinking about work as part of attempts to address 'the social question'. In Cosden's analysis, it was in this encyclical that the 'relational dimensions and potentialities' of work began to make their way into official Roman Catholic teaching, with the place of ordinary work in the social structures of human life being acknowledged and affirmed. There are parallels here with the development in Protestant thinking about work found in the writing of Luther and Calvin (Cosden, 2004, 19-20). As the tradition of Catholic social teaching developed during the Twentieth Century, the subject of work continued to be on the agenda. According to Catholic theologian M.-D. Chenu, cited by both Volf and Cosden, the actual term "theology of work" began to be used at some point around the middle of the that century (Volf, 1991/2001, 71; Cosden, 2004, 4-5)[17]. It was around this time that 'genitive' theologies of work such as Chenu's begin to appear[18], which are more than reflections on the ethical and character-forming dimensions of work and are what Volf defines as 'dogmatic reflection[s] on the nature and consequences of human work' (Volf, 1991/2001, 74).

Ninety years after *Rerum Novarum*, work was the focus of John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (John Paul II, 1981/2003), which Volf describes as 'one of the most remarkable ecclesiastical

[17] The edition cited by Volf is Chenu, M.D.. (1966). *The Theology of Work: An Exploration.* Chicago: Regnery.
[18] Cosden explains a genitive theology as 'a theology 'of *something*', or a comprehensive theological explanation of something' (Cosden, 2004, 5).

documents on the question of work ever written (Volf, 1991/2001, 5). Cosden, while preferring to describe *Laborem Exercens* more as a 'theological ethics of work and not as a theology of work proper' (Cosden, 2004, 26), still sees it as the culmination of official Catholic teaching on the subject.

Moving on to modern Protestant thinking about work, Cosden provides a helpful survey of recent currents (Cosden, 2004, 37-77). He notes that the vocational model of work inherited from Luther, in which work is given as a calling from God and a way to serve others, remains widely influential. We shall return to this when we look at the emerging theological consensus about work in a later section and in greater detail in chapter 4. There has also tended to be a focus on protology, in other words on starting with the creation accounts and seeing work primarily as a 'creation ordinance'.

While this has remained the dominant approach, Cosden identifies three other approaches that have emerged. The first of these is a 'contextual' approach in which 'certain concrete ethical concerns' determine the agenda, the materials used and the slant taken towards work. These ethical concerns might be political, social, economic or ecological. They include feminist takes on work, but also approaches that have a more conservative political or economic agenda[19]. Second is the approach of Barth which, while still being protological, begins with the principle of sabbath rather than activity. For Barth, sabbath isn't merely a balance to activity, but 'becomes paradigmatic and is meant to be a principle that permeates and transforms the entire nature and structure of work, and thus its meaning' (Cosden, 2004, 45).

The third new approach to work that has emerged in recent decades is an eschatological one that has reinvigorated thinking about work, while proving controversial in several aspects. It was pioneered by Moltmann (primarily in two essays analysed and critiqued in Cosden, 2004, 47-77), influentially espoused by Volf (1991/2001), and followed by Cosden himself (2004; 2006). This eschatological orientation, as Cosden explains,

> … means that from protology, work is perceived as teleologically directed and oriented forward toward the future new creation rather than backward toward the restoration of the initial creation. (Cosden, 2004, 46)

Volf's contention that human work has a role to play in the coming of the new creation has been defended and extended by Cosden (2006) and to some degree by Witherington (2011, 2-5), who makes use of the language of the coming Kingdom of God. UK pastor and writer John Stott is more ambivalent about this aspect of Volf's theology of work, however, asking 'Is not the kingdom of God,

[19] Cosden cites Dorothee Soelle's *To Work and To Love* (Soelle & Cloyes, 1984) as an example of the former and the writings of Michael Novak as an example of the latter.

both in its present reality and in its future perfection, a gift of God, rather than a human achievement?' (Stott et al., 1984/2011, 224).

The other aspect of Volf's theology of work worth a mention is the role of the Holy Spirit. After critiquing Luther's vocational model of work, Volf suggests a pneumatological model which emphasises the giving of charismatic gifts to enable co-operation with God (Volf, 1991/2001, 111-119). Witherington agrees with Volf that 'The Spirit both enables our work and provides guidance and guidelines about what work we should do' but quibbles with the way that Volf uses the term 'charism', arguing that in the New Testament, 'the gifts are not the work or vocation' (Witherington, 2011, 37). Volf goes even further to suggest that the Spirit may also be active in the work of non-Christians 'by analogy' with the giving of charisms (Volf, 1991/2001, 119). In response, Stott is happy to affirm that 'the Holy Spirit is active in the world', but is nervous of the use of charism to apply in such circumstances (Stott et al., 1984/2011, 224). We shall return to the role of the Holy Spirit in human work, as talked about by the participants in this research, in chapter 4.

Staying with modern Protestant thinking about work, but broadening the theological scope, work features prominently in some of the recent, predominantly North American, literature that uses the language of 'Christian worldview'. The Christian worldview is a concept that has gained significant traction in Reformed Protestant circles in North America[20], has been gaining some currency in the UK[21], and was influential on my own thinking in the lead-up to this research project[22]. A Christian worldview, according to the literature, is an overarching conceptual framework, often expressed as a metanarrative (as in, for example, Bartholomew & Goheen, 2006/2014) into which every aspect of life will fit. A prominent example of this literature at the more popular end of the spectrum is US theologian Michael E. Wittmer's *Heaven is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You Do Matters to God* (Wittmer, 2004)[23]. In this book, Wittmer locates work, primarily framed as cultivation or culture-making from Genesis chs. 1 and 2, within a conceptual grid (essentially a metanarrative) of creation-fall-redemption. To use categories from theologies of work, Wittmer's take is therefore both protological and eschatological. God has given a 'cultural mandate' to humankind in creation. Our culture-making has been marred by the fall, but it falls within the scope of God's redemption and can be oriented towards the promised new creation.

[20] See Naugle (2002) for a history of the concept and an overview of some of the key literature.
[21] E.g. in the work of LICC.
[22] Christian worldview was the subject area of my DProf portfolio before I chose to focus specifically on the topic of work (see the Portfolio Summary at the beginning of this thesis).
[23] For a UK example see Hardyman (2009). Hardyman draws on Wittmer's metanarrative approach in Part One of the book ('a story of glory: given, lost and found') and devotes a later chapter specifically to the subject of work (85-95).

From the foregoing survey, we can see not only how work has come to be theologically valued and affirmed in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions, but also how it has been subject to different approaches over the centuries, with the focus shifting between vocation and gifting, and between protology and eschatology. Despite this variety, however, Volf (1991/2001, 98-102) has identified a broad consensus emerging across the traditions that, whatever else it is, work can be seen as co-operation with God, whether primarily in sustaining and developing creation (the protological slant), or in bringing about transformation that will culminate in the new creation (the eschatological slant). Volf summarises his own more eschatological take like this: 'As Christians do their mundane work, the Spirit enables them to cooperate with God in the kingdom of God that "completes creation and renews heaven and earth."' [24] (Volf, 1991/2001, 115) .

This fundamental understanding of work as, at least potentially, co-operation with God in the fulfilment of God's purposes for the world forms a key part of the theological framing of this research project. As it entails that humans can be described as God's co-workers (Cosden, 2006, 122), co-labourers (Witherington, 2011, 35) or junior partners (Ryken, 1995, 163) in their everyday work, it offers a clear way of bridging the Sunday-Monday gap. Was it, however, how people actually framed, and indeed, experienced, their work, and if it was, what did working with God look and feel like in practice? These ways of expressing my initial research question developed during the project (see section 2.7 in the next chapter) and are explored in chapters 4 and 5.

1.3.2 Work and whole-life discipleship

The next area of literature to consider focuses on the overlapping theme of whole-life Christian discipleship, of which workplace discipleship is one expression. The current crop of literature on whole-life discipleship in many ways stands on the shoulders of those writing in what Graham (2015) calls the 'heyday' of theological thinking about the laity from the mid-Twentieth Century to 1985 and Miller (2007) terms the Ministry of the Laity Era (see section 1.3). Coming at the end of that period, the 1985 Church of England report *All Are Called: Towards a Theology of the Laity* (General Synod Board of Education, 1985) advocates a vision of whole-life discipleship in all but name[25]. The 'Common Statement' at the beginning of this report affirms the Christian call to all human beings 'to become the People of God, the Church, servants and ministers and citizens of the Kingdom, a new humanity in Jesus Christ.' This is a call that comes 'for all of our activities,' including 'the work of ordinary weekdays' which for many will be 'ministries within the structures of the secular world –

[24] Volf is here quoting Moltmann, J. (1984). "The Right to Work." In *On Human Dignity: Political Dignity and Ethics.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 45.

[25] The word 'discipleship' is used in the report, but only infrequently, and it does not feature in The Common Statement.

political, industrial, business, professional, social, educational' (General Synod Board of Education, 1985, 3-4).

The period from the mid-1980s to the present, Miller's (2007) Faith at Work Era, saw a proliferation of thinking and writing that built on literature from the Ministry of the Laity Era and incorporated insights from recent developments in the theology of work, not least John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* (John Paul II, 1981/2003) and Volf's *Work in the Spirit* (Volf, 1991/2001). According to Miller, the Faith at Work movement that emerged during this era 'at its core … is organized around a quest to integrate one's personal faith teachings with one's professional work responsibilities' (2007, 6). The scale of proliferation of writing about faith and work during this era can be seen in IVP's *The Marketplace Annotated Bibliography: A Christian Guide to Books on Work, Business & Vocation* (Hammond et al., 2002) which runs to over 200 pages. While some of the more academic books I have already mentioned are included[26], most are at the more popular end of the spectrum and many more books in the genre have been published since it came out twenty years ago.

In the UK, three writers are particularly worth mentioning because of their influence on the contemporary faith at work scene, especially in the evangelical Anglican world[27]. The first is Anglican minister John Stott, whose *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Stott et al., 1984/2011) was first published in 1984. In it, Stott called on Christians, particularly evangelicals, to re-engage with 'social concern' and see practical service in the world as going hand in hand with evangelistic witness. When the third edition was published in 1999, the chapter on work and unemployment included an engagement with Volf's *Work in the Spirit* (1991/2001). While Stott disagreed with some aspects of Volf's pneumatological and eschatological take on work, he did accept the theological consensus about work that Volf had identified. Stott asserts that '[the] concept of divine-human collaboration is applicable to all honourable work. God has humbled himself and honoured us by making himself dependent on our co-operation. (Stott et al., 1984/2011, 223)[28]. Here, the theological idea of work as co-operation with God had found its way into a popular-level book giving a holistic view of Christian discipleship.

Second is Richard Higginson, who was director of Ridley Hall's 'Faith in Business' project from 1989 to 2018[29]. Among Higginson's several writings about faith and work are the booklet *Mind the Gap:*

[26] For example, Volf (1991/2001)
[27] It will become clear that evangelical writers predominate in this section of the literature survey. This does reflect the profile of the popular literature concerning Christian faith and work. It also reflects the theological influences, both direct and indirect, on the church context in which the research took place.
[28] I quote here from the most recent (4th) edition, but the quote is unchanged from the 3rd edition.
[29] Since Higginsons's retirement from Ridley Hall in 2018, Faith in Business has become an independent charity (Faith in Business, 2022).

Connecting Faith with Work (Higginson, 1997) and *Questions of Business Life* (Higginson, 2002), which was based on seminars run at Ridley Hall in 1996 on a variety of work-related topics. In that book, Higginson explains, 'I want to explore the implications of Christian faith and discipleship for many of the tough and complex issues that confront businesspeople in their everyday circumstances' (Higginson, 2002, viii). Like Stott, Higginson combines a vision of God's all-encompassing call on the Christian's life, with rigorous engagement with both theological literature and contemporary issues, specifically relating to the world of business.

The third UK-based writer to note is Mark Greene. Greene was, until recently, Executive Director of LICC, which had been set up by John Stott and others in 1982 to help Christians 'to make the connection between the living Word of God and the challenges they faced out in his world' (LICC, 2022d). Greene has a background of working in the advertising industry and even prior to his LICC role, when on the staff of what was then London Bible College, he was writing about faith and work. Greene's popular book *Thank God It's Monday* (Greene, 1994/2001) has proved of lasting influence and is now in its fourth edition. In it, Greene expresses the desire to 'see Christians released into ministry where they are' and sets about to empower and enthuse Christians for ministry in the workplace:

> This book is about living an integrated Christian life at work as well as outside work. It is about God at work in our workplace as well as outside it. It is about living in the confidence of God's resources at work as well as outside work. It is about the fact that God's place is always first wherever we are, whatever we do, whoever we work for. (Greene, 1994/2001, 21)

To a significant degree this excerpt encapsulates some of my own presuppositions at the outset of this research. If co-operation with God was the theological framework that I had for work, then this vision of faith in the workplace, subsequently fleshed out in many other LICC resources, informed my understanding of what this might potentially look like at its best in practice.

After *Thank God It's Monday*, along with other work-related resources coming out of LICC, Greene produced the booklet *Supporting Christians at Work* (Greene, 2001) which aimed to help pastors support workers in their congregations. In it, he refers to the challenge of the sacred-secular divide, which also features significantly in the 2003 booklet *Imagine … How We Can Reach the UK* (Greene, 2003). The latter booklet, which put an empowered and envisioned laity at the heart of a vision to re-evangelise the nation, in turn introduced the idea of a 'whole-life Christianity' as the antidote to the divide. This 'whole-life' epithet, especially in the phrase 'whole-life discipleship', has subsequently become a hallmark of LICC's resources (for example, Hudson, 2012). It has also found

its way recently into the Church of England's own thinking and official writing about lay discipleship. The designation 'whole-life' or 'whole life', for example, occurs no less than 48 times in GS 2056 *Setting God's People Free* (Archbishops' Council, 2017)[30]. GS 2056 goes as far as describing making 'whole-life maturing disciples' as being 'the core calling of every church community and every follower of Jesus' (Archbishops' Council, 2017, 2). Along with the understanding of work as co-operation with God elucidated in the previous section, this view of lived Christian faith as encompassing the whole of life, including the workplace, was an assumption I brought with me to the research and I shall use the language of whole-life discipleship in this thesis.

One other cornerstone of LICC's more recent output that is significant for this research is the '6 Ms' framework. This features in the book *Fruitfulness on the Frontline* (Greene, 2014) along with an accompanying course, as well as LICC's *Transforming Work* material (Greene et al., 2015). The framework was developed, according to the LICC website, 'to help us see how God is already working through us, and those we know, and to inspire our imaginations for how he might in the future' (LICC, 2022a)[31]. The 6 Ms are:

- Models godly character
- Makes good work
- Ministers grace and love
- Moulds culture
- Mouthpiece for truth and justice
- Messenger of the gospel[32]

This is one of the existing frameworks of faith/work integration that I was aware of prior to the research, and which informed the analysis, though the research was not specifically aimed at validating or critiquing it. While the boundaries between the different categories are not very distinct, the 6 Ms framework does have the strength of encompassing a holistic understanding of Christian mission, ministry and witness in everyday life that goes beyond the evangelical shibboleth of personal evangelism. When applied to the workplace it has space for a variety of theological understandings of work including work as service and work as culture-building and encourages a broad view of what co-operating with God might look like.

To complete the picture of contemporary popular literature about workplace discipleship in the UK, one should mention Ken Costa's *God at Work*, and IVP's *Faith at Work* series, which includes Coffey (2008); Valler (2008); and Wynne (2009). Within the evangelical world especially, US pastor Timothy

[30] Interestingly the designation appears only once in GS 1977 *Developing Discipleship* (Croft, 2015). This perhaps reflects the contribution of Mark Greene of LICC to the later document.
[31] See Greene (2014) p. 12 for an explanation of the origin of the 6 Ms.
[32] This is reproduced in Appendix 4, along with other key frameworks that informed the analysis.

Keller's *Every Good Endeavour* (Keller, 2012) is a recent significant entry into this genre. Work also often takes up a chapter or more in books addressing whole-life discipleship more generally, such as Pritchard (2013) and Hardyman (2009). The latter of these draws significantly on Wittmer (2004) for his theological take on work, and is one example of the influence of the North American worldview literature on UK thinkers and writers in this area.

Whether or not the concept of worldview is used, all these books attempt to give 'ordinary' Christians some kind of theological context for their daily work. Giving a theological context, it is assumed, will help readers to see the value of their work to God. Some go further than others in framing work as co-operation with God, but the concept is explicitly there in several of these popular level books, from Stott et al. (1984/2011) to Keller (2012). The idea that simply teaching a Christian worldview will by itself lead to whole-life discipleship has been critiqued recently, however, by James K.A. Smith (2009, 2013, 2016). Smith argues, following Augustine, that humans are more fundamentally desiring creatures than thinking creatures. Our actions arise primarily from our imaginations and our desires, or loves, rather than our systematic thoughts, and our imaginations and desires are grown by our liturgies or practices. When it comes to forming disciples, then, Smith argues, we should not rely on teaching a worldview but should pay more attention to our liturgies and practices.

In light of Smith's critique, it is interesting to note the recent growth in the genre of books encouraging rituals, liturgies and practices across different areas of everyday life, including work. This includes Tish Harrison Warren's *Liturgy of the Ordinary* (Harrison Warren, 2016), books of liturgy like *Every Moment Holy* that includes a liturgy 'For Waiters and Waitresses' (McKelvey, 2019, 41-42) and Daniels and Vandewarker's *Working in the Presence of God* (Daniels & Vandewarker, 2019). These can be put alongside the work of writers like Walton (2012) and Heywood (2017, 2021) who strongly advocate the role of theological reflection in developing Christian discipleship and ministry, as well as the recent research by Dunlop et al. (2021) into the contemporary practice of theological refection by Anglican churchgoers. In chapter 5 I argue from my data that practices of attentiveness and reflection hold the potential to enhance faith/work integration by helping people to identify the presence and activity of God in their workplace.

1.3.3 Social science and faith in the workplace

Having surveyed the academic and more popular theological literature relating to faith and work, in this section I address the social science literature that has informed this study. While my research is located within the discipline of Practical Theology (see next chapter) and took place, as we have just seen, within a particular theological framework, both the design and the analysis drew on elements

of social science research, most notably in the domains of the sociology of religion and organizational psychology. While the use of social science methods, models and research findings is not new to Practical Theology in the area of workplace discipleship (see section 1.3.4), the specific combination used in this research results in the fresh perspective that I present in this thesis. In the remainder of this section, I shall cover the various relevant strands of social science research broadly in the order in which they feature in this thesis.

Recent sociological studies in the US of 'lived' or 'everyday' religion in the US reveal a mixed picture of how religion is expressed at work. Meredith McGuire found in her interview-based research that, despite the 'religious ideals' of Christian thinkers like Benedict and Luther, 'few people (then or now) appear to experience their work as a central spiritual practice.' She concludes that 'For most people, work occurs in the profane world and is experienced as very separate from their religious or spiritual lives' (2008, 109). By contrast, Nancy Tatom Ammerman, in her study of religion in the everyday life of 95 Americans from 'across the religious and nonreligious spectrum' (Ammerman, 2013, 305), found that many of the participants told stories about their work that had a spiritual dimension. Some forms of work, however, such as work involving service to others, or '… work that deals with the limits of human existence', were more susceptible to a spiritual understanding than '… work in business and all its related enterprises' (2013, 210-211). It was Ammerman's findings that alerted me to the potential significance of business sector to Christians' experience of work and led me to include a question about sector on my recruitment questionnaire (see chapter 2). To add a nuance to Ammerman's findings, however, I shall argue in chapter 3 that the organizational level at which connections are made is a significant factor for faith/work integration, particularly within the sector of business.

Closer to the context of my research, a recent ethnographic study into a conservative evangelical church in London paints a picture of discipleship at work that resonates with the discipleship experience outlined in the introduction to this chapter. In Anna Strhan's study, the workplace features as a place where '… evangelicals experience urban cultural fragmentation' as a result of conflicts between the church's ideals and the realities of their cultural environment (2015, 94). This is especially relevant to my research both because the 'fragmentation' Strhan describes is related to my research problem and because the research context in an evangelical Anglican church is similar to that of the participants in my study.

At the same time as these sociological studies, some researchers have identified a general development happening in the way faith, or spirituality, is viewed in the workplace in the UK and the US, at least. In the UK, Howard and Welbourn have described a 'Spirit at Work phenomenon': an

increasing interest among employers, employees, business schools and journals in exploring the integration of work and spirituality (Howard & Welbourn, 2004) [33]. They cite several 'enabling features', including stakeholder capitalism, reaction to financial scandals, feminism, environmentalism and the 'new paradigm' in management science, which takes a more holistic approach to people and organizations. Similarly in the US, Miller reports that 'the business academy is bursting with interest in the subject of spirituality and religion in the workplace' Miller (2007, 118). This burst of interest has resulted in a whole raft of research into different aspects of the subject. One particularly useful guide to that research, from a Christian faith/work integration perspective, is Buszka and Ewest's *Integrating Christian Faith and Work* (Buszka & Ewest, 2019) from which I have drawn in order to get an overview and to find research relevant to my own.

Given the use of both 'religion' and 'spirituality' in the quote from Miller in the previous paragraph, it should be noted that both those terms, along with 'faith', have related and overlapping definitions without being synonymous in the social science literature. Buszka and Ewest devote a whole chapter to definitions and terminology (Buszka & Ewest, 2019, 63-84) and end up agreeing with Miller that the word 'faith' usefully 'recognizes the generalities and openness of spirituality and at the same time includes the particularities of the more codified and institutionalized nature of religion' (Miller, 2007, 18). It's also worth pointing out that religion in the workplace is more likely to problematised in the literature, because of its place in equality and diversity legislation. For example, Andrew Hambler's chapter on work in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Studying Christians* considers the behaviour of Christians at work through the lens of tribunal cases (Hambler, 2019). Spirituality, on the other hand, as Howard and Welbourn (2004) report, is more likely to be seen as something positive and, as Buszka and Ewest summarise, 'growing research on spirituality in the workplace may be as much due to the inclusivity and acceptability of the term, as it is that researchers are more interested in this topic' (Buszka & Ewest, 2019, 72). In fact, organizations in the US have taken a range of approaches to how they handle religion and spirituality in the workplace and this has led to the development by Miller and Ewest of "The Faith and Work Organizational Framework" (Miller & Ewest, 2015) which I utilise in chapter 3 in analysing my participants' experiences of their own organizations.

This burst of interest in workplace spirituality in the US has also led to a range of assessment tools being developed, including the Faith at Work Scale (FWS) and The Integration Profile (TIP – formerly The Integration Box).[34] FWS is 'a 15-item measure of workplace religion informed by Judaism and

[33] Howard and Welbourn give a very broad definition of spirituality, which incorporates four 'connections': connection with self, with others, with nature and with higher power (Howard & Welbourn, 2004, 35-47).
[34] See Appendix 4. These and several others are described in Neal (2013).

Christianity' (Lynn et al., 2009). TIP is a way of assessing a worker's 'mode' of faith/work integration that is not tied to any particular religious tradition and uses a typology of 'four common behavioral manifestations and corresponding motivations [Ethics, Expression, Experience and Enrichment] for those integrating their faith into the workplace' (Miller & Ewest, 2013a, 406).[35] As with LICC's 6 Ms framework described earlier, FWS and TIP both provided useful lenses for analysing my interview data, suggesting some categories that might be used. I also use Lynn et al.'s findings with FWS in chapter 2 to flesh out the implications of the participant sample profile.

A further area of social science research that has been useful for this study is organizational psychology. Within that discipline a sub-discipline of vocational psychology has emerged which explores what people find meaningful and motivational at work, using definitions of vocation that allow for a wider scope than just those found within the sphere of organised religion (Dik & Duffy, 2009). The findings of vocational psychology research suggest that people find their work more meaningful when they can see that it contributes to the greater good (Dik & Duffy, 2012). At first sight this would seem to support the worldview approach to encouraging workplace discipleship whereby locating one's work within God's overarching purposes is the key to finding value in it. This is not the complete picture, however. Adam Grant's work on task significance and relational architecture (Grant, 2007, 2008) draws attention to the impact of a job's structure on the meaning that the worker finds in it. In chapter 3, I use Grant's 'job impact framework', along with the organizational level categories of micro, mezzo and macro from Miller's TIP to explain why participants, especially those working in large organizations, tended find their jobs more in line with God's purposes at a micro level than at a macro one. I argue that this has practical implications for the usefulness of a worldview approach to encouraging workplace discipleship.

Finally in terms of the social science literature, I engage with the research of US anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann (Luhrmann, 2012, 2020). Luhrmann explores the religious experience of members of two Vineyard churches in the US and identifies the role of certain imaginative practices, including ways of praying, which effectively helped Vineyard members to train their minds to experience God as 'real'. In chapter 5 I argue that Lurhmann's research illuminates what some of my participants had to say about their perception of God's presence and activity in the workplace. Furthermore, it gives an anthropological rationale for encouraging such practices that complements arguments found in the Christian literature on discipleship and spiritual formation.

[35] For an up to date description of The Integration Profile, see Princeton University Faith & Work Initiative (2022).

1.3.4 Church, parachurch and other Practical Theology research using social science methods

In the final section of this review we come to the literature that is closest to terms of domain to my own study, namely research relating to workplace discipleship by institutional churches, parachurch organizations or otherwise within the domain of Practical Theology.

Much of the current understanding of the state of discipleship in the Church of England seems to be based on a combination of survey data and anecdotal evidence. A 1993 survey that was part of the Christians in Public Life programme at Westhill College, Birmingham revealed that of those surveyed, '... well over half … felt that the educational programmes and pastoral care of their local church did not adequately support them in their working lives' (Clark, 2008, 82).

GS 2056 cites three more surveys carried out in the UK. A 1997 survey into preaching (Greene, 1997) reported that respondents found the teaching and preaching they received 'least helpful in the workplaces where they spend the most time' (Archbishops' Council, 2017, 4). The Apprentice 09 survey[36] revealed that '62% of those in full-time paid employment experienced little, not much, or no help/preparation from the life and ministries of church to deal with the issues they faced at work' (Archbishops' Council, 2017, 3). Most recently a survey was undertaken in 2014 among 30 churches in the West Midlands and aimed to answer the question *What Helps Disciples Grow?* (WHDG*)* (Foster, 2016). Contrary to the negative conclusions reported by GS 2056,[37] according to WHDG 68% of respondents thought they were good at putting their faith into practice in their daily life, and 86% thought that their church was good at helping them to do so (Foster, 2016, 14). Compared to the previous surveys, the results of WHDG seem surprisingly positive. Admittedly, it did not ask respondents specifically about discipleship in the workplace, but the results suggest that further research into actual lived experiences behind the questionnaire responses would be useful. This is the niche into which my research fits, and my findings help to explain why some Christians have a more vibrant experience of workplace discipleship than others.

In the domain of academic Practical Theology, several studies have taken place in the last decade or so which pertain to my research. In the US, the doctoral research of Shutt (2011) used participant observation and semi-structured interviews to explore how evangelical Christians in Oklahoma approach connecting the gospel with the workplace. He concluded that, for them, evangelism takes centre stage. In a European context, Werner (2006, 2008) researched Christian SME[38] owner-

[36] The 'Apprentice' survey (Care, 2009)

[37] According to GS 2056 only 37% of respondents felt that their church helped them with taking responsibility for their Christian growth (Archbishops' Council, 2017, 4). However, according to the published report of WHDG, 37% referred to the percentage who agreed with the statement that 'I would say that my Christian growth is the responsibility of the church I attend' (Foster, 2016, 6).

[38] Small to medium-sized enterprises

managers to explore how they related their Christian identity to their business practice. She identified themes of calling, witness, stewardship, holiness and general Christian moral tenets. Most recently, Belder in his doctoral thesis (Belder, 2017) has explored the effectiveness of a course on helping Christians in a UK parish church to integrate their faith and their work. He found that the course in itself, despite presenting a theological vision of work, was not sufficient to overcome cultural pressures and bring about a significant shift in the meaningfulness participants found in their work. Belder's own recommended responses for church's focus on support for workers and paying attention to the liturgical life of the church, as suggested by the work of Smith (Smith, 2009, 2013). As we shall see in chapter 5, my own recommendations for reformed practice focus more on the encouragement of theological reflection and the role of workplace groups as well as church-based groups. This is not to contradict Belder's suggestions but to complement them. Workplace discipleship continues to be very much a "live" topic of research in Practical Theology. At the time of writing, I am also aware of ongoing research by at least two researchers at doctoral level into the areas of faith, work and vocation, as well as research into everyday discipleship being sponsored by the Church of England.[39]

Fitting somewhere in the overlap between theology, discipleship and social science methods is research into 'ordinary theology', a phrase coined by Jeff Astley (Astley, 2002; Astley & Christie, 2007; Astley & Francis, 2013). Ordinary theology is theology done 'from below', the 'unofficial' theology that operates in the lives of 'ordinary' Christians, as opposed to the officially sanctioned theology of the church. Walton has expanded the idea into 'ordinary discipleship', though his research, which included interviews with church leaders and questionnaires completed by 'ordinary' Christians, was primarily concerned with engagement in church small groups (Walton, 2013) rather than everyday life. Nevertheless, the category of ordinary discipleship is a helpful one to frame the kind of lived, as opposed to ideal, discipleship that actually goes on in the workplace. This is the kind of discipleship that I explore and describe in this thesis.

1.4 Conclusion – the data gap in the Sunday-Monday gap

This research project explores a feature of lived Christian experience, the manifestation of discipleship in daily life, that has been identified as problematic by my own denomination, the Church of England (Croft, 2015; Archbishops' Council, 2017). It focuses on one context, the workplace, where fragmentation, according to survey data and ethnographic study (Care, 2009; Strhan, 2015), is particularly felt. This phenomenon is something that I have observed in my own

[39] The latest report from St. Peter's Saltley Trust, on Christians' perspectives on calling and vocation (Jones & Turner, 2022), while relevant to this thesis came out too recently to be considered for the analysis.

practice as an ordained Anglican minister and adult theological educator in a parish and diocesan context.

The work of Werner (2006, 2008), Ammerman (2013) and Strhan (2015) shows what kind of data can be generated through qualitative research into how Christian discipleship is experienced in daily life. According to GS 2056, however, there is still much more to be done:

> Even where we were able to uncover the scale of lay involvement in Church-related roles and in wider society, we found very little that shed light on the perspectives and viewpoints of lay people - for example, what support they would value, the pressures they face, or the opportunities they see for mission in their workplaces and communities' (Archbishops' Council, 2017, 9).

This kind of deep exploration into Christians' experience of discipleship at daily work in the UK is still thin on the ground. Much of the existing sociological research is in the US and there is still little rigorous qualitative research into the experience of UK Christians in the workplace. This is the area where my research was designed to make a contribution, using a multi-disciplinary approach that I describe in further detail in chapter 2. This approach draws on a combination of existing research in the sociology of religion and organizational psychology in a way that gives what I believe to be a fresh perspective on faith/work integration in the UK context.

In the remaining chapters I make the argument that the dimension of closeness, or proximity, to God and God's purposes was key to the experience of faith/work integration. In chapter 3, I argue that the participants who had the strongest sense of their work as co-operation with God were those who could make connections between their work and God's purposes at the micro level of their daily encounters with other people. In other words, they could see God's purposes being worked out up close. I use models from organizational psychology to explain why was the case and identify two factors that could militate against making faith/work connections at that level. In chapter 4, I show that this sense of working closely with God was especially strong for those who believed they had experienced God's presence and providential activity in their workplace and explore the understanding of providence, prayer, guidance and the Holy Spirit that underlies such experiences. Finally, in chapter 5, I make the case that the Christian practices of awareness and reflection have a significant role to play in such experiences by facilitating the perception of God's close presence and activity in the workplace.

Chapter 2 Researching faith/work connections

2.1 Introduction

In chapter 1 outlined the question at the heart of my research project and located it in its historical, theological and research contexts. My aim in the current chapter is to describe, explain and give a rationale for the particular way in which I went about exploring that question. To that end, I shall first present my overall approach, describe the research setting and consider the ethical and methodological issues that I encountered and dealt with en route as a practitioner-researcher. I shall then focus on the participants, their recruitment, selection and profile. Finally, I shall cover the methods used to co-generate the data on which this thesis is based, concluding with an overview of the process of analysis that led to the argument that follows in the next three chapters[40].

2.2 Approach, project design and methods

Swinton and Mowat (2016) describe Practical Theology as being '… dedicated to enabling the faithful performance of the gospel and to exploring and taking seriously the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God' (4). As a practitioner-researcher, this was my underlying motivation for this research, with a focus on the secular workplace as a context for 'the faithful performance of the gospel' and 'the human encounter with God'. In hindsight, of these two elements, 'performance' and 'encounter', my focus during the project design stage was more on the performance aspect of the workplace discipleship experience, along with the ways that participants framed their work theologically. It was during the interviews and then the analysis stage, as we shall see in section 2.7 below, that my attention was brought more to the 'encounter' aspect.

In reviewing the relevant literature in the previous chapter, I introduced some of the theological assumptions that I brought with me into this project. The two most significant of these for my research were the understanding of the Christian calling as being to whole-life discipleship, and the understanding of work as co-operation with God in the working out of God's protological and eschatological purposes. I understood from recent literature (The Church of England, 2019; The Faith and Order Commission, 2020) that these were not just my own assumptions, or the assumptions of the particular church where I was working, but were underlying the approach of my denomination, the Church of England, to what it now calls 'everyday faith'. There was, therefore, what Cameron (2010) refers to as a 'normative' theological component to my approach that was connected to the 'formal' theology of theologians going back to Luther and beyond which I surveyed in chapter 1.

[40] In describing the project in this chapter, some wording is repeated from the project proposal document previously submitted as part of the doctoral programme.

At the same time, I didn't intend my research to be merely an exercise in seeing how well people's discipleship matched up to denominational norms or the norms of one local church. It was meant to involve genuine listening. We have already seen in chapter 1 how the General Synod paper *Setting God's People Free* speaks of a need to learn more of 'the perspectives and viewpoints of lay people' (Archbishops' Council, 2017, 9). Within the same denominational context but ten years earlier, Astley and Christie were arguing likewise that the church needed to listen seriously to the theology of its own members if it was going 'to grow, or even survive' (Astley & Christie, 2007, 4).

This concern is not limited to the Church of England, however. Writing over twenty years ago, in *The Abolition of the Laity*, R. Paul Stevens also argues that:

> the New Testament presupposes a community in which every person is a theologian of application, trying to make sense out of his or her life in order to live for the praise of God's glory: theology of, for and by the whole people of God. (Stevens, 1999, 21)

In this endeavour, Stevens says, the academy must not work apart from congregations, but with them. In my research I have sought to do what Stevens has in mind, exploring the ways in which the participants were trying to make sense of one particular aspect of their lives, namely their paid work in 'the marketplace'[41], 'in order to live for the praise of God's glory.' One way of framing part of what I hoped might emerge from the research, and to which this thesis makes a contribution, could be called an 'ordinary practical theology of work'. It would be 'ordinary' insofar as it met Astley's definition of ordinary theology, namely '… the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education' (Astley, 2002, 1). It would also be 'practical' in the sense that it would concern the 'present, contextualized, experienced practice' (Astley, 2002, 3) of the participants, specifically their practice of everyday work.

Having said this, going back to what I said earlier about the normative theological assumptions that I brought to the research, and the ultimate aim of enabling 'faithful performance', the scope of the research went beyond discovering people's ordinary theology of work. I aimed to enable what Pattison (2000) calls a 'critical conversation' between the experience of Christians in the secular workplace, my own 'ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions' and those 'provided by the Christian tradition' (139). Key to this was not just the 'conversation' aspect, but also that it was about Christians' lived experience of connecting faith and work and not just their theology of work. Overall, though I did not come across the terminology until after the research had taken place, my

[41] I am taking 'the marketplace' in a very broad sense here, to cover the world of paid employment, recognising that there were participants working in the education and health and social care sectors.

approach was very much along the lines of what Ward (2017) calls 'Lived Theology', combining aspects of lived religion, ordinary theology and Cameron's four voices approaches[42] (62-67).

Given all of the above, the research called for a qualitative approach which, as Swinton and Mowat (2016) explain, is suited to exploring '… *meaning* and a deeper *understanding* of situations' (36, italics original) and, as Mason (2002) writes, embraces '… richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity …' (1). While a number of assessment scales exist to allow quantitative measurement of different aspects of faith at work (Miller & Ewest, 2013b; Neal, 2013, Part V), I was investigating the depth and complexity that lie behind such measures, exploring how participants explain their experience of faith/work integration. Other examples of a qualitative approach being used in similar contexts include doctoral research into faith/work integration among evangelicals in Oklahoma (Shutt, 2011), Christian SME owner managers in Britain and Germany (Werner, 2006, 2008) and Christians in an English parish church (Belder, 2017).

The specific research method that I used to gather data was semi-structured interviews. According to Kvale, 'The [qualitative research] interview is a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects' everyday world' (2007, 11). Interviews do not allow observation of embodied behaviour and practices, but they are less intrusive in participants' working lives, were more feasible in terms of the timescale of this research. They also give access to the way participants ascribe meaning and purpose to their work in a way that observation cannot do[43]. Aside from the time issues involved, the nature of the work of several of the participants would have made observation of their work in the workplace setting complicated and problematic for confidentiality, logistical and other reasons. Examples include a GP giving consultations to patients, a hospital nurse on the ward, participants for whom international travel was a significant part of their work and so on.

In terms of Cameron's 'four voices' (Cameron, 2010), using the interview method did mean that what I was hearing was participants' espoused rather than their operant theology. I was not directly observing the practices and behaviours in which their operant theology was embedded but hearing their articulations of how and why they did what they did. This is in line with the methodology that Astley describes for ordinary theology, one that recognises that 'it is often difficult to infer people's beliefs from their practice' and which therefore 'concentrates on people's beliefs as they are

[42] Cameron (2010). We have heard the voices of 'normative' and 'formal' theology in relation to work in the previous chapter in reviewing church teaching and the writing of theologians. I discuss 'operant' and 'espoused' theology below.

[43] See the discussion of the benefits of qualitative interviewing in Bryman (2015, 494-497)

expressed in their words: portraying the theology in what people say (or write) rather than the theology implicit in what they do' (Astley & Francis, 2013, 5).

It is worth underlining the emphasis on 'depth' in the quotes about qualitative research from Swinton & Mowat and Mason above. One of the issues that qualitative research has to address is its perceived lack of generalizability. However, as Swinton and Mowat (2016) point out, part of the skill of qualitative research is providing a description of the research subject that is sufficiently rich and detailed to enable readers of the research to identify for themselves what are the similarities and differences between what is being described and their own sphere of interest. They are consequently equipped to determine what might be extrapolated more widely and what remains tied to the specific setting of the research in question. This is the criterion of transferability, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest as a valid alternative to generalizability (cited by Swinton & Mowat, 2016, 44-47)[44]. To this end I shall provide a description of the research setting(s) and participants in sections 2.3 and 2.5 below.

As a further step in the validation of the data, I had intended to report back initial findings to a focus group of four to six participants from the original interviewees and this was included in the description of the project provided to potential participants. This was partly for the purposes of further respondent validation but also because such a focus group has the potential to '… assist in clarifying and amplifying meaning as well as underscoring nuances and multiple angles of vision' (Galletta, 2013, 22). Unfortunately, in the event there was not sufficient time to arrange such a focus group, especially since a job move meant that I left the original research site during the analysis phase after the interviews had taken place. I was reasonably confident at that point that the data gathered in the interviews was of sufficient quality on its own to be able to produce a thesis, but in an ideal world the planned focus group might have contributed further to the trustworthiness of the data.

Finally in terms of approach, in the research and analysis I am adopting a critical realist interpretive paradigm (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, 33-37) that McGhee and Grant (2017) argue is suited to research into spirituality at work. For me, a critical realist approach means that I am aware of the potential gap between the stories told and the world behind the stories. I am aware also that the reality described by participants in conversation is at least to some degree a constructed representation of reality[45]. It is a representation of reality co-constructed with the interviewer (myself) in part for a particular audience, initially me, but perhaps indirectly for other readers of my

[44] See also Bryman (2015, 385).
[45] McGhee and Grant (2017) prefer to talk about 'construal' rather than 'construction'.

research. Nevertheless, in adopting a critical realist stance I take it that there is a 'real world' of lived experience behind what the participants said in interview and that the reality described by the participants has a genuine, though mediated, correlation with that lived reality. In other words, as a researcher I need to pay attention to the constructedness of what came out of the interviews, but I do not view what was created as merely a construct with no relation to a 'real' world.

2.3 The research setting(s)

There is a sense in which there were two settings for this research, the congregation of which all but one of the participants were members, and their respective work settings. I shall address the latter in section 2.5.

The church to which all but one of the participants belonged, to which I have given the pseudonym St. Peter's, to help preserve the anonymity of the participants, is a medium to large sized[46] church in a commuter town in the Home Counties. Its tradition at the time of the research was broadly evangelical, displaying Bebbington's 'defining attributes' of conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism (Bebbington, 1989). At the time of the research St. Peter's was using the Evangelical Alliance statement of faith (The Evangelical Alliance, 2022) as part of recruitment process, though this did not necessarily represent the doctrinal position of all church members. In past years a significant number of the congregation had attended the New Wine[47] summer conference, and more recently Holy Trinity Brompton's Focus event[48], with a much smaller number attending the more conservative Word Alive event[49] in the spring. Work-related courses from both the Jubilee Centre and LICC had been run in the church. Other references in participant interviews to the Alpha course[50], the Hillsong conference[51] and the Global Leadership Summit[52] further indicate the evangelical ethos of, and influences on, both the church as a whole and most of the participants individually. To relate the churchmanship of St. Peter's to the subjects of research into two other large evangelical churches, it would be somewhat less uniformly conservative than the 'St. John's' studied by Anna Strhan (Strhan, 2015) and similarly less uniformly charismatic[53] than St. Michael-le-

[46] The electoral roll was 730 in 2018 [Data from 2018 Parish Profile document, not referenced to retain anonymity]
[47] https://www.new-wine.org/ Retrieved May 12, 2022
[48] https://www.htb.org/focus Retrieved May 12, 2022
[49] https://wordaliveevent.org/ Retrieved May 12, 2022
[50] https://alpha.org.uk/ Retrieved May 12, 2022
[51] https://hillsong.com/conference/ Retrieved May 12, 2022
[52] https://globalleadership.org/global-leadership-summit/?locale=en Retrieved May 12, 2022
[53] For the purposes of this thesis, three of Goldingay's (1996) six characteristics of charismatic spirituality are especially pertinent to my use of the label 'charismatic', as summarised by Francis et al.: 'The ongoing Christian life is aware of the sense of the presence and power of God, a joy in God and an enthusiasm about God. God is seen as involved with the world in an interventionist sense, changing and healing. The Christian community is open to God who acts, guides and speaks to the church.' (Francis et al., 2000, 122)

Belfry, studied by Matthew Guest (Guest, 2004/2016), but with many similar features. I shall return to the significance of the Christian spirituality of participants to their experience of workplace discipleship in chapters 4 and 5.

In terms of socio-economic profile, according to the Church of England's Statistics for Mission St. Peter's deprivation rank in 2019 put it in the top 10% of least deprived parishes (Church of England, 2022c). As we shall see in section 2.5, this socio-economic setting was reflected in the profile of the research participants, who were all in professional occupations and mostly in senior roles within those occupations.

As already discussed in the previous section in relation to transferability, one of the features of qualitative practitioner research is the inevitable limitation that arises when it is situated within the particular setting of the researcher's own practice. In the case of the setting of this study, as just described, it is important to recognise that the experiences of work being explored were those of congregants who generally experienced a high degree of choice and efficacy in their work. Furthermore, they were in most cases interpreting their experience of work through a theological grid that was broadly evangelical. I explore some of the potential impact of these limitations in my discussion of participant profiles in section 2.5.2[54] and as part of the argument in chapters 3 to 5[55]. I shall return to them in my conclusions in section 5.6.

2.4 The practitioner-researcher – methodological and ethical issues

In this section I shall consider the ethical and methodological issues that arose in the research from my role as a practitioner-researcher. The key methodological issue that I consider is the role of reflection and reflexivity in practitioner research and what they look like in the case of this particular study. As far as research ethics are concerned, as Bulmer asserts: 'Researchers always have to take account of the effects of their actions upon [their] subjects and act in such a way as to preserve their rights and integrity as human beings. Such behaviour is ethical behaviour' (Bulmer, 2008, 146). Furthermore, as Brinkmann and Kvale show, ethical concerns run through every stage of interview-based qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, 83ff.).

Some of the ethical considerations identified in the research design were common to qualitative research using semi-structured interviews and were not related specifically to my dual role. These included issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and data verification and security, all of which will

[54] See especially sections 2.5.2.3 on sector and 2.5.2.4 on role.
[55] For example, the discussion in section 3.3 on capitalism and working in the commercial sector, and throughout chapters 4 and 5 in the findings about understandings of God's providence and presence in the workplace.

be covered in later sections on data gathering and analysis. What follows in this section is a discussion of concerns that did relate more specifically to my dual role as pastor and researcher.

2.4.1 Reflection and reflexivity

Reflection and reflexivity are a key component in qualitative research generally, and practitioner research in particular (Lee, 2009, 57-58; Swinton & Mowat, 2016, 56-63). I attempted to achieve this in a number of ways including keeping a research journal and dialogue with other researching professionals on my doctoral programme and at conferences. Hearing the experiences of other researchers was very helpful in making me more aware of the various dimensions of my own role within the research. The results of reflection and reflexivity are shown partly in this chapter as a whole and will also crop up in the ensuing chapters where my role and presence in the research is particularly relevant to the findings of the analysis.

Swinton and Mowat define reflexivity as 'the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings' (2016, 57). According to Fox, Martin & Green, '[practitioner research] recognises that rather than attempting to eliminate researcher effects, the research should, through the use of reflexivity, acknowledge these effects and integrate them into the design' (2007, 81). Accordingly, I begin by locating myself in relation to the research.

At the time that the research was designed, the interviews carried out and the initial analysis undertaken I was on the staff of St. Peter's as one of its ordained ministers. I thus at that time had a pastoral role in relation to all but one of the participants. I address the potential role confusion arising from that in section 2.4.3 below. During the course of the analysis and writing stages of the thesis, however, I left that church and took up a post in a different church and so no longer have that same pastoral relationship with the participants. On the other hand, as one of their former pastors I don't feel that I am now simply a researcher in relation to them. There is definitely a sense of residual pastoral concern. I also remain a practitioner in parochial ministry in the Church of England, albeit in a different context and so the initial research question remains a live issue in my current context.

In addition to the roles of practitioner-researcher and pastor/teacher, as alluded to in chapter 1, I am also someone who, in a "past life" spent seven years in full time employment in the oil industry. This past experience potentially has both an upside and a downside. On the one hand it meant that I had some previous experience in a corporate context which helped me to understand the work settings of several of the participants. On the other hand, I was aware that the world of corporate work had changed in the twenty years since I had left it, so my knowledge was somewhat dated. I

also had to be careful not to project my own experiences and feelings about working as a Christian in that environment onto my participants. These considerations added to the necessity of paying careful attention, both in the interviews and in later analysis, to what the participants were actually saying and being aware of the potential for my past experiences to act as blinkers rather than giving helpful extra perspective.

2.4.2 Power and informed consent

The main concern here was to avoid any sense of coercion to participate on the part of potential participants arising from my pastoral role. I aimed to mitigate this risk, as will be detailed below, by carrying out recruitment through advertising rather than through direct invitation of individuals, with the result that participants would self-select to volunteer for the research. There was also a clear indication on the information sheet that participants could withdraw at any time without explanation and that this would have no impact on their pastoral care or other church involvement. This message was reinforced verbally prior to each interview[56].

2.4.3 Role confusion and pastoral care of participants

In discussing the participants' experience of their daily work, it was always going to be possible that pastoral issues might arise during the course of interviews. This could potentially cause a tension between my roles as researcher, pastor and, in some cases, friend. Except perhaps in extreme or urgent situations (which thankfully did not arise) it would not have been appropriate to have responded to such issues during the interview itself in my pastoral role. On the other hand, it would also not have been appropriate to have ignored such issues should they arise. With this potential role confusion in mind, it was made clear in the participants' information, and verbally reiterated before each interview, that interviews were not to be thought of as pastoral encounters and that during the interviews I was to be thought of as wearing a researcher's 'hat' rather than a pastoral one. However, should pastoral issues arise, participants were offered a follow up pastoral conversation with one of my clergy colleagues. Participants were also advised that they could end the interview at any time.

In practice there was only one interview where this could have been an issue, when the participant became upset while describing their current work environment and requested a short break during the interview. In this particular case it was an ongoing issue of which I was already aware and had had conversations with the participant about previously. I was also aware that the participant had a network, including a church small group, within which I believed she was receiving pastoral support

[56]The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form are in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively.

at the appropriate level. In this instance, no extra pastoral follow-up was requested or required as a result of the interview process itself.

2.4.4 Normativity

It was important for the research that participants should not feel inhibited from expressing their honest views about their experience of discipleship in the workplace and their theological understanding of work. One possible source of inhibition that I foresaw while designing the research was my identity as an ordained church minister, potentially representing what might be seen as official church teaching. This was partly mitigated in practice by avoiding references to 'theology' and 'doctrine' in the questions asked during the interview. I also took care in my response to participants' answers to try to avoid any sense that they were being judged on the soundness or rightness of their answers. With Jeremy at one point I reassured him that I was not after 'intellectual' answers to my questions and he appeared to be reassured by this.

2.4.5 Accountability

As a practitioner-researcher I had a level of accountability to St. Peter's, which was both my employer at the time and the Christian community to which most of the participants belonged. At the start of the doctoral programme, it was agreed with the church leadership that I could allocate some of my working hours to the doctorate. During the analysis phase of the research, however, the church came to be under different leadership and the initial official allocation of my time to research was not renegotiated. At a later stage of the analysis phase I left the church to take up a post elsewhere, meaning that I no longer had the accountability relationship of an employee or church member, while retaining the responsibilities of a researcher. While I was still on the staff at St. Peter's, I was able to share with colleagues some of the themes that were emerging from the research on an informal basis, but since I have left, there is no expectation of a formal presentation of findings to the current St. Peter's leadership.

2.5 The participants

2.5.1 Recruitment and selection

The original intention was to recruit 12 to 15 participants[57] from members of the church of which I was one of the clergy team at the time interview took place.[58] Recruitment from my area of practice means that I bring knowledge of the context into the research and that any knowledge generated by the research may be more easily translated into transformed practice. These are potential strengths of practitioner research highlighted by Fox et al. (2007), and which lie behind my choice of

[57] Brinkmann and Kvale report 'In common interview studies, the number of interviews tends to be around 15 +/- 10' (2015, 140).

[58] At the time I had the role title of Associate Pastor for Discipleship & Adult Spiritual Formation

recruitment strategy, along with the pragmatic factor of access. However, Fox et al. (2007) do also identify issues of concern in such research, including the use and abuse of power, potential role confusion and the need to avoid any degree of coercion. These issues were addressed in the previous section.

Invitation to participate in the research was made via (a) an advertisement in the church's weekly bulletin, and (b) advertisement flyers issued at 'leadership breakfasts' run by the church[59]. In this way, participants were self-selecting to volunteer and were not individually approached by the researcher. Advertisements invited participation by people who fulfil the following criteria:

- They self-identify as being Christian
- They are currently in full-time or part-time employment or have been within the last 2 years (this allowed for the sample to include recent retirees)

Everyone who responded to the recruitment advertising was sent (a) a participant information sheet, (b) a consent form, and (c) a simple three-question questionnaire to find out (i) whether respondent is male/female/prefer not to say, (ii) how long respondent has been a Christian (< 5 years / between 5 and 10 years / > 10 years), (iii) the sector in which the respondent works.

The intention of the questionnaire was to enable a degree of variation across gender, length of time participants had identified as Christians and work sector if there were more than 15 respondents. This selection procedure aimed to secure a breadth of representation and facilitate the collection of a range of voices, experiences and possible thematic patterns (Galletta, 2013, 33). As far as work sector was concerned, I was aiming for a range of sectors and organization sizes to be represented, ideally including both not-for-profit and commerce (recognising the different experiences across sectors reported by Ammerman (2013, 171-211)).

As it turned out, response rate was lower than expected despite further advertisement at a men's weekend away and all respondents were accepted for the research. This included a participant (Harry) who worshipped at a neighbouring church but found out about my research through his parents who attended St. Peter's and who had attended St. Peter's himself while growing up. While in some ways this participant was an outlier in his experience of Christian discipleship at work, being by some way the most heavily involved in a workplace Christian group, I have taken the view that the data generated in my interview with him was worth including in the analysis that follows, particularly as the research was not designed specifically to be a congregational study. In the

[59] Recruitment material can be found in Appendix 1 and 2

following chapters I have tried to remind the reader, when it is relevant to do so, that Harry was attending a different church from St. Peter's.

2.5.2 Discussion of participant profiles

The following table combines the data given by participants on the mini-questionnaire that formed part of the recruitment process with the aliases agreed with them and a role description.

Participant alias	Gender	Christian for	Sector	Role Description
Alex	Male	>10 years	Energy industry	Senior HR manager
Brian	Male	>10 years	Education	Senior IT manager (higher education)
Chris	Male	>10 years	Consumer goods	Senior manager
Daniel	Male	>10 years	Social care (residential)	Business owner
Edward	Male	>10 years	Professional services	Marketing consultant
Sofia	Female	>10 years	Healthcare	GP
Georgie	Female	>10 years	Healthcare	Senior hospital nurse
Harry	Male	>10 years	Management consultancy	Management consultant
Isla	Female	>10 years	Education	Teacher
Jeremy	Male	Between 5 and 10 years	Professional services (media)	Senior manager
Kath	Female	>10 years	Education	Teacher
Liam	Male	>10 years	Investment/Private equity	Private equity investor
Mary	Female	>10 years	Financial services	Senior accountancy consultant

Table 2.1 Participant profiles

In the rest of this section, I flesh out the bare description of the participants given in the above table in order to enhance the transferability of the research outcomes, as discussed in section 2.2 above. In doing so I draw particularly on the findings of Lynn et al. (2010) in their research using the Faith at Work Scale (FWS) with Christian workers in the US in which they considered several variables to see if they were related to faith/work integration. These variables had been identified from the prior research literature and came under the headings of intent (which included church attendance and

faith maturity[60]), opportunity (which included professional status and organizational size) and ability (which included age and gender).While Lynn et al.'s quantitative research methodology was different from the qualitative approach of this study, several of the variables that they considered in relation to faith/work integration correlate to categories in the above table. Though I did not deliberately design the questionnaire around Lynn et al.'s research, their findings provide helpful input in considering the potential significance of the various factors that characterise my research sample.

2.5.2.1 Gender

While I had initially been hoping for a more even gender split, the ratio of male to female (8:5) among the participants is close to that of those aged 16 to 74 in employment in the census data for the St. Peter's location cited above. I also believe from my own knowledge of the church, though there is no hard data available to support this, that it reflected the make-up of the church membership at the time, with more men than women of working age in paid employment. Research suggests that connections between gender, occupation and faith/work integration are not entirely straightforward, however. In Lynn et al.'s study with the FWS, gender was not found to relate to the level of integration, with the caveat that this was true of FWS mean scores, and 'whether gender differences exist in particular aspects or influences of integration has yet to be examined' (Lynn et al., 2010, 691).

It is here that the connection between gender and sector may be significant. What is known from other research is that gender segregation in occupational choices is a global phenomenon (Watt, 2010). In the UK, women are underrepresented in a number of sectors, including industry and financial services, but comprise more than two thirds of those working in the Health and Social Work and Education sectors (Woodfield, 2007, 7)[61]. This situation is reflected in my sample. Of the five female participants, two worked in healthcare and two in education. Buszka and Ewest make a suggestion that could provide a link here with faith/work integration. After reviewing recent research on work-related gender differences, they conclude that '… jobs that allow women to interact with, guide, and help others could be more appealing because these allow them to fulfil their desire for meaningful social relationships' (2019, 33). In terms of the FWS this might suggest gender differences could be anticipated in relation to the 'caring' and 'accepting' aspects that form part of the 'community' dimension.

[60] Measured using the Donahue short form of the Faith Maturity Scale (Benson et al., 1993; Piedmont & Nelson, 2002).

[61] While Woodfield is writing in 2007 and the data may be somewhat out of date, it is closer to representing the situation when my participants were making their initial career choices than more recent statistics.

2.5.2.2 Length of time a Christian

While the length of time someone had been a Christian was not a variable tested by Lynn et al, the related variables of age and intent were. Intent, which included church attendance and faith maturity, turned out to be most strongly related to faith/work integration. I did not ask participants about the regularity of their church attendance either on the initial mini-questionnaire or in interview, though sometimes it came out in the interviews and in most cases it was something that I knew about from my practitioner role. Of those in the St. Peter's congregation all were regular attenders, though the actual frequency varied from attending most weeks (three or four Sundays a month) to once or twice every two months. The one participant from a Roman Catholic background also attended the local Roman Catholic church from time to time.

As far as faith maturity is concerned, this cannot be directly inferred from the length of time for which participants identified as having been Christians on the pre-interview questionnaire, but it seems reasonable to expect there to be some correlation. Age was found to be positively related to integration, though there may have been confounding factors. From my personal knowledge of the participants rather than the questionnaire the range of ages was from the 30s to the 50s.

What this all means for interpreting the current study is that one would expect a relatively high degree of intent, and therefore a relatively high degree of faith/work integration, in a sample where the majority were regular churchgoers who had been Christians for over 10 years. As this thesis goes on to explore the contours of what that integration looks like, this will need to be borne in mind.

2.5.2.3 Sector

One feature of the overall profile of the participants is the number of people working in professional and financial services. We have already touched on the significance of employment sector as it relates to gender and faith/work integration in section 2.5.2.1 and saw how it is potentially significant. Ammerman's research into religion in everyday life also suggests that '[i]n some kinds of jobs[62], the window for sacred meaning and spiritual action seems fairly wide' while '[s]elling expensive clothing or balancing the books for an insurance company are a different matter' (Ammerman, 2013, 196). We shall explore this much more deeply in chapter 3 but suffice it to say that other factors come into play here as well, including organizational size and the individual's approach to their job. As Buszka and Ewest put it, 'occupational characteristics are contextualized by the individual' (Buszka & Ewest, 2019, 193). While certain jobs may be seen as more about directly serving people than others 'any form of work seen by the individual as making the world a better place could potentially be viewed as a calling' (194).

[62] Ammerman identifies artists and doctors as examples.

2.5.2.4 Role

As can be seen from the table, the majority of the participants were in senior positions in their work, with several managing whole departments, sometimes across multiple countries. This is fairly representative of the parish of St. Peter's. According to 2011 census data for the two merged wards that most closely match St. Peter's parish, 28.2% of those aged 16 to 74 and in employment were managers, directors or senior officials, with a further 27.4% in professional occupations and 15.8% in associate professional and technical occupations (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

Professional status was not related to integration in Lynn et al.'s results. This was unexpected in the light of earlier research by Davidson and Caddell (1994) into job orientation among church-goers in the US. Davidson and Caddell's data suggested that 'regardless of gender, upper-class[63] people who were highly educated and highly paid and experienced high levels of job security while working full time with people tended to view their work as a calling or career more than those who do not fit this profile' (144). According to Lynn et al., the lack of correlation between professional status and faith/work integration in their study 'may suggest that the expectations of professionalism and autonomy cancel each other out, or that forms of work in general do not obstruct integration' (Lynn et al., 2010, 692). The first of these suggestions is echoed by Buszka and Ewest, who note that leadership roles tend to come with a variety of work tasks and a higher degree of autonomy, both of which contribute towards meaningfulness, but people with greater authority in the workplace tend also to be sensitive to the danger of misusing their power in expressing their faith at work (Buszka & Ewest, 2019, 202-203). As we shall see in the next chapter (section 3.5), this did turn out to be a factor for several of my participants.

Role seniority, then, can work both ways when it comes to faith/work integration. Organizational size, however, which is reflected in some of the role titles, was negatively related to faith/work integration in Lynn et al's study. In other words, the bigger the organization in which someone worked, the lower the level of their integration tended to be. Given the size of the organizations many of my participants worked in, with nearly half in national or multinational companies, this is an interesting finding, and I shall discuss it in relation to my data in the next chapter.

2.5.2.5 Ethnicity

To complete this section, it is worth addressing briefly the question of ethnicity, which I did not ask about on my initial questionnaire. That is partly down to wishing to keep the questionnaire as simple

[63] This is a reference to occupational class. Three classes were distinguished in the study: 'capitalist class (i.e., business owner or manager), intermediate class (i.e., administrator, professional or self-employed in education, religion, or other human services), and working class (lower white-collar or blue-collar employee)' (Davidson & Caddell, 1994, 136). On these definitions, all my participants belonged to the capitalist and intermediate classes, with most in the capitalist class.

as possible and partly to the fact that I did not go into the study with the conscious intention of exploring the specific experience of BAME Christians, or any other particular perspective within the overall perspective of the congregation(s). That aspect of the research design may reflect my own set of blinkers as a beginner researcher. Having said that, I have tried in the analysis to be aware of how factors such as ethnicity, as well as of gender and socio-economic class may have impacted the experience of the participants.

As far as ethnicity is concerned, there was one BAME participant in the study, which probably reflects the overall make-up of St. Peter's[64], though not by design. Given the confounding factors of role, sector and particular spiritual tradition in their case, however, it is very difficult to isolate ethnicity as a factor in their unique experience of faith/work integration. Related to the factor of ethnicity, three other participants had grown up and begun their working lives outside the UK. This did give them interesting 'outsider' perspectives on the UK working environment for Christians, as did the experience of others who had worked abroad. While these perspectives do not form a major part of this thesis, observations made about the relative faith-friendliness of different work environments do form part of section 3.5 in the next chapter.

2.6 Interviews and transcription

Having discussed the profile of the participants recruited for this study I now turn in the next two sections of this chapter to the interview and analysis phases of the research. As I have explained in the previous chapter and the opening sections of this chapter, the starting aim of my research was to explore the connections that Christians in secular employment made between their faith and their everyday work. There were also several sub-questions identified in my research proposal:

- What terms do people use to describe the connections, or lack of connections, between their faith and their work?
- To what degree do people recognise the level of integration that they have (or have not) achieved?
- What factors do participants see as being significant in their faith/work integration?
- What other (i.e. other than Christian) stories or frameworks provide meaning and purpose in people's daily work?
- What practices do participants see as embodying and/or reinforcing faith/work connections?
- How have people come to make the connections that they have?

From these initial research questions, I drafted an interview plan[65] which was revised after input from peers at a residential, after an informal trial run with a non-participant and then again after the first couple of interviews. I treated the first interviews as pilots to enable me to develop the

[64] As with gender, I do not have access to any hard data to substantiate this.
[65] The final version of the interview plan is in Appendix 3

interview guide used for the main interviews (Galletta, 2013, 2) and to develop my interview skills. While the interview guide was tweaked after the first two interviews, for example by moving questions about the participant's faith background to the beginning, it was not substantially changed and there was no need to request a second interview from those participants.

Participants made their own choice of where the interview would take place, choosing between (a) the participant's home, (b) the researcher's home and (c) a room in the St. Peter's church centre. In giving this choice I was aware of the potential power dynamics of different locations, as well as issues of convenience, and I intended that participants could decide for themselves on where they felt most comfortable participating in the interview. Largely for reasons of practicability no interviews took place in the participants' places of work. Interviews were recorded onto the researcher's laptop using Audacity software.

Transcription was initially done manually with the help of Transcribe software[66], but for the last few interviews I tried out Transcribe's AI-driven automated transcription. This saved some time but still required a fair amount of corrections. It also turned out that the AI software stripped out hesitations ('ums' and 'ers'). I had been including these in my manual transcriptions, along with repetitions, following the recommendation of King and Horrocks not to 'tidy up' transcribed talk (2010, 148-149). At the time of transcribing, I was not sure how significant such non-linguistic utterances would turn out to be for interpreting the data, so I attempted to reinput hesitations in the automated transcripts, though perhaps not consistently. I have also chosen to follow King and Horrocks by not 'tidying up' the quotations from interviews used in this thesis, though I am aware that some researchers choose to do so (for example, Slee, 2004, 57, n.9; Luhrmann, 2012, ix). This is partly to avoid appearing to correct participants and partly so that the reader can see exactly what participants said.

Once the interviews had been transcribed, I sent each participant a copy of the transcription of my interview with them so that they could correct any inaccuracies and veto any elements of the interview that they didn't wish to be used. This was partly an exercise in respondent validation / member checking (Galletta, 2013, 127; Bryman, 2015, 385) and partly a check that I had anonymised the interviews to their satisfaction. I sent the transcriptions back one final time when the thesis was near completion to prompt participants that this was their last opportunity to withdraw, but also to check that they were happy with the alias and role description that I was using for them.

[66] https://transcribe.wreally.com/ Retrieved May 12, 2022

2.7 Analysis

I began the analysis process intending to carry out a systematic process of thematic analysis such as those found in Ezzy (2002, 86-94) and King and Horrocks (2010, 152-174), going from coding to new theory. Thematic analysis, according to Ezzy, is appropriate for discovering what themes emerge from the data rather than using the data to test any particular theory or framework (Ezzy, 2002, 86-88) and so it seemed to suit my project design. While I was aware of faith/work integration models such as TIP and would carry out analysis in conversation with them, as well as other literature, the aim of the project was not to test them.

My initial coding method was In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016, 105-110) which at the time seemed helpfully open and which Saldaña identifies as being suited to beginner researchers. It did help me to become familiar with the interview data but generated far too many codes to be useful without further coding. At this point in the analysis, I opted to begin using Quirkos software[67] which had been recommended by a colleague on my doctoral programme and which proved extremely useful in handling the volume of transcription data as well as making it possible to visualise the code structures. It was also relatively simple to learn compared to more complex CAQDAS programs like NVivo, whose extra functionality I did not think I would need. Using Quirkos I made a second pass through the interview data using eclectic coding, with most of the codes being descriptive (Saldaña, 2016, 212-218). This generated (after a bit of tweaking) 106 codes, most of which were eventually assigned to a dozen or so clusters.

These two rounds of coding helped me to organise the data, but my attempts to work further through a rigidly structured process of thematic analysis proved frustrating. In early write-ups of my findings, despite the inductive nature of thematic analysis, it felt like I was merely reinforcing already well-established models like TIP and LICC's 6 Ms with illustrative examples from my interviews. If the research question was 'how do Christians in secular employment connect their faith with their everyday work?', my data suggested that they were doing it in all of the ways those models described, which was encouraging, but not as interesting as I would have hoped. For a while I switched to a more narrative-based approach, focussing on the stories participants told, but this threatened to produce something like an academic version of LICC's *The One About* booklets (Greene, 2018, 2020), telling stories about 'God in our everyday'[68]. Again, this would have been encouraging, but not generative of new insight. The breadth of the original research question led to an interview design that yielded very rich data. In hindsight, however, the very richness of the data

[67] https://www.quirkos.com/ Retrieved May 12, 2022

[68] This comment is not meant to disparage those booklets, which I believe to be a helpful resource for everyday discipleship.

was causing problems for an inexperienced researcher trying to derive a comprehensive theory from it.

At this stage, I began to narrow my focus and concentrate on issues in the data that I felt were underrepresented in the rapidly expanding Christian literature about work and workplace discipleship. Ezzy explains how such issues can be uncovered in thematic analysis:

> While the general issues that are of interest are determined prior to the analysis, the specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored are not predetermined. This means that this form of research may take the researcher into issues and problems he or she had not anticipated. (Ezzy, 2002, 88)

This was not so much a change in the research question as a refinement of it. I was now looking to identify from the data aspects of my participants' faith/work connections that I had not anticipated because they did not already feature significantly in the literature. To some degree I had been doing this subconsciously anyway, but it now became a more deliberate approach. I also realised that I would have to go back to the literature relating to the key themes that I had identified, in some cases to sources that I had not engaged with previously. This entailed moving from a linear process to an iterative process of going back and forth between the data, the literature and my own thinking. The previous coding work in Quirkos still proved useful as it helped me to navigate my way through the data and find relevant sections of interviews more easily. The iterative process I ended up using is one I take to be quite similar to the 'free-flowing dialogue' described by Nicola Slee in the analysis phase of her research into women's faith development (Slee, 2004, 57-58). Indeed, I was considerably encouraged at this stage of the research to read Slee writing of her own project that 'the process of research design was more one of trial and error than a systematic application of principles' and that '[t]he method […] generated far more data than could possibly be analysed with any degree of comprehensiveness' (Slee, 2004, 60). This was very much echoed in my own experience.

This iterative process came to focus on two observations that I made in the data and which I shall explore in the rest of this thesis. The first emerged from looking closer at the parts of the interviews relating to the 'theology of work' cluster of codes and concerned the significance of organizational levels for the salience of faith/work connections and thus the experience of work as co-operation with God. It was recognising this that led me to go back and dig deeper into the organizational psychology literature to see if I could find any explanation in the research for what I was seeing in the interview data. This is the subject of chapter 3.

The second observation connected the interview sections coded 'providence/calling/vocation' with those coded 'religious experience' and concerned the difference made to the workplace discipleship experience by the perception of God's presence and activity in the workplace. In terms of Swinton and Mowat's description of Practical Theology quoted at the beginning of section 2.2, I realised again something that had struck me during the interview process, that several participants were not only describing their own beliefs and behaviours in relation to work but also 'human encounter(s) with God' (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, 4). On reflection, the fact that I had not more strongly anticipated this dimension of Christian experience in the workplace probably says something about my own spirituality, but it also pointed me to a gap in what I had picked up from my reading of the literature so far. This led me to reconsider the significance of the categories of providence and personal relationship with God in participants' understanding of their work, which I explore in chapter 4.

There were also pointers in the interview data to a connection between this perception of God's presence and activity at the workplace and spiritual practices. Thanks to a suggestion from my supervisors, I turned to the research of US anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann (2012, 2020) to try to make more sense of what was going on here. I also revisited the literature on discipleship and theological reflection in the UK context, as well as recent research by Sarah Dunlop et al. (2021) into theological reflection by Anglican churchgoers, to flesh out the implications for practice suggested by my data. These connections between workplace experiences of God and spiritual practices are the subject of chapter 5.

As we shall see in the rest of this thesis, what connects these two observations, and is the thread running through the next three chapters, is the dimension of closeness, or proximity to God and God's purposes. Participants in this study tended to experience their work most strongly as co-operation with God when they could perceive God's purposes being achieved at the closest, micro, level of their work and when they sensed God's presence and providential activity at that level. The more that this was true of their workplace experience, the more they felt that they were working with, as opposed to merely for, God. In several cases this experience of close co-operation with God was associated with deliberate practices of attentiveness and reflection, but the evidence suggests that further encouragement and training in such practices could have a significant impact on workplace discipleship.

2.8 Caveat: The changing world of work and the Covid-19 pandemic

I finish this chapter on my research methodology, methods and process with a brief caveat that relates to the immediate historic setting in which the research took place. The interviews that form

the core of this research were conducted between April 18th and December 12th 2018. Thus they predate the Covid-19 pandemic which not only disrupted work for many, if not all, of the participants and may well have impacted the world of work permanently in ways that are not yet clear as I write this.

The world of work was changing already due to technological advances such as AI, robotics and the infrastructure enabling remote working, as well as sociological change, including globalisation (see the work of London Business School's Lynda Gratton on the future of work (Gratton, 2010; 2011)). Such changes are likely to have an impact on the ways in which Christian faith can and will be expressed in the workplace in the future and to a degree this was reflected in some of the interview data. The focus of this thesis, however, is limited to the experience of Christians in the workplace at the time the interviews took place.

Chapter 3 Working for the purposes of God in the world

3.1 Introduction

In the next three chapters, I shall explore the ways in which participants made connections between their faith and their everyday work. In this chapter, I focus on the work that the participants were doing and the way that they connected it with the greater good of God's purposes and work in the world. We shall see how connections can be made at different levels and how and why the salience of connections varies between those levels. We shall also look at two factors that can challenge faith/work integration. One is the perceived need to be vocally or visibly Christian in environments where overt expressions of faith are discouraged. The other is the perceived need to be distinctively Christian in an environment where work values and practices are in line with one's own.

As we saw in the literature survey in chapter 1, it is a common feature of the more popular books on workplace discipleship to devote a significant number of pages to locating everyday work theologically within the overall purposes of God. For those in the evangelical Protestant tradition this often broadly follows the vocational model inherited from the Reformers. The usual premise for doing this is the view that the sacred/secular divide exists at least partly because of a defective worldview in which everyday work has become devalued and the understanding of God's mission is narrowly focussed on making converts. Accordingly, I was interested to know whether, and how, participants did locate their work within God's purposes for the world and what difference that made to the way they felt about their work.

In his popular book *Every Good Endeavour,* evangelical US pastor Timothy Keller makes a claim that epitomises the approach to enhancing workplace discipleship that I have just outlined and that I wished to explore:

> [E]very Christian should be able to identify, with conviction and satisfaction, the ways in which his or her work participates with God in his creativity and cultivation. (Keller, 2012, 53)

Theologian Michael E. Wittmer goes even further in *Heaven is a Place on Earth* (Wittmer, 2004). Wittmer claims that having a theology of work (specifically here an understanding of the 'cultural mandate' in Genesis 2[69]) can impact one's experience of everyday work:

> Where does your job fit into this picture? How does what you do enable you or others to exercise dominion over the earth, cultivating its resources for the profit of both humanity and the earth itself? If you can locate your occupation within this process, you will discover a

[69] God's command to humans to 'cultivate [God's] creation' (Wittmer, 2004, 124)

> divine nobility in your tasks. You will no longer work with one eye on the clock, motivated only by your paycheck, but will realize that in your job you are cooperating with God. (Wittmer, 2004, 125)

This is a bold claim to make, but it does have some support from the world of vocational psychology, the academic sub-discipline within organizational psychology that focuses on calling and vocation. In their book *Make Your Job a Calling,* leading researchers in the field Bryan Dik and Ryan Duffy tell a story about three stone cutters that recurs frequently in the literature (Dik & Duffy, 2012, 79-80)[70]. When the stone cutters are asked what they are doing, the first replies that he is cutting stone, the second replies that he is making a living,[71] and the third replies that he is building a cathedral. The point of the fable is that work becomes more meaningful when it is connected with a greater good. Dik & Duffy explain:

> The notion of meaningful work as tied to the greater good harkens back to some of the oldest ideas about what makes work meaningful. The emphasis on the greater good seems woven into the fabric of meaningful work, a part of its very nature. This point is true conceptually, but also empirically; statistical analyses of meaningful work items have identified the greater good as a core theme of what makes work matter to people. (Dik & Duffy, 2012, 83, see also Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012)

In regard to the experience of the participants in this study, then, one might ask in what ways did they connect their work with the greater good of God's purposes being worked out in the world, and what impact did such connections have on the perceived meaningfulness of their work from a faith perspective? Before looking at the interview data to answer that question, one further categorisation is helpful, and that concerns the level at which connections are made.

One version of this categorization is provided by David Miller's The Integration Profile (TIP). Writing about the 'Ethics Type' of faith manifestation at work[72] in *God at Work*, Miller explains that issues of work ethics 'are treated at many levels: micro (personal), mezzo (corporate), and macro (societal)' (Miller, 2007, 129)[73]. While Miller uses this categorization specifically in relation to ethics, we can

[70] As Dik and Duffy put it 'Apparently this story has a long history' and they first read it in an essay by John J. Ryan in a 1977 book (Dik & Duffy, 2012, 260, n. 34). Another popular version of the story has it about Sir Christopher Wren talking to three bricklayers employed in the rebuilding of St. Paul's.
[71] In some versions he is trying to be the best stone cutter / bricklayer he can be.
[72] This describes 'those whose primary mode of integrating faith at work is through attention to personal virtue, business ethics, and to broader questions of social and economic justice' (Miller, 2007, 129)
[73] Later development of the profile distinguishes between a 'community orientation' of the Ethics profile that incorporates the mezzo and macro levels and a 'self-orientation' that equates to the micro level (Miller et al., 2019, 458).

also apply it to the level at which God's purposes are perceived to be being achieved at work. In terms of TIP this fits more strictly into the 'outcomes orientation Experience profile', which is described as follows:

> The outcome of their work, or the work of their organization's outputs (service or product), is a source of personal meaning and purpose, contributing a positive value to the world. (Miller et al., 2019, 459)

Combining the various categorizations, we can distinguish between macro level social outcomes (how the organization impacts society), mezzo level organizational outcomes (how the organization impacts its own employees) and micro level personal outcomes (how the individual's work impacts themselves and those around them).

Lysova et al. use a similar categorisation in their 2019 review article considering research on the antecedents of meaningful work. They consider factors at four different levels: individual, job, organizational and societal (Lysova et al., 2019). Of these I take the first two together to equate to Miller's micro level, organizational to mezzo and societal to macro and shall use the terms accordingly in the rest of the chapter.

In the Christian literature about work and discipleship, different levels are addressed in different contexts. Theologies of work, for example, tend to address the societal level, as do more popular-level books on workplace discipleship when they are positioning daily work within the overall purposes of God (for example, Stevens, 2006, 22-33 and Wittmer, 2004, as cited above). The Church of England's *Kingdom Calling* document connects social calling with the contribution an organization makes to the greater good of society:

> If the calling of institutions within society is to provide certain social goods, then it becomes possible to understand the social vocations of individuals as characteristically consisting in a call to help a given institution fulfil its calling under God within society. (The Faith and Order Commission, 2020, 34)

When it comes to the nitty gritty of everyday workplace discipleship, however, the popular-level books go on to address the micro and mezzo, or personal, job and organizational levels. These are the levels on which LICC's 6 Ms largely focus, for example (Greene, 2014; Greene et al., 2015).

With this nuance of levels in mind, then, we turn to the interview data and the question of how participants connected their work with the purposes of God and what impact making those connections made. The answer in summary is that most participants did articulate such connections, but connections tended to be much more salient at the micro and mezzo levels than the macro level

and this was particularly true of those working in large organizations in the commercial sector. In other words, making a difference for God at the level of one's individual job and within one's organization was more personally meaningful than 'help[ing] a given institution fulfil its calling under God within society' (The Faith and Order Commission, 2020, 34).

3.2 Working for God's purposes at different levels

When it comes to analysing what the participants themselves said about the overall purposes of work and connections with their own work, it is worth noting that I did not ask directly what they thought might be God's purposes for work generally.[74] The relevant question in the interview guide was 'How do you think God sees your work?' In several interviews, I extrapolated on this question, or used a variation, along the lines of 'in what ways do you see the work that you do lining up with what God is doing in the world, or with the purposes of God?' (from interview 1). This line of questioning gave participants an opportunity to articulate a theology of work without explicitly asking for one. It is possible that participants who didn't express an overall theology of work could have done so if asked more directly. On the other hand, one could argue that the more indirect line of questioning was more likely to unearth the participant's operant, or at least espoused, theology of work, as opposed to any normative theology of work that they might have (for the distinction, see Cameron, 2010, 53-56).

In a several cases, often through exposure to the teaching of LICC either directly or indirectly, participants expressed an understanding of how work fits into the overall purposes of God at the most macro level[75], or what one might call a theology of work. Brian is the only participant who mentioned having participated in an LICC programme in the past (*Executive Toolbox* (LICC, 2022b)) and during the interview he related several concepts and practices from the programme that he had incorporated into his working life. It seems no coincidence that he was also one of the participants who reflected on work as a God-ordained way of giving us purpose:

> I think actually theologically my view, and my view has kind of matured a little bit on this over time, but I actually think that work is a very important thing that God has given us by way of purpose and I think therefore to not have work is actually to be somewhat purposeless. And I think that is a huge problem for people who are unemployed and unable to find work - [I: Mm.] - because they don't find so much purpose in their life. That's not to say that work is the only source of purpose but I think there is, you know, all through the Bible we see that people are doing work in, and involved in doing things and I think

[74] Unlike Belder in his doctoral research (Belder, 2017). In hindsight, this would have been a useful question to have asked.
[75] Perhaps 'global' or even 'cosmic' level.

> therefore work is an essential part of our makeup, how God has created us so that we do have a purpose from that and whether that's farming or fishing or, you know, working in an office or teaching, or whatever it happens to be, I think work is part of what is necessary to give us purpose. (Brian)

Here Brian echoes what the theological literature says about the fundamental role that work plays in God's purposes for humankind. Volf, for example, concludes from the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 that work is 'a fundamental dimension of human existence' (Volf, 1991/2001, 127). Similarly, Witherington asserts 'Even just a momentary glance at the creation story tells us that work was meant to be in our DNA from the outset' (Witherington, 2011, 2). Work gives meaning and purpose to humans. Some writers go further to say that this is because humans are created in the image of a God who is himself a worker, making work intrinsically of value. This is Cosden's 'ontological' nature of work (Cosden, 2004, 17), also found in the popular literature, for example in Keller (2012, 36).

Participants also talked about the role that work has in God's purposes in providing for basic human needs. This is a focus that sits foursquare in the Protestant tradition going back to Martin Luther (Hardy, 1990, 45-54). It is part of what Cosden terms the 'instrumental' nature of work, which includes '[s]ustenance concerns' that 'focus upon work as a means through which to provide the necessary resources for human survival and flourishing' (Cosden, 2004, 181). Participants identified a variety of ways in which this was achieved either through the overall operation of the organization for which they worked at the macro, or societal, level. At the most basic level a company might provide purposeful, meaningful and gainful employment for its employees, thus meeting their human need for work (Chris). Management consultancy (Harry) and private equity investment (Liam) contribute to this need more indirectly, by helping organizations work better and helping them to flourish and grow, thus generating more employment and services (Liam) and indirectly meeting the needs of 'the poor and hungry' (Harry). These latter two perspectives resonate with Stevens' claim that businesses 'have a redemptive purpose in alleviating poverty, creating new wealth, and enhancing human existence' (Stevens, 2006, 29).

Staying at the macro level, several of the participants talked about the impact of their work in ways that went beyond the level of basic sustenance and simply providing people with a way of making a living, and would fit within Stevens' category of the calling to 'improve and embellish human life' (Stevens, 2006, 24-27). In the sphere of education, both teachers, Isla and Kath talked in different ways about being able to help students grow and achieve more of their human potential. Brian, who worked for a university, said

> […] I think that I do feel there's something about the work that [university name] does is ... is making the world a better place and if I can therefore make [university name] a better place then there is a direct relationship. (Brian)

Brand consultant Edward reflected on the example of creating a gin brand. He suggested it was as 'relevant' as creating an uplifting work of art in terms of being something 'that is exciting, engaging and feels good to you as a consumer.' Citing the example of Jesus turning water into wine at Cana, he explained, 'You know, it's enabling people to, to enjoy life as well as, you know, simply maintaining life.' Going further, and somewhat with tongue in cheek, Edward saw value in creating aspirational products more generally:

> There's something about the higher values of of a civilized world, of of the better things in life that that gives people a reason to work harder and to aspire to things. (Edward)

At the macro or societal level, then, many of the participants, when asked, could articulate a connection between their work and the greater good of God's purposes in the world, and, as we have seen, this was most often expressed in terms of what Cosden calls 'sustenance concerns'. When it comes to finding their own work meaningful, however, or perceiving it to be participating with God's work on an everyday basis, participants felt far more ambivalent about these macro level connections than they did about connections at a micro or mezzo level, which we shall look at in detail later in this chapter. This was particularly true of those participants, half of the total, who worked in large businesses in the commercial sector. In this next section I shall explore what this looks like in the data and draw on social science research, particularly in organizational psychology, to see why it might be the case.

3.3 Ambivalence about macro level connections with God's purposes

Chris, who worked for a global consumer goods company, is an instructive example of how macro level connections with the greater good sometimes lacked salience. When I asked him where he felt his work fitted into the overall purpose of God, he replied:

> That's a fantastic question. I do feel sometimes that God would probably ask that what I do has a purpose. You know, is of true value to this world. It's interesting, I think that's a struggle for me. One of the biggest struggles ... [Pause] I'm engaged in a [laughs] in company and an activity that, should it not exist, everyone would get along just fine - [I: [laughs] OK] - and so again I believe that there are, you know, what we do bringing [unclear] to people, our goal [unclear] to people and giving them these moments of refreshment and being an employer that has grown this massive business across the globe - I believe there's value there. I think having ... I don't think capitalism and faith are in conflict, I think they can

> both exist. But then I do think about [unclear] the last few years in particular, this is great [unclear] is fine, I need to ... I feel like there has to be more, I [unclear] in some way ... I don't know, I mean I hope that through the coaching and the guidance that I give people, through what I do at work, that I hope that there's value in that ... of some significance and I like to think that there is. I like to think that I am helping people ... but no it's hard ... that's a tough one for me. I've ... yeah ... there are many people out there doing things that are of much more value to the world that what I do, so it's a hard one. (Chris)

The reference to capitalism reflects an ambivalence towards the system which may account for part of this discomfort with macro level connections. Chris, while saying 'I don't think capitalism and faith are in conflict', also said that there were roles within the system, such as being a commodities trader, that he would feel uncomfortable with because they generated income 'without the people'. Similarly ambivalent was Harry, who saw capitalism as capable of bringing about societal good but referred to it as a 'relatively broken system'. This discomfort about capitalism reflects something of the spectrum of opinion found in the Christian literature about work, which Stevens summarises as follows:

> On the left are those who hold that capitalism is a system of oppression. On the right are those who maintain that capitalism is the only system capable of providing economic development, creating wealth, and ensuring political freedom. In the middle are those who give a modest endorsement of capitalism while critiquing some of its cultural and political ways of functioning. (Stevens, 2006, 101-102)

On this categorisation, Chris and Harry seem to belong to the middle, and the fact that they aren't able to endorse capitalism without reservation may be one of the reasons that, for them, working for a business that creates jobs and contributes to the economy isn't enough in itself to make for meaningful work.

The experience of participants working in the commercial sector also resonates with the research of US sociologist Nancy Tatom Ammerman into religion in everyday life, as reported in *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes* (Ammerman, 2013). Twenty-two of Ammerman's participants were 'in management or professional-level positions' in firms in a variety of sectors. Ammerman writes:

> What they shared was a world of work that is oriented to the capitalist economy, with all its potential for success and failure. While they might have a good deal of discretion about how they do their work and a good deal of influence over the outcomes, they also live in a world of markets and regulations and bureaucracies – all the things that characterise the modern

> economic system. Their stories only occasionally took those structural forces explicitly into account, but neither did they routinely speak of work as having deep personal and spiritual meaning. They were less likely to talk about the work they do in spiritual terms than were the workers in any other sector of the labour force. (Ammerman, 2013, 185)

While the "spirituality at work" movement has produced many resources, Ammerman nevertheless concludes:

> Systematic analysis is, however, in shorter supply than the advice. What the stories of our participants suggest is that the everyday work of keeping American corporations running is not likely to yield easily to sacred reinterpretations. There may be more spirituality *at* work than spirituality *in* work. (Ammerman, 2013, 187)

For Ammerman's participants, then, the world of business, entangled as it is in the capitalist system, did not seem as conducive to making spiritual meaning as other sectors. She goes on to say that '[o]nly the most spiritually serious among our participants talked about the way their faith informs what they actually do' (Ammerman, 2013, 186). This would seem to put my participants into the 'most spiritually serious' category relative to Ammerman's, as they did talk about their faith in these terms, despite operating in the same kind of environment. What we are seeing, however, is that this was less to do with their organization's contribution to the capitalist economy, and more to do with what they were doing on a job and organizational level.

Moving on from feelings about the merits and demerits of capitalist system, which my participants tended only to refer to in passing[76], we come to another factor limiting the impact of macro level connections with God's purposes, namely the size and nature of the organizations in which they worked. Here I shall turn to the findings of recent research in organizational psychology, much of which is summarised in Buszka and Ewest (2019), which cast a helpful light on what was going on with my participants.

We begin with an intriguing detail in Lynn et al.'s report on research using the Faith at Work Scale (FWS) (Lynn et al., 2010). Lynn et al. used the FWS to investigate faith/work integration among Christians in the US. One of the variables in which they were interested in was 'organizational size', which they found to be negatively associated with faith/work integration. They suggest three possible contributory factors, one of which seems particularly salient to the participants in this study:

[76] In the interviews I did not ask participants to elucidate further on such passing comments about capitalism, so I am unable to report further on what they made of it theologically as an economic system.

> […] formal or distant relationships may moderate the degree to which individuals can practice work-faith integration. If employees don't have close relationships, they may not be able to view or interact with others in as meaningful a way as they can in smaller organizations. (Lynn et al., 2010, 692)

Further elaboration of this possibility can be found in work on 'task significance' in the organizational psychology literature. Task significance is one of the core job dimensions of the influential job characteristics model developed by J. Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham, who define it as '[t]he degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people—whether in the immediate organization or in the external environment' (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 161). According to the model, task significance contributes, along with the dimensions of skill variety and task identity, to the 'experienced meaningfulness' of one's work. The model has been used extensively in research over the last four decades and the relationship between task significance and job meaningfulness is now quite well established (Grant, 2008; Allan, 2017; Allan et al., 2018).

Building on Hackman and Oldham's foundation, Adam Grant proposes a 'job impact framework' that draws attention to the significance of a job's relational architecture, which is 'the structural properties of work that shape employees' opportunities to connect and interact with other people' (Grant, 2007, 396). The two main elements of this relational architecture are the job's impact on beneficiaries and the kind of contact with beneficiaries that it affords, which together lead to the perceived impact – 'the degree to which employees are aware that their actions affect others' (Grant, 2007, 399). Grant identifies five dimensions of contact with beneficiaries, of which one, physical proximity – 'the degree of geographic and interpersonal space in the interaction that the job provides' (Grant, 2007, 398) – is especially relevant to this chapter.

One further piece of the puzzle is supplied in the 'Future Directions' section of a 2008 article, where Grant distinguishes between internal and external beneficiaries. He suggests 'it would be constructive for researchers to investigate how the framework may differ for these two groups of beneficiaries' and outlines two possibilities:

> On one hand, task significance may be more likely to translate into perceptions of social impact and social worth when employees are benefiting others inside the organization, as employees have regular access to frequent, direct feedback from their coworkers and supervisors. On the other hand, task significance may be more likely to translate into perceptions of social impact and social worth when employees are benefiting others outside the organization, as feedback from these external sources may be more novel and extended toward a broader purpose that affects a larger group of people. (Grant, 2008, 120)

As far as those participants in my study who worked in large commercial organizations were concerned, it seems clear that it was the first of these two possibilities that was their experience. Even if their organizations were having a positive impact at the societal level, for example by helping companies to flourish and grow, there was such a significant distance between them and the external beneficiaries, along with a lack of feedback from those beneficiaries, that the *perceived* impact was small. Consequently, that macro level perceived impact did little to give meaningfulness to their daily jobs. Furthermore, for the five of the seven working in the commercial sector who were involved in providing services to other organizations[77], the distance from external beneficiaries was compounded. For them, the eventual external beneficiaries were two steps removed from their daily work; to put it in simple terms, rather than helping people, they were helping other businesses to help people.

Proximity to beneficiaries, then, is a key factor in faith/work integration. While it was barely an issue for the two teachers and those working in health and social care, who saw the impact of their work on external beneficiaries every day, for many of the others it was hugely significant. The further they were from the external beneficiaries of their work at the macro level, the smaller was the perceived impact at that level and the less salient it was for them in terms of providing meaningfulness in their jobs.[78]

There is a growing recognition of the importance of this aspect of workers' experience of their jobs, which has led to the development of 'relational job design'. Buszka and Ewest describe this as 'a more contemporary approach to modifying job characteristics to impact employee motivation by considering the relational architecture of jobs' (Buszka & Ewest, 2019, 199). They say of this approach:

> We propose that jobs rich in relational architecture will lend themselves more naturally to FWI [faith/work integration] because the job itself is designed to facilitate the building of relationships that enable job holders to see how their work makes a positive difference in the lives of others. (Buszka & Ewest, 2019, 200)

[77] That number includes private equity investor Liam

[78] Outside the more academic literature, a relational approach to understanding the workplace, as well as other aspects of social and political life, can also be found in the work of the Christian-based Relationships Foundation in the UK (Relationships Foundation, 2022). Coming out of that stable, the book *The Relational Manager* (Schluter & Lee, 2009) uses a model of 'relational proximity' which has similar dimensions to the 'contact with beneficiaries' factor in Grant's model.

As we have seen, this proposal lines up with and further reinforces what my participants had to say about the connections between their jobs and the fulfilment of God's purposes. It also has potential implications for the pastoral support of workers that we shall come to later.

Two further examples will flesh out this finding from the data, both to illustrate and to add some nuance. The first is that of care home proprietor Daniel. Prior to running care homes, he had been a senior financial executive working in mergers and acquisitions. As was the case with several other participants, the external beneficiaries of his work were relationally distant from him, as indeed were most of the people impacted by the buying and selling of companies with which he was involved. With the change in career, however, came a significant change in the relational architecture of his job. In his new job he is able to interact with beneficiaries on a daily basis:

> […] you are able to actually appreciate human beings and human life and old age and different [unclear: types?] of people much more than when I was the finance guy because, you know, it's it's completely different because, you know, every day you see somebody that you can help. (Daniel)

We shall come back to Daniel's change in perspective in chapter 5, but here we note the impact that a change in relational architecture can have on faith/work integration, in line with Buszka and Ewest's proposal above (the whole section is Buszka & Ewest, 2019, 199-202).

The second, and in some ways more negative, example is that of private equity investor Liam. He, as we have seen, could describe the macro level benefits of his work in terms of helping businesses to flourish and grow, thus providing more employment and services. As he put it at another point in the interview:

> There's something positive about when you are building businesses, when you're creating employment, when you are um creating value for shareholders and pension funds and all those things, there is l... there is there absolutely there is loads of positive in that, you know, there is loads of excitement in that, there is loads of, um, er you know enjoyment in that. (Liam)

It is worth saying for the sake of completeness that Liam was also aware that his job sometimes had a negative impact on people, for example when buying a company was followed by making redundancies. What is particularly interesting in the interview with Liam, however, is that, while he could identify positive macro level outcomes of his job, he also said 'I don't think I see God at work in my organization, which I find extremely frustrating.' Elsewhere in the interview he explained that he couldn't see his organization fulfilling God's purposes in the same way as a social entrepreneurial

business in Africa that he had heard about at a conference. In terms of Liam's operant theology of what counts as co-operating with God there may be something here whether one's organization is explicitly Christian or not, but it also seems likely that there is something to do with relational architecture and the nature of a job's impact on beneficiaries.

Liam had identified three sets of macro level beneficiaries of his work, the investors whose money he was multiplying, the employees of the companies that he was helping to grow and flourish, and, more indirectly, the rest of society that might benefit from a growing economy. Of these, Liam was relationally much closer to the first than the other two, which means, according to Grant's model, that the perceived impact of his job on them was greater. One wonders whether, in Liam's thinking, benefits to relationally proximate wealthy investors are less significant in God's purposes than benefits to those who are not wealthy, the much more distant external beneficiaries of his job. In Grant's model there is a moderating factor that he terms 'social information about beneficiaries' that shapes the way that workers think and feel about beneficiaries (Grant, 2007, 402-403). In the model this information is usually provided by 'organizational and occupational ideologies' that inform how workers see their customers, for example. I would suggest that for Christians, their own personal ideologies[79] or the ideologies of their church or denomination may play a similar role. A Christian ideology that sees God as having a bias to the poor[80], for example, would convey social information that might lead to a greater affective commitment to less wealthy beneficiaries than to more wealthy ones. If that is the case with Liam, then one can see how the combination of this ideology with the relational architecture of his job would lead to serious ambivalence about how he is participating with God in the achievement of God's purposes. In Liam's case this may have been further exacerbated by a perceived lack of connections at the mezzo and micro levels, and it is to those levels that we now turn.

3.4 Mezzo and micro level connections: where the rubber hits the road

What I have been arguing so far in this chapter is that seeing a connection between one's work and the greater good of God's purposes at a macro or societal level, while promoted in some of the Christian literature, was problematic for participants working in large commercial organizations. This may have been partly to do with general ambivalence about the capitalist system in which they were implicated, but it was even more to do with the relational architecture of their jobs, especially the

[79] By 'personal ideology' here I mean something close to, if not identical with, Cameron's 'operant theology' (Cameron, 2010).
[80] See Sheppard (1983).

relational distance from external beneficiaries[81]. In this section we shall see how these participants found more meaningful connections at the mezzo and micro levels where the beneficiaries were largely internal and much more proximate, leading to greater perceived impact.

To begin with, we return to Chris, who worked for a multinational consumer goods company. We saw in the previous section how he felt somewhat ambivalent about the good that his company was doing in the world. A little bit later in the interview Chris voiced a somewhat more positive view of his company's macro level impact, saying that he believed in the company's mission, what it did and the stand it had taken on various issues. Significantly, however, it was what he did on a day-to-day basis that was most important to him:

> So I think the company's fine. I think it's more about [unclear] within our organization is what you are doing. You know it's what you are doing aligns with your faith and can you see that at the end of every day? (Chris)

Chris's role model in this was his father, a small business owner:

> […] he created a place where [his employees] could do that [sc. have 'a source of income and a livelihood'] and feel valued and respected and, you know, skills, and feel part of a family, a community, you know, all that seemed to have purpose and value, so ... so I think the more that I see my work delivering that, the more I feel it's connected with my faith, that I'm doing the things I should be doing each day. (Chris)

From the interview it was clear that for Chris to see his work 'delivering' these things, they needed to be happening at his level, not just at the level of the company's overall operations. This was the level at which he was able to see that the direct impact of his work on others aligned with his faith[82].

An even more striking example of the contrast between connections at different levels was the one participant who could not see any connection between his job and the purposes of God at the

[81] Of course, the relational architecture of large companies is itself a component of the capitalist system and has been questioned, for example by Rushworth and Schluter in their critique of how listed companies are structured and operate (Rushworth & Schluter, 2011).

[82] It may not be a coincidence that Chris had been brought up as a Roman Catholic, as his understanding of the value of work here, and especially the reference to community, echoes a theme found in Catholic social teaching about work. John Paul II, for example, writes in the papal encyclical *Centesimus Annus*:

> In fact, the purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a *community of persons* who in various ways are endeavouring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society. (John Paul II, 1991, section 35)

macro, or societal, level. This was Jeremy, who held a very senior position in a marketing services company. He said of his work context that 'It's an irrelevant company in an irrelevant industry in a world that is going potty.' Elsewhere in the interview Jeremy said, in equally stark terms, 'I don't do anything good for the world and I pray about that as well.' Possibly Jeremy might have agreed with some of the other participants that his company did some good for the world at least by providing employment, had that been put to him, but that clearly was not at the forefront of the way he thought about his job. Instead, 'doing good for the world' was something which was associated in his mind with a major charity on whose board he had served for a time, in a similar way to the African social entrepreneurial business in the thinking of Liam that was mentioned in the previous section.

Jeremy did think he was doing some good, however; it was just not at the macro level. The good that he was doing related to his role within the organization and his impact on colleagues:

> I do feel that if people see that a Christian ... if people see a leader who is decent and occasionally funny, and occasionally not, but occasionally funny and approachable and humble and that leader is a Christian I do feel there is a benefit to God and I do feel there's a benefit for the world. (Worthen)

Here at the micro, job, level was an outcome, an impact on internal beneficiaries, that he could associate with the purposes of God. It may not have been 'profound', to use his own word, in fact 'it's a pinprick in an elephant's bottom', but …

> [...] there is no question that in my tiny little company in my tiny little world, standing up and linking good leadership with Christianity, I feel does somehow pay God back for what he's given me. Not particularly a huge payback, but some kind of payback. (Worthen)

What Chris and Jeremy describe was echoed in interviews with several other participants who worked in large commercial organizations. Harry, as we saw in the previous section, could see a macro level benefit from management consultancy, but he was much more motivated by what he could do on a mezzo or micro level, impacting the culture of his own organization, or individuals within the organization. Alex, a senior HR professional in a multinational energy company, likewise felt that he was fulfilling God's purposes through his impact on organizational culture and individuals.

In fact, it was at the mezzo and micro levels that most of the connections were being made between participants' work and the purposes of God. These were the levels at which perceived job impact was the greatest and what Grant terms 'affective commitment to beneficiaries' (Grant, 2007, 401-402) was the strongest. Participants may not have thought they were transforming the world

through their work, except perhaps very indirectly, but they were loving their workplace neighbours, their colleagues, students, patients and clients, and, on a good day, they might be transforming their workplace just a little bit as well. They tried to do these things in a variety of different ways, which could be summarised as doing a good job, serving people and treating them with compassion and fairness, and acting with personal integrity, particularly with honesty.[83] Sometimes this was in the everyday business of teaching, consulting, providing IT services and so on. Sometimes it was in the particularly stressful situations of dealing with difficult colleagues or, as reported by several of the participants, making people redundant, which they tried to do with justice and compassion.

At the mezzo and micro levels there were, however, two factors which had the potential to moderate the extent to which participants felt that their work was connected with the purposes of God. Both were to do with assumptions about what Christian discipleship ought to look like in the workplace. These were the challenges of being vocally or visibly Christian and being distinctively Christian, and we shall examine each of these challenges in turn.

3.5 The challenge of being vocally or visibly Christian

Overall, participants did not appear to have any difficulty thinking of stories to tell about how they were able to express their faith at work in their attitudes and actions, the mezzo and micro level impact of their jobs that we have discussed above. When it came to verbal expressions of faith, however, the picture was somewhat different. This is the aspect of 'fruitful' discipleship described in LICC's 6 Ms as being a 'messenger of the gospel' (for example, Greene, 2014, 159-184). In the *Transforming Work* Leader's Pack, the authors say of the 6M framework:

> It goes beyond simply being a nice person and having evangelistic conversations to help you see where God is already at work through you and to spot other opportunities in your everyday work. (Greene et al., 2015, 44)

There seems to be an assumption here that many of those coming to the programme will see 'having evangelistic conversations' as being at the core of what it means to be a fruitful Christian in the workplace and that help is required for Christians to see beyond that. Indeed, the thrust of much of the contemporary workplace discipleship literature is aiming to explain the theological importance of work itself and how it is done, such that the workplace is far more than simply an arena for evangelism. A look at the tables of contents of four recent books in the genre (Coffey, 2008; Valler, 2008; Wynne, 2009; Keller, 2012) reveals that none of them has a chapter dedicated to evangelism

[83] To put it another way, collectively they were doing all the things found in LICC's 6M framework (see Appendix 4).

in the workplace. Evangelism is not excluded, indeed working well may lead to evangelistic opportunities, but evangelism, if narrowly seen as having evangelistic conversations, is not the prime reason for being at work.

Often, however, when asked about how faith was expressed at work, many participants' immediate response was to talk about opportunities and difficulties around overt faith-sharing conversations. There may be something particular to evangelical spirituality here, with its emphasis on evangelism. In the interview guide, when I asked how participants 'expressed' their faith in the workplace, the word 'express' was intended to be deliberately ambiguous and did not necessarily imply verbal expression. Even within the 'Expression' manifestation of faith/work integration in The Integration Profile (Miller et al., 2019), while ethical behaviour belongs to a separate manifestation, there is still a non-verbal expression category. It was interesting, therefore, how many of the participants began their answers to that question by talking in terms of verbal expression, often by saying that verbal expressions of faith in the workplace were problematic.

For example, when asked why he thinks God wants him in his workplace, Alex said:

> Um [Pause] I guess it's … two things. One is I think … at an individual level there's something about ... sharing your faith with others in different places of the company over many years. I've been lucky enough to work all over, with people all over the world. So there's something about, you know, have I given Him the glory? Have I, you know, been a witness to His love? And, you know, I'm sure some days I've done much better than others in that regard. (Alex)

While this was an instinct for most of the participants, for many of them their work environments were not especially conducive to having the kind of evangelistic conversations they perhaps felt they ought to be having. In this regard, Miller and Ewest propose a fourfold categorisation of organizational orientations towards faith: faith-avoiding, faith-based, faith-safe and faith-friendly (Miller & Ewest, 2015). None of the organizations for which participants worked at the time of interview were faith-based, defined as 'overtly and clearly grounded in one particular faith (religious or spiritual) tradition' (Miller & Ewest, 2015, 317). From participants' descriptions, a couple might qualify as being a faith-friendly organization, one that 'goes well beyond minimum legal requirements, and proactively welcomes and perceives employee and business benefits in appropriate manifestations of faith at work' (Miller & Ewest, 2015, 319). One was the management consultancy for which Harry worked, which encouraged and helped to resource several faith

networks. The other was Mary's accountancy firm, which also had several different faith groups and offered a meditation room in each office[84].

Most of the organizations for which participants worked seemed to fit the description of being faith-safe:

> [A] faith-safe organization tolerates employee interest in faith at work and does not seek to squelch its expression. However, it does not embrace and encourage such expression. (Miller & Ewest, 2015, 318)

An example would be Alex's organization, a multinational. He said of expressions of faith:

> I would say not either encouraged or discouraged. I would say it is fairly neutral - [I: OK] - but I think most people try and keep their faith to themselves (Alex)

That last comment is significant. Being a faith-safe organization does not necessarily mean that all forms of faith expression were equally tolerated. While none of the organizations could be characterised as entirely faith avoiding ('seek[ing] to suppress personal or community expressions of faith, religion, and spirituality at work' (Miller & Ewest, 2015, 316)), certain forms of faith expression were either officially or unofficially frowned upon. These included praying with patients in a hospital (Georgie) or GP surgery setting (Sofia). It could also include verbal expressions of faith in a classroom context, as expressed by teacher Kath, referring to her training:

> […] we were very much told that if you had a certain belief system um you needed to make sure that you kept that private and that you taught in a way that allowed students to explore a range of different viewpoints and then come to their own kind of conclusions and give them opportunities to um question and to um experience different things. (Kath)

Overall, there was a general impression that, while verbal expression of faith was not officially forbidden, as Brian put it, '[…] within the work context it's not necessarily appropriate to be seeking to evangelize – [I: Mm.] – overtly'.

How, then did participants face this challenge? Some, like Alex and Brian, seemed to live with the tension while expressing regret or disappointment that they could not speak more overtly about their faith in the workplace. Others, like Edward, talked about opportunities for conversations around faith that took place outside 'office hours', for example on plane journeys, or at social

[84] In what follows I am focussing on participants' experience of UK workplaces. Three of the participants who had experience of working abroad noted that working environments were more faith-friendly in some other countries, with India and the southern US both getting a mention.

events. Interestingly in light of recent trends, Mary reported that for her, such opportunities were becoming increasingly rare since she had started working more from home.

In two cases where verbal expressions of faith were discouraged in the workplace, both in a healthcare setting, participants talked about subtle ways that they had found of expressing faith. Nurse Georgie described ways in which God might become a topic of conversation when considering the wonders of the healing process.

> […] helping patients to, to to actually see the [unclear] greater plan in in what they're going through. Um, but it's it's sometimes difficult and I mean I'm always talking about how amazing it is to watch Creation, how how healings [unclear], and I'll go on and explain to the patients how, you know, it's amazing you've got these special ligaments on the hand which stop your, you know, I can just tell them the *miracles* [Georgie emphasis] of of how the body works and that, and I ... and I often will say [unclear] it amazes me that people believe we happened as a result of a Big Bang because that can't possibly be. But … so I sort of jokingly put that in … (Georgie)

GP Sofia described how she expressed faith to patients not verbally but visibly (a sub-category of the Expression manifestation in TIP) by displaying visual symbols of her faith, an icon from Mount Athos, given to her by a patient, and a cross:

> And I just put [the icon] there [sc. in Sofia's office] and sometimes probably patients see it but they don't say anything, but they probably realise that I'm a Christian because I'm wearing a cross […] (Sofia)

In fact, Sofia was the only participant who talked about such non-verbal expressions of faith[85]. Two potentially inhibiting factors may be at play here. The first is the real or perceived faith-unfriendliness of organizations discussed earlier. The second relates to the tradition of spirituality of individual participants. It may be significant in this context that Sofia had been brought up in the Orthodox tradition, which she explicitly mentioned in relation to the icon immediately prior to the interview section quoted above. The Protestant tradition in which most of the other participants had been brought up tends to emphasise verbal and behavioural expressions of faith in public rather than symbols or ritual actions. Potentially observable ritual actions such as prayer in the Protestant tradition tend to be reserved for gathered worship or practiced in private. Mary, for example, said

[85] Arguably, involvement in a workplace Christian group could be considered a non-verbal expression of faith, but none of the participants who were or had been involved in such groups gave being publicly identifiable as a Christian as a reason for such involvement.

that she had never used the 'meditation room'[86] provided at her workplace because 'I don't feel the need to go to a room to pray'. Still, it was interesting that apart from Sofia there were no other references to wearing a cross or any other symbol of Christian faith.

So, conversations with an overt Christian content were taking place, but in several of the workplaces represented in this study they were few and far between. This may have been a contributory factor to the phenomenon I shall examine next, which was the almost apologetic way in which many of the participants expressed an uncertainty about whether they were being distinctively Christian at work.

3.6 The challenge of being distinctively Christian

Several of the popular-level books about workplace discipleship make the point that Christians will, at least some of the time and in some workplaces, find themselves out of step with the culture of their organization. Jago Wynne writes about the need to 'work like a trout', by which he means swimming against the cultural flow of the workplace (Wynne, 2009, 93-95). In similar vein, Paul Valler uses the biblical category of exile:

> Some workplaces feel like an exile for Christians. Scripture says of the people of faith that 'they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth' (Hebrews 11:13). Organizations may have laudable public values, but many have a working culture that is indifferent to God and driven by personal agendas and ambition. Christians can feel that they are in Jerusalem on Sunday and Babylon on Monday, asking the question, 'How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?' (Psalm 137:4) We struggle not to lose our distinctiveness in that kind of environment. (Valler, 2008, 54)

Being in exile may lead to the struggle to maintain distinctiveness, but it can also lead to the opportunity to bear witness to one's faith through that distinctiveness, as Wynne and Valler go on to demonstrate. On the other hand, if one's sense of Christian identity at work is too bound up with the idea of distinctiveness, then working in an environment where the values are close to one's own presents a new set of challenges. These were the tensions faced by many of the participants.

There were some, like IT manager Brian and management consultant Harry, who thought that a Christian attitude of service could be distinctive in a working environment that was more characterised by personal ambition. An interesting feature of many other participants' descriptions of their attitudes and actions at work, however, is the way that they recognised that the same attitudes and actions could be seen in people who were not Christians, individually or at the level of the organization. Alex, for example, said:

[86] This was the official title for such rooms at her workplace, rather than 'prayer room'.

> […] as a company we have a code of conduct which describes the values of the company and, you know, I would [unclear] the values and my values as someone of faith I would say they line up fairly closely – [I: Oh, OK] - So I've very seldom been asked to do anything at odds with my faith. (Alex)

This similarity of values could be positive. It might mean less friction in the workplace and fewer ethical dilemmas, as it had for Alex. It might make it easier to talk about one's values with colleagues because Christian values were 'ubiquitous', to quote Jeremy. It could also be negative, however, in that it militated against a sense of distinctive Christian identity. How can one be an 'alien and stranger' (see Valler quote above, and also Strhan, 2015) when one pretty much looks like everyone else in the workplace? Isla, when asked how her faith was expressed at work, talked about showing love, which she thought of as coming from God. But, even as she said that, it seems she was aware that others could show love as well:

> Um ... I mean [unclear: there have been interesting arguments with] someone about faith how they would say they see it, but you have to love those children, you have to care for them and that sort of love comes from God, so, but I I'd be interested to hear a non-Christian would say what, how, you know, how they would see it. (Isla)

Some other participants wondered whether their own attitudes and values were more to do with their innate personality or character than their Christian faith. So, for example, GP Sofia said about her ethos of helping people: 'I don't know if it's my personality or it's because I'm a Christian. I think it's both.' Similarly, Liam said about his motivation to treat people 'fairly and well': '[…] you could rightly say and would say that that was probably my instinct before I was a Christian.' This ambivalence about Christian distinctiveness was also noticed by Werner in her study of Christian SME owner-managers (Werner, 2008)[87] and is well-known in the literature of Christian Ethics where it is recognised that not all Christian values are exclusively Christian (see, for example, MacNamara, 1998).

3.7 Implications for practice

In this chapter we have seen how all the participants showed what I interpreted as a high level of faith/work integration. We have also seen how connections at the micro and mezzo level were more salient for participants than those at the macro level and how, at these lower levels, a perceived

[87] Werner expresses it like this: 'some respondents referred to their conscience and their character as having an impact on their behaviour, and the question arises whether the respondents' faith shapes their conscience or character or whether their character and conscience leads them to interpret Christianity in a particular way.' (Werner, 2008, 459)

duty to be vocally, visibly, or distinctively Christian could be a challenge. In the final section of this chapter, I shall briefly suggest three possible implications for the pastoral practice of supporting and encouraging Christian workplace discipleship that are suggested by these findings.

The first implication is that there is a need, when teaching a theology of work, to recognise the significance of the different levels at which connections with God's purposes can be made. There is certainly value in believing that one's organization as a whole is contributing to the greater good of society, that it is helping to achieve God's protological or eschatological purposes at that level, and that one's own work is a part of that. Particularly for those working in larger organizations, however, there is potentially greater value in helping them to see what they do on a daily basis as contributing to God's purposes in the world through the impact it has on those with whom they have direct contact. This is indeed what many books and other resources attempt to do, but for my participants, while they may have felt they were able to express their faith at work, there was less of a sense that in doing so they were helping to build God's kingdom (Witherington, 2011) or that their work was connected with God's New Creation (Cosden, 2006). I shall return to the question of how people can be helped to see their work in this way in chapter 5.

Secondly, and related to the first implication, there is further work to do in helping people to see that God's mission in the world is wider than evangelism and that they need not feel despondent that they are not having conversations about faith every day at work, especially if they are in an environment that is less than faith-friendly. This is the approach taken by Cosden, who draws on the work of missiologist David Bosch (Bosch, 1991) and others following him, to paint a picture of mission that embraces everyday work (Cosden, 2006, 124-148). The way that LICC's 6 Ms model has 'being a messenger of the gospel' as just one of six ways of being 'fruitful on the frontline' (Greene, 2014) is also helpful in this regard, as are the Anglican Communion's 'Five Marks of Mission' (Anglican Communion Office, 2022). In those marks, 'proclaim[ing] the Good News of the Kingdom' sits alongside four others that include 'respond[ing] to human need by loving service'.

Thirdly, what might have helped to alleviate the discomfort felt by some participants about their distinctiveness, or lack of it, is a clearer theological understanding of how God works in the world. One way of explaining how non-Christians can be seen to be working in much the same way as Christians would be to invoke the role of the Holy Spirit, as Volf does:

> To the extent that non-Christians are open to the prompting of the Spirit, their work, too, is the cooperation with God in anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world, even though they may not be aware of it. (Volf, 1991/2001, 119)

Another way would be to expound the doctrine of common grace, the approach taken by Keller (Keller, 2012, 183-192). It is because of God's common grace, Keller explains, not only that non-Christians can contribute to the carrying out of God's plans and purposes in the world, but also that they can at times appear, or even be, more moral than the Christians around them. Whether or not common grace by itself explains why non-Christians can be *more* moral than Christians, it is another theological theme, like the work of the Holy Spirit and the understanding of mission championed by Bosch and espoused by Cosden, that extends the work of God outside the boundaries of the church.

Finally, as a complementary way of explaining the prevalence of Christian values outside the church, and therefore making it less of a cause of consternation to Christians, one could point to the recent work of historian Tom Holland. Holland explores the history of how Christianity has shaped much of contemporary Western society and summarises: 'To live in a Western country is to live in a society still utterly saturated by Christian concepts and assumptions' (Holland, 2019, 21). In such a society one might actually expect to find Christian values being expressed and espoused by people and institutions who would not describe themselves as Christian.

Talking of the way God works in the world leads us to the question of how participants perceived the presence and activity of God in their own workplace, which is the subject of the next two chapters.

Chapter 4 Experiencing God at work

4.1 Introduction: the experience of co-operating with God

In chapter 1 we saw how many theologians of work understand human work to be co-operation with God in God's own work in the world, an idea that Volf points out is found in both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions (Volf, 2001, p. 98ff.). In chapter 3, we saw how many of the participants echoed the theologians as they articulated the connections that they saw between their work and God's purposes. This idea of work as co-operation has potential connotations that go beyond human work being merely the delegated carrying out of God's purposes. If human work is co-operation with God, then it is work done in some sense *with* God as well as *for* God[88]. In this chapter we shall see how the theological doctrine of work as co-operation with God was instantiated in the lived experience of some of the participants and particularly how they experienced work as close co-operation with a personally present and active God.

In relation to this 'with' dimension, several writers at the more popular end of the academic literature emphasise God's immanent presence in the workplace. In doing so, they draw attention to an aspect of the lived experience of work as co-operation with God that is largely absent from the more academic literature. R. Paul Stevens, for example, writes:

> [A] trinitarian spirituality means that the God whom we know is not distant in heaven but immanent and present, not only in sacred places and sacred times but in the warp and woof of everyday life. The incarnation of God in Jesus and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit mean that God is with us even in the grittiest business situation. (Stevens, 2006, 128)

Along similar lines, Darrell Cosden writes:

> *Humans in ordinary work are God's apprentices, his co-workers. …* [We] have a God-given mandate to extensively shape and reshape the world through our work. As we do this, of course, we shape ourselves time and time again – and ultimately we shape the future as well. Yet, we never work alone. Even when we try to do it without him, God is always there working as well. Sometimes God remains in the background – responding, fixing, prodding. Sometimes he is in the foreground, working out his own purposes directly and ahead of us. Ordinary work in this world is a joint project between the master and his apprentices. (Cosden, 2006, 98-99, italics in original)

[88] For this use of 'with', see Jethani (2011), which was cited by Harry as being particularly influential on his workplace discipleship.

At the even more popular and practical level are books (for example, Greene, 1994/2001; Coffey, 2008; Valler, 2008; Greene, 2014) that include stories of what God's active presence looks like in the everyday lives of Christian disciples. Mark Greene, in *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*, explains that the book's purpose in telling such stories

> … is an encouragement, I hope, to grow more alert to the ways that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has been working, is working, might work in and through you right where you are, whatever your frontline. (Greene, 2014, 21)

What I discovered in my research was that many of my participants had stories of their own to tell of God working through them and, indeed, around them, some quite remarkable. In several of these stories God is vividly described as being actively present in the workplace and personally involved in the participant's working life. In fact, it was this dimension that accounted for arguably the greatest variation in the participants' experience of working as Christians. One of the most striking features of the interview data was the range in the levels of confidence, conviction and even excitement with which participants spoke about the connection between their work and God. Broadly speaking, the stronger the sense that they were interactively co-operating with God in their work, the more positively they spoke in general about the integration between their faith and their work. It was one thing to believe as a matter of doctrine that one's work and how one did it mattered to God. It was another thing entirely to believe, based on one's own experience, that one was personally encountering and working with God at work, either occasionally or all the time.

There is something of a gap here in the literature in terms of explaining what is going on theologically. The doctrinal category closest to what we are talking about in this context is providence and, as we saw in chapter 1, the connection between work and providence has been a feature of the Christian theologies of work since Luther. We shall look at precise definitions in section 4.2, but broadly speaking the more academic theologies of work, if they do invoke the category of providence, tend not to address in any great depth the question of whether God's activity in relation to human work extends to special providence, or direct divine intervention in particular situations. To use categories from the previous chapter, the academic discourse about work tends to focus on the macro level rather than the micro level. The more popular and practical literature, on the other hand, tends merely to assume the role of special providence (Cosden's 'foreground' working of God in the above quote), without feeling the need to argue for it. This question is significant for workplace discipleship because, as we shall see in this chapter, the more that people felt they could discern special providence at work, the more personally they seemed to

believe God was involved in what they were doing and the more likely they were to frame their work as co-operation with God.

In this chapter I shall explore this link in the research data between perceived experiences of special providence and the framing of work as co-operation with a personal God. I begin with some illustrative examples of stories participants told about special providence along with the conclusions that participants made from them about God's purposes. I then draw on Keith Ward's book *Divine Action* (Ward, 1990/2007) to explore the theological connection between special providence and personal relationship (a term that Ward himself uses), the role of petitionary prayer within that relationship, and the question of divine guidance at work. Finally, I finish the chapter by examining two particular issues raised by my data in relation to God's involvement in everyday work, namely the role of the Holy Spirit and the relationship between one's work and God's calling.

4.2 Stories of God's providential activity at work

Drawing on Langford (1981), Astley offers definitions of general and special providence that help us to locate theologically some of the stories told by participants. General providence, Astley writes, '… is the name given to God's general 'ordering', 'regulating', 'leading', 'directing' or 'steering' of the course of nature, evolution and history' (Astley, 2010, 164). Special, or particular, providence[89], on the other hand, is God's

> … divine care expressed in more specific, ad hoc events that aid particular individuals or communities. These events appear to be designed 'for this particular purpose' – as in apparent 'answers to prayers' for healing or rain, or the 'coincidence' of a doctor being in the theatre when an actor suffers a heart attack. (Astley, 2010, 165)

It is worth noting that there are other ways of construing providence found in the theological literature. David Fergusson, for example, offers a more nuanced description of providence in five dimensions (Fergusson, 2018, 303-305). The second of these, 'the wisdom that pervades (optimal) political, economic and domestic practices' (2018, 304) most closely matches the conception found in theologies of work from Luther onwards of how everyday work fits into God's providential purposes at a macro level. The micro level actions of God described by participants, on the other hand, fit most comfortably into Fergusson's fourth dimension, that of God's spirit. Fergusson explains, 'As spirit, God is everywhere present and active, but in ways that point to a completion of the other two actions of God [sc. creation and redemption]' (2018, 304). Fergusson's

[89] I shall use the two terms interchangeably, as does Astley. Ward tends to prefer 'particular'.

'reconstruction' of the doctrine of providence is helpful in many ways[90] but, as we shall see in this chapter, participants' descriptions of God's activity in their experience tended not to relate it explicitly to God's spirit but more closely matched the descriptions of Astley and Cosden.

In fact, more than half of the participants told stories of God's presence and activity at their workplace or in relation to their work that fit both Astley's definition of special providence and Cosden's description, quoted earlier, of God's activity in the 'foreground'. In this section I shall give some illustrative examples of these stories along with the conclusions that participants drew from their experience. In the above definition Astley talks of God's acts of special providence being apparently designed 'for this particular purpose' and we shall see in the following examples what divine purposes participants thought were being achieved.

Several elements of Astley's definition of special providence can be found in a story told by care home proprietor Daniel of a resident suffering with dementia who had swallowed a glove. In Daniel's telling of the story, disaster was averted due, at least in part, to a set of providential circumstances. These included the timing - she had not yet been put to bed for the night - and the availability of the right suction equipment to remove the object, equipment which had never previously had to be used. Daniel concluded about the incident '[…] so it was God that made everything to work at the same time […].' With hindsight, Daniel also discerned God's hand behind decisions to purchase particular care homes:

> […] I believe that [pause] a lot of these times when we buy a care home, you don't realise that thank God that you got in there at the right time because um [pause] some people don't have processes and things in place to ensure safety of people and you wonder sometimes and say 'Wow. God did you just send me to that place?' (Daniel)

Daniel did not only believe that God had put him where he was for a reason, however. He could see, in episodes where he discerned God's activity through him or around him, what that reason might be. In a previous job, Daniel had found himself in a position to give advice to an employee that helped her to advance her career. Apropos that incident Daniel drew a general conclusion about God's providential activity that echoes Astley's linking of special providence to events that 'aid particular individuals or communities':

> … whatever position that you have, God puts you there *because you can contribute to somebody else's life* … (Daniel) [italics mine]

[90] Not least Fergusson's 'adverbial' explanation of providence: 'the statement that God acts providentially might be the primary form of a theology of providence' (Fergusson, 2018, 298).

Nurse Georgie said something very similar about her work:

> It's, it's very fulfilling. It's, I mean it's incredibly satisfying to know that *I can go in and make a difference for a patient*. Um, but I know that it's only just *because God has put me there*. (Georgie) [Italics mine]

In fact, of all the participants, Georgie had one of the strongest impressions of God's providence. She told several stories of incidents in her life outside the workplace where she felt God had remarkably provided for her and which had led her to be '[…] utterly convinced that that the Lord is looking after me on a daily basis.' This conviction extended to her experience in the workplace. She strikingly summed up the sense that God had put her where she was in order to 'make a difference for a patient' by describing herself as being 'God's hands' in the workplace.

For advertising and brand consultant Edward, God's providential purposes at work related to helping people particularly through conversations about faith. Having said 'there was a reason' why he had been in an advertising agency at one point in his career, a setting where there were very few Christians, he went on to say:

> … and actually I could, be in the right place at the right time - [I: Yeah] - for certain people - [I: Yeah] - were, probably they were a long way from most Christians, a long way from the church - [I: Right. Yeah.] - So, that was a familiar recurring theme (Edward)

Later in the interview Edward explained with several examples how being 'in the right place at the right time' for him meant being provided, often unexpectedly, with opportunities to have conversations about faith with colleagues or clients. Of one such conversation with a client he said:

> […] and then we got into Christianity and then a little alarm bell will go off in my mind that I've been here before, God's led me down these paths before. (Edward)

Finally in this section, Liam and Mary both saw God as being providentially at work in the way they had come to be in their current jobs. Liam had drawn this conclusion because he thought that ending up as a partner in a private equity firm having started out as an engineer 'was pretty unlikely' and was 'never my ambition, never my dream and never my intention.' Accountant Mary described finding her first job after moving to the UK in terms of God's direction. Getting a work visa, a flat to live in and a job all within a few weeks led her to conclude:

> […] God clearly directed because I was in a position where I wanted to change what I was doing - [Overlap I: Yeah] - but didn't really know what I wanted to do and it felt like God just said 'Here you go' […] (Mary)

For Mary, this was one example among many of God directing her in moving jobs and it seemed to be in these times of transition when God's providential activity was most obvious to her. For her, it fitted into the framework of a God-directed career in which from the outset she had set out to bring God glory by using her God given gifts and sharing her faith where possible. For Liam, however, the reason for God putting him in his current position was less clear. The story he told of how he had come back to a living adult faith was very much a story of special providence, but he did not seem to have any equivalent work-related stories to tell, and this seemed to be the cause of some frustration. Liam could only conclude that his current job was a form of preparation, perhaps through gaining financial resources, for an as yet undisclosed but perhaps more obviously service-orientated role that God had in mind for him in the future. Liam's experience was unusual in this respect. Far more often, as we have seen, when participants felt that God had 'put', 'sent' or 'directed' them somewhere they could see what God's purposes were in doing so, whether it was to help others in practical ways or to share faith with them in conversation.

4.3 Providence, presence and a personal God at work

What did these experiences of God's providential activity do for the participants who had them? It seems that it was these experiences, more than any learned doctrine of God's providence, that led them to conclude that they were where God 'wanted' or 'meant' them to be and that God intended for them to be a channel of God's activity at their place of work. In other words, their belief that they were actively co-operating with God in their work went beyond doctrinal orthodoxy and was based on, or at least significantly reinforced by, the perception that they had actually encountered God at work. One could perhaps sum up the crucial characteristic of the experiences recounted in this chapter by saying that the participants concerned felt that they had experienced God as being *personally* present and active in relation to their work and it was this that made the most significant difference to their workplace discipleship experience. In this section I shall explore this personal aspect of their experience drawing particularly on the thought of theologians Keith Ward and Kees van der Knijff.

4.3.1 Special providence and a personal God at work

In the introduction to this chapter, I invoked the theological category of providence as a way of talking about God's purposeful action in the world. While providence, as we have seen, is clearly relevant to the workplace discipleship experience, it has not been a popular topic in academic theological literature for some time, though there has been renewed interest in the last 40 years or so[91]. One theologian whose writing is particularly helpful in our context is Keith Ward. In his book

[91] See, for example, Langford (1981); Wood (2008); Fergusson (2018).

Divine Action (Ward, 1990/2007), Ward not only argues for the plausibility of a God who intervenes in an 'open and emergent universe' but connects special, or particular, providence with the possibility of a personal relationship with God. While I would not agree with every aspect of Ward's framework, and I suspect my participants would not either, what he says in relation to particular providence, petitionary prayer, and relationship with God both resonates with, and is helpful in parsing, participants' reported experiences.

According to Ward's take on classic Christian theism, the ultimate purpose of God's providential action towards people is

> […] to bring people into obedient, loving relation with him, and to find their fulfilment in that relationship. (Ward, 1990/2007, 135)

Ward goes on to argue, on the basis of God's loving nature, that this will entail particularity in God's purposes, and therefore God's actions:

> The Christian God is above all a God of love, and as such he is bound to act to realize specific purposes for particular human persons. A love which is purely general, and exactly the same for everyone, is not real love, since it neglects precisely that uniqueness and particularity of the person which it is the place of love to celebrate. (Ward, 1990/2007, 137)

A personal relationship with a loving God, therefore, will involve acts of particular providence by God. What we are seeing in the interview data is that at least some of the participants believed that they had seen God act providentially and that they inferred from these events that God had specific purposes for them, and perhaps for those in their sphere of influence, which he was acting to realize. In other words, they took what they interpreted as providential events to be evidence that God had a purposeful and, more importantly, a personal relationship with them. What is more, because they had seen God act providentially in their workplace, they believed that God's personal purposes for them included their working lives.

The connection between particular providence and a personal relationship with God can also be illustrated by way of contrast with the Reformed Protestant take on providence found in Michael E. Wittmer's *Heaven is a Place on Earth* (Wittmer, 2004). Wittmer's take emphasises general over particular providence and leads to a noticeably less personal way of seeing the relationship between God and the individual worker than the one we have been looking at so far. Drawing on the tradition of Luther and Calvin, in which God's providential action is normally 'masked' or 'hidden' behind the everyday working of people going about their daily business, Wittmer summarises:

> Certainly God reserves the right to directly intervene in our world, using his naked, brute force to accomplish his will. However, most often God does not operate in such naked fashion, but chooses to conceal his working within human hands. (Wittmer, 2004, 131)

One wonders whether the participants in this study would describe the acts of intervention that they had discerned in the terms that Wittmer uses. Perhaps Wittmer does not have in mind the kind of 'positioning' or 'directing' intervention that participants did describe. Certainly, their perception seems to be of intervention that is neither entirely concealed within human hands, nor experienced as 'brute force'. If anything, what they describe is closer to gentle nudging.

Talking of perception, it is worth noting at this point a caution that Ward gives about how divine providence is recognised. At the beginning of a chapter on 'The Particularity of Providence', Ward summarises part of his argument up to this point:

> […] God, having set up a system for encouraging self-developing beings to find their fulfilment by eventual union with him, could not act providentially all the time, as such action would destroy the system. (Ward, 1990/2007, 134)

If God is not acting providentially all of the time, in the special or particular sense of directly intervening in the working of the world, it follows that it is a matter of discernment to decide whether God is acting providentially in any given event, and human discernment, as Ward points out, is flawed by the fact that 'we ourselves are enmeshed in the structures of evil and sin' (Ward, 1990/2007, 140). Ward accordingly urges 'a measure of agnostic diffidence about what God is doing, especially when it seems to support our own plans and desires' (Ward, 1990/2007, 141). It has to be said that, rightly or wrongly, some of the participants had more 'agnostic diffidence' than others when it came to discerning God's providential actions. In fact, we shall see in section 4.3.4 how, for some, any potential diffidence had been mitigated, or even overcome, by a perception that God had disclosed God's purposes through direct revelation, by speaking or giving a vision, rather than indirectly through events. I shall have more to say about such revelations later, but for now we note that in practice they were exceedingly rare occurrences in my data. In general, the need for an appropriate level of diffidence is something we shall need to bear in mind when it comes to exploring practices of theological reflection in the next chapter.

4.3.2 A God who answers prayer

We saw earlier how responding to God's prompting or directing is one way of co-operating with God at work that participants experienced. Another way of experiencing co-operation was to seek God's help through petitionary prayer and to perceive that prayer being answered. At the end of a chapter

entitled ‘Prayer as Participation in Divine Action’, Ward summarises the role that prayer plays in personal relationship with God, and the way in which it can be seen itself as co-operation with God:

> [Prayer] is part of establishing a fully personal relationship with God, of asking him to act to realize particular goods, and thus of responsibly using our God-given capacity to channel responsive Divine action in particular ways. Prayer will always make a difference to the world. It will sometimes make precisely the difference we desire. For it is part of the way in which God decrees that his creative and redemptive action in the world should be given a particular shape and form. (Ward, 1990/2007, 169)

In this section I shall explore what this looked like in participants’ experience.

In relation to work, most of the more practical and popular level books on workplace discipleship have something to say about prayer and its role in strengthening workplace discipleship (for example, Costa, 2007, 129-134; Valler, 2008, 104-115; Greene, 2014, 189-191). Some forms of prayer relate to ways of ‘practising the presence of God’[92] (for example, Stevens & Ung, 2010, 126-127) and I shall look at those in more detail in the next chapter. In this section I shall focus on petitionary prayer and show how praying for concerns at work, especially when those prayers were felt to have been answered, was a key component in developing a sense of work as co-operation with a personal God.

Most, if not all, of the participants said that they sought God’s help through prayer for their work. Some, however, went on to tell stories of how answered prayers enhanced their sense of God’s presence and of God’s personal involvement in their work. GP Sofia is one of the more striking examples. She had experienced several answers to prayer for patients:

> Sofia: You know, when I examine him [sc. a patient] or something I'll just pray - [Overlap I: Right, but silently, rather than -] - silently. Yes. And try to help him with healing, or if the Holy Spirit can come. And sometimes I've seen it happen, patients are, Oh I'm not in pain anymore.
>
> I: Actually while you're, during during the process of seeing them - [Overlap Sofia: Yes] - right. OK.
>
> Sofia: It's interesting. Um, so, yes sometimes I can feel that, the Holy Spirit will come, sometimes I don't feel anything. It's all very ... I can't explain it.

[92] A phrase associated with the 17th Century lay brother Brother Lawrence, whose spiritual practices are described in the book *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Brother Lawrence, 1958, 1967/2006).

Sofia's practice of prayer for healing is instructive in light of comments Ward makes about such prayer. According to Ward, it is a normal part of prayer to ask God 'to help, comfort and heal those who are ill or in need' (1990/, 165), and yet

> God cannot heal all suffering, without destroying the structure of this world entirely. But part of that structure is that people can freely help or harm one another. They can increase or decrease suffering by their actions. As they relate to God, they can increase or decrease the possibilities of the Divine governance of things. (Ward, 1990/2007, 165)

While Sofia had seen apparently miraculous things happen and said 'I think sometimes there is Jesus […] who can do a lot of miracles', she also recognised that 'they don't happen every day'. When praying for patients who in her clinical opinion were likely to die, rather than pray for miraculous healing, 'I mainly pray for them not to suffer and for their families.' So, for Sofia, when a patient died a natural death without excessive suffering, this could be just as much an answer to prayer as a miraculous healing. What is more, and she told a story to this effect, the Holy Spirit could just as much be sensed as being present. In praying as she did, Sofia was cultivating a working relationship with God in which her practice of medicine went alongside God's own activity and in which she recognised limits to the ways in which God is prepared to intervene in the world.

Another participant whose experience illustrates the connection between prayer and partnership with God, also incidentally in a medical context, is nurse Georgie:

> I: […] how would you say you thought God sees the work you do?
>
> Georgie: Um, I hope and pray that he sees me as his hands. – [I: OK] - On my patients. I mean there have been times when I've just been quietly praying for them or there's somebody, and I go in and I see them and, excuse me, they're clearly dying um I can pray for them, you know, behind a closed door um or behind a closed curtains nobody knows that's what I'm doing. Um, and ... there are times when I think I should be doing more for God but actually I realise that he's given me this ability to do what I do. He's given me the the means to do it. Um and so that is possibly where my my mission field is at the moment.

It is interesting to note how Georgie goes straight from talking about being God's hands on her patients to talking about praying for them. For Georgie, prayer is an integral part of her experience of work as co-operation with God in bringing about God's purposes in the world.

The final example in this section links petitionary prayer for the participant's own work with personal relationship with God and, in this case, personal communication. Brand and advertising consultant

Edward told a story of a particularly demanding work project, running a focus group for a client for the first time:

> I got on my flight. I was really nervous, I thought, you know [name of company]'s a pretty demanding company - [I: Yeah.] - and [name of business school]'s full of pretty demanding students and I was going to facilitate the group. I ... was confident that somewhere I had the potential to do it but I w... I felt like I really leaned on God - [I: Right.] - and God really said, 'Don't worry. It's going to be all right.' And [name of wife] said to me, if you've prayed about it, she said, it's going to be alright … (Edward)

The focus group turned out be a resounding success, which Edward saw as a definite answer to prayer:

> I was so [unclear] 'Thanks God,' because, you know, if it was down to me I'd have been, you know, if, if they'd cancelled it I'd have been so relieved. - [I: Yeah.] But actually wow - [I: Yeah.] - I'm so glad they didn't. - [I: Yup.] - And, you know, God gave me the confidence to go in there and think well, Okay - [I: Yeah.] - I prayed about this. (Edward)

I shall have more to say about receiving direct communication from God ('God really said') in a later section; but here we might notice the personal language of 'leaning on' God in prayer and the experience of God enabling Edward to do something that he felt he would not have achieved 'if it was down to me'. Presumably God could have made the focus group session a success even if Edward had not asked for help and Edward would still have been thankful if that had happened. In asking for help, however, Edward had explicitly expressed dependence on God and invoked God's partnership in what he was doing. It is not apparent from the anecdote itself exactly how this particular intervention might have furthered God's purposes in the world, though further questioning and reflection may have helped to discern that. Still, at the very least it served to build Edward's sense of relationship with God and gave evidence that, through prayer, God was interactively involved in his everyday work.

4.3.3 A God who guides

Another aspect of God's providential activity that relates to having a personal relationship with him in the workplace is the question of guidance. Guidance, like the closely related topic of prayer, is regularly addressed in the literature on workplace discipleship, most often in relation to making job and career choices, but also in relation to other choices faced in a work context (for example, Costa, 2007, 69-86; Valler, 2008, 128-147; Keller, 2012, 210-212). R. Paul Stevens makes explicit the connection between guidance and the kind of personal God in which the participants in this study believed:

> All Christians need and desire guidance. It is implicit in the existence of a personal God who cares, leads and enters into personal relationships with his creatures so they will accomplish his purpose on earth. (Stevens, 1997, 471)

Along similar lines, Ward, in his chapter on prayer, gives an account of how human beings with free will might co-operate with a God who has individual purposes for them:

> When I relate to other persons, I act with them to devise joint pursuits, co-operating with them in achieving commonly desired purposes. Now we cannot help God to plan things more wisely or to achieve ends he cannot achieve by himself. But God does have intentions and goals for us; and we can respond creatively to him, in formulating these goals and pursuing them – or we can ignore him, and follow our own way. God will interact personally with us by inspiring us with his dynamic creativity, in so far as we allow him to do so; that is, in so far as we attend to him, in seeking what we should be. The Divine love is his desire for our fulfilment in relation to him, as our selves are consciously related to the Supreme Self, and so are inspired to discover what he prompts us to do, and to draw upon his strength in doing it. (Ward, 1990/2007, 157)

Most of the participants, whether directly in stories of God guiding or by reporting that they prayed for guidance, indicated a belief in line with Ward's claim, that God had 'intentions and goals' for them at work. For example, Georgie, who had a very strong sense of God's providence, talked about 'God's plan' in relation to patients and their outcomes. Daniel, when praying for a job, would ask God not to give it to him 'if there's something better that you have in plan for me'. What is not entirely clear in the interview data is how detailed or meticulous they thought such intentions might be. As we shall see in a moment, there is significant variety in the literature about this aspect of guidance. Nevertheless, some of the perceived instances of divine providence in the workplace were taken by participants to be instances of God guiding them so that they could enact God's will for them. This might have been direction toward a particular job, as it was for Mary, or prompting to engage in an evangelistic conversation, as reported by Edward.

Dutch theologian Kees van der Knijff has developed a typology of models of guidance found in Reformed Protestant literature that is helpful here (Knijff, 2016). The first model, 'guidance through revelation', presupposes that God has a has 'a detailed will or plan for the life of every individual believer' (182) which he reveals in a variety of different ways. This could be through the specific application of Scripture, through circumstances or, at the more charismatic end of the spectrum of the literature, through 'concrete divine speaking' (182). According to the second model, 'guidance through intimation', God similarly has a will for the individual believer, but this is found through

developing an 'intimate relationship' with God and learning to discern the 'still small voice' of the Holy Spirit within (182-183). Proponents of the third model, 'guidance through transformation', hold that the revelation of God's will is restricted to Scripture while God's guidance of the individual believer is through enabling them to grow in wisdom so that they make wise decisions.

Having presented his typology, van der Knijff is the first to admit that the reality of people's beliefs is rarely as neat as this:

> […] we should note that the proposed models cannot do full justice to the intricacies of the many individual positions, most of which cannot be neatly categorised. (184)

Certainly it would be difficult to categorise the individual positions of my participants neatly, especially as the interviews didn't pursue this particular topic in detail. Kath, for example, made reference to praying for both wisdom and guidance in a way that potentially could fit into any of the three models:

> […] when I face good times and bad, um prayer is fundamental to kind of seeking God's wisdom or guidance or thanks in certain situations um and having a sort of day-to-day relationship, I guess, so with with God […] (Kath)

Elsewhere Kath referred to wisdom coming from the Bible, and she did not report any instances of direct revelation from God, so perhaps the model here is over on the 'intimation' and 'transformation' side. Asking for help with decision-making 'in certain situations' does not necessarily imply belief that God has a detailed plan that must be discovered. Whatever the model, however, it is interesting to note in the overall context of this chapter how for Kath, prayer for God's wisdom and guidance is part of 'a sort of day-to-day relationship with God'. Here again we see the link between work as co-operation and the perception of a personal relationship with God.

While neat categorisation is not always possible from the interview data, where a model of guidance was suggested, it did tend to be over on the 'revelation' and 'intimation' side, rather than 'transformation'. Daniel, for example, reported seeking guidance and hearing from God through prayer and Bible reading:

> […] every decision that I have made in life, whether it's to leave [country of origin] to come here, or whether if I need to change a job, I always pray about it and when I pray, and sometimes, you know, God will lead me to a certain passage in the Bible, I'll open the B... I can just open any, just take a Bible, just open it and then you read the verses there and then you know that actually I think God is talking to me here, so with that, you know, I always

> pray about it and I always believe that God will honour his words, he will do what he promises that he will do. (Daniel)

I shall have more to say about the particular practice described here in the next chapter, but when we set it alongside Daniel's stories of special providence of which we heard examples earlier, a picture is built up of a God who is involved with the participant's work on an individual and personal basis. While this was not the case for all the participants, Daniel and several others in the study describe a God who acts providentially, who answers prayer, and who leads and guides on an everyday basis, all in the context of their working lives. This is a God with whom one can see oneself, to use a distinction made by Darrell Cosden on the basis of John 15:14-15 and Romans 8:13-17, as a co-worker rather than merely a sub-worker, partnering and not merely obeying (Cosden, 2006, 121-124)

4.3.4 A God who communicates directly

Perhaps the most striking examples of experiencing God's active presence in relation to work went beyond the category of providence and were the comparatively rare stories that participants told of what might be termed direct communication from God. We've already heard from Edward about God's verbal reassurance when facing a particularly challenging work project. In this section I shall give three further examples of direct communication from God, all of which would fit with the 'revelation' model in van der Knijff's typology. These examples go beyond what Ward has to say about personal relationship with God but, as we shall see in the next chapter, they are not out of keeping with anthropological research by Tanya Luhrmann into the experience of 'renewal evangelicals' in the US.

Accountant Mary told the story of how she had found her first job after graduating. After drafting a number of letters and attempting to network within her church she had not had any success:

> […] and then I really got to the point where I was sort of saying to God, 'Well what what do you want me to do? Where am I going to go here?' and I wasn't concerned that, you know, I didn't have a job, I was still at home, my parents were quite happy to support me, you know, until I I found something. Um, and I just said 'What do I do?' And I remember hearing quite clearly 'Yellow Pages' which in [Mary's country of origin] is effectively the business section of the phone book.

This experience led Mary to look up accountants in the Yellow Pages and send letters of introduction which eventually, via a somewhat indirect further route, led to her first job. In the interview Mary confirmed that she took the words 'Yellow Pages' as coming from God and described the whole episode, and subsequent job moves, as 'very much God driven.'

As we shall see in the next chapter, management consultant Harry was developing a practice of listening to God and reported that 'I felt him speak to me through my thoughts'. He also told of an experience outside that practice that took place on a plane journey as he was talking with a senior partner about his activities with the company's Christian network:

> I was sharing some information with him and as I was doing this […] I just had this... um, almost sort of, I don't know if fear is the right word, but quite, almost supernatural feeling of just being exactly where I was supposed to be, it was like my ... er, body was tingling - [Overlap I: Right] - and I j... it was the first time I'd ever experienced anything like it and I just felt like I was working at something where, which was what, which was that which God wanted me to be doing and I was doing it with him […] (Harry)

The other example of non-verbal direct communication from God was GP Sofia's description of a vision, accompanied by a sense of 'comfort and peace', that she had been given after praying for her father was seriously ill with lung cancer:

> […] and then one day I was just lying in bed and er I saw Jesus on a huge cross crucified. He was looking at me and he just took my hand, he put it on his heart, and then a lot of light came through me. And then I opened my eyes and you know I just realised that he had been a vision, not just a dream because I had an amazing experience of uh comfort and peace that you can't really describe. It's like the Holy Spirit basically being with you. And since that day uh my life changed completely. Um I became even stronger Christian. I started going every Sunday here [name of church] to church because I just felt that it, you know I know he's there and it's amazing. (Sofia)

While this vision was not received at work and was perceived to be given in the first instance in response to a prayer about her father, rather than her work, it did have a deep impact on her work. Since the vision, she felt that she was even more able to sympathise with her patients than before and she believed 'I think he came to me because I think he wanted to support me in the work that I'm doing.'

On the surface these are three very different experiences engaging different internal senses, the hearing of God's voice, the sensation of a 'supernatural feeling' and the seeing of a vision. Beneath the surface, however, there is a common theme. In all three cases the participant inferred that God was personally involved with them in their work, either giving direction or confirming the direction in which they were already going. When it comes to the assurance that one's work is valuable to God it was this kind of experience that seems to have given participants the strongest sense of assurance

in practice. In fact, the last sentence of Harry's quote above is in many ways the epitome of what so much of the popular workplace discipleship literature is aiming at, to feel that I am working at 'that which God want[s] me to be doing and I [am] doing it with him'.

4.4 God's active presence and the person of the Holy Spirit

When we are talking about God's active presence in the workplace, particularly given the somewhat charismatic spirituality of many of the participants, it seems surprising that there were not more explicit references to the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the interviews. One might consider, for example, Gordon Fee's description of the Holy Spirit in Paul's Epistles as 'God's empowering presence' (Fee, 2011). One might equally consider the various roles played by the Holy Spirit in some theologies of work. Volf, for example, equates '[w]ork as cooperation with God in the eschatological transformation of the world' with '[w]ork in the Spirit' (Volf, 1991/2001, 119) and *charisms* play a prominent role in his pneumatological approach to work. As Volf explains, it is the Holy Spirit who enables people to cooperate with God in the world's transformation through the giving of gifts. Though Volf's take on spiritual gifts is not without its critics (see, for example, Hardy, 1993, 191-196; Witherington, 2011, 36-37), his approach has been followed by others. Larive, in his trinitarian approach to work, sees the Holy Spirit's role not only as the giver of 'skills', but also as the builder of 'holy rapport' in the workplace, where relationships are characterised by mutual service and respect (Larive, 2004, 107-126). Stevens, building on Volf's suggestions about gifts, also points out the role of the fruit of the Spirit in 'ethical living and neighbourly service' and the role of the workplace in sanctification (Stevens, 1999, 121-123). When it comes to God's active and empowering presence in the workplace, then, one might expect the Holy Spirit to get more than a mention.

In fact, explicit references to the Holy Spirit were few and far between. Isla and Mary both mentioned the fruit of the Spirit in relation to ethical living and working. Harry talked about helping other Christians at work 'to search out their gifting and and understand their calling from God', a reference which may be to spiritual gifts, though the word 'spiritual' wasn't used and it could reflect a broader understanding of gifting that goes beyond the charismata in the epistles[93]. Mary similarly said in relation to her work 'These are the talents and the giftings that he's given me - [I: Yeah] - um, I need to use those for him'.

While the fruit, and possibly the gifts, of the Spirit were mentioned, nobody used the language of the Holy Spirit dynamically working through them as they exercised the gifts or exhibited the fruit. Nor was the voice of the Spirit invoked in the context of guidance, as in van der Knijff's 'intimation' model. Daniel did talk about receiving the Holy Spirit in his story about becoming a Christian, but the

[93] See, for example, Hardy's explanation of Calvin's take on gifts in Hardy (1993, 195-196).

only participant who specifically talked about the Holy Spirit being present with them at work was GP Sofia, who, interestingly, came from an Orthodox, rather than a charismatic evangelical background. Sofia mentioned the presence of the Holy Spirit both in the story of her vision and in her description of sometimes feeling the Holy Spirit come in answer to prayer for her patients.

This relative absence of talk about the Holy Spirit is intriguing but I suspect too much could be read into it. It may simply be that in the ordinary theology of the participants there is much less differentiation between the individual persons of the Trinity than one finds in the academic literature. Participants are happy to talk about 'God' being present and active at work without specifying, or even consciously thinking, that they are talking of the person of the Holy Spirit. In fact, there were very few specific references to the other persons of the Trinity either, at least in relation to everyday interaction with God. Jeremy described prayer as 'talking to Jesus' and Georgie said that, knowing God was watching over her, she didn't want to do anything to hurt him 'because he's my loving Father', but that was about it.

All of this is to say that, while it would be possible to ascribe a Trinitarian shape to the participants' theology of work as I have outlined it so far, for example that they were working with the Father, in the way of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit, this would not be true to the actual language that they used. As we have seen, many participants did tell stories of co-operating with God's empowering presence in the workplace, but by and large they did not follow the academic theologians in naming the Holy Spirit as the person of the Trinity whom they were encountering there. While one could see in this what Fergusson in a slightly different context calls '[a] lack of pneumatological inflection' (2018, 298) [94] it nevertheless is a feature of my participants' ordinary theology of work.

4.5 A God who calls?

In this final section I shall address a question that arises both from the interview data concerning personal relationship with God in relation to work and the literature of workplace discipleship: to what extent is experiencing one's work as personal co-operation with God tied to framing it explicitly as a calling or vocation? Calling and vocation have a prominent role in much of the practical literature reaffirming the theological value of everyday work (for example, Ryken, 1995, 191-204; Stevens, 1999, 71-105; Witherington, 2011, 23-52). Several other books on vocation pay particular attention to work and other aspects of everyday life (for example, Badcock, 1998; Schuurman, 2004; Sherman, 2011; Walmsley, 2020), including two recent Church of England documents (The Church of

[94] Fergusson is here critiquing 'monist' accounts of providence that confine it within the doctrine of God or of creation.

England, 2019; The Faith and Order Commission, 2020). Furthermore, research in the social sciences reports many positive outcomes for individuals who see their work as a calling, including commitment to job and organization, job satisfaction and sense of meaning at work (Duffy & Dik, 2013)[95]. The perceived significance of calling also lines up with Buszka and Ewest's contention that '… viewing work as a calling can be a powerful impetus for FWI [faith/work integration]' (Buszka & Ewest, 2019, 197).

Because of the particular significance of vocation in the literature and in the research context I shall pay particularly close attention to it, with this section consequently being somewhat longer than preceding ones. I shall give a brief summary of the literature on work as vocation, focussing on the Church of England context, before exploring the link in my research data between seeing work as calling and seeing it as co-operation with a personal God. As we shall see, the link was there for several of the participants but not for all. Participants did not have to frame their work explicitly as a calling or vocation to see it as valuable to God or to believe that they were partnering with God in their work.

In my own context of practice, one of the main thrusts of the Church of England's *Everyday Faith* and *Growing Vocations* initiatives is to help people broaden their understanding of personal vocation to include 'social' and 'relational' callings as well as 'ministerial' ones, where 'social' calling includes, but is not limited to, paid work (The Church of England, 2019; The Faith and Order Commission, 2020). In doing so, it is hoped that lay people especially can come to see the importance and value to God of what they do in their everyday lives. Standing broadly within a long theological tradition that goes back to Martin Luther[96], the Church of England's *Kingdom Calling* document explains its understanding of personal vocation as follows:

> In responding to God's call and finding our place among God's people, we accept commitments that mark us in deep and lasting ways. We can refer to acceptance of such life-shaping commitment as a vocation that we receive from God that enables us to serve others and contribute with them to the common good. Thus understood, a vocation is one way in which we may live out our calling as human persons and members of Christ's body. (The Faith and Order Commission, 2020, 25)

[95] While calling in this research has a broader scope than Christian calling, Duffy and Dik's definition, consisting of 'an external summons, meaning/purpose, and prosocial motivation' (Duffy & Dik, 2013, 429) would include the understanding of Christian calling in most of the Christian literature.
[96] See, for example, historical surveys in Hardy (1990, 44-76); Ryken (1995, 71-84; 95-112); Badcock (1998, 32-52); Jensen (2006, 21-41).

There is some ambiguity in the Church of England literature about whether every Christian has a personal calling in this sense of 'life-shaping commitment'. Certainly, *Kingdom Calling* recognises that not everyone will be able to see their work as a calling:

> In the contemporary social context, to be able to accept one's paid work as a vocation […] might appear as something of a luxury. It might be denied, for instance, to those who find themselves unemployed against their will, or shuttling between short-term or zero-hours contracts, or holding multiple jobs at the same time for different organizations with which any contractual relationship is weak at best. Commitment to one type of occupation or profession, in such contexts, does not look like a possibility that is truly available. (The Faith and Order Commission, 2020, 31-32)[97]

On the other hand, the more popular level booklet *Calling All God's People* wants to uphold 'the idea that every member of the church has a vocation within the common calling of God's people for the common good […]' (The Church of England, 2019, 12). Perhaps there are times when someone has 'only' relational or ministerial callings.

When it comes to discerning one's calling, *Kingdom Calling* is in line with most of the Christian literature on work and vocation in denying that everyone should expect to 'hear' a call from God in some supernatural way:

> […] vocation does not depend on a heavenly voice suddenly directing us to do something out of the ordinary. (The Faith and Order Commission, 2020, 26)[98]

Nevertheless, much of the literature, including *Kingdom Calling*, still asserts or implies that God does call individuals to particular roles or tasks, which may include paid jobs or careers. These callings, it is usually claimed, can be discerned through some combination of one's own spiritual gifts, skills, passions and interests, one's current life situation, opportunities to serve and providential circumstances, and the wise counsel of others (for example, Hardy, 1990, 79-123; Ryken, 1995, 201-204; Stevens, 1999, 80-83; The Faith and Order Commission, 2020, 36-41).

Going back to van der Knijff's typology of models of guidance, it is rare to find vocational literature that fully embraces the 'transformation' model. This would allow one to make 'wise' job and career choices that are compatible with the call to discipleship, certainly, but without any sense that there

[97] It is worth noting that none of the participants found themselves in such circumstances at the time of interview.

[98] Compare, for example, what Stevens writes: 'There is no need to be 'called' through an existential compelling experience to an occupation in society.' (Stevens, 1999, 82).

is always a particular job choice that God wants one to make and which one must somehow discover. One writer who argues for something like this is Gary Badcock, who denies that secular jobs can be seen as callings except perhaps 'in a derivative and secondary sense' (Badcock, 1998, 9). The Christian calling, he writes, is primarily 'to live the Christian life' (Badcock, 1998, 10). Secular jobs provide contexts in which one can do this, particularly by loving one's neighbour, but he doubts that the level of detail at which Christians are called to follow God's will ('the heavenly blueprint') extends to 'the decision between becoming a mechanic and becoming a postal worker' (Badcock, 1998, 9).

Derek Walmsley, Diocesan Director of Ordinands and Vocations in the Anglican Diocese of Leeds, comes to broadly similar conclusions about particular or individual callings, though via a different route. He emphasises the three-fold 'common call' to 'worship, community and mission' (Walmsley, 2020, 28). While he does allow that God might give 'individual' calls within this common call, he asserts:

> Many of us will have no sense of a special individual call but must serve the common call of God in whatever we do moment by moment. The special call is overemphasized, and that can make us feel a failure or inadequate, just because we are not doing something saintly or world-changing. (Walmsley, 2020, 28)

For Walmsley, the expectation of receiving a 'special' call from God not only can leave someone feeling inadequate when no such call is experienced, but also can fuel an individualistic desire to feel special. Our focus, he says, should not be on waiting to be assigned a special role, but on finding whatever part we can play in what God is already doing in the world. Following Rowan Williams and the missional approaches of David Bosch and Lesslie Newbigin, Walmsley writes:

> And so vocation (if you want another really short definition) is really about seeing what God is up to and joining in. This is very different from the common image of vocation as 'God speaks directly to me and I do it', which is very individualistic. (Walmsley, 2020, 438)

In the literature, then, there is general agreement that the workplace should be seen as a context in which one's callings as a human and as a Christian disciple to love God and neighbour in worship and mission can be lived out in co-operation with God. This in itself might be enough to frame one's work as a calling and there is a minority view in the literature that makes this claim and stops there. The majority of the literature, however, goes further to assert that God always, usually or sometimes (here it often gets a bit vague) gives individual or personal callings to specific roles or tasks. In the

most recent Church of England documents, such personal callings require a 'life-shaping' commitment, but the bar is not always set that high elsewhere in the literature.

Against this background we now turn to the question I posed at the start of this section: for the participants in this study, to what extent was experiencing one's work as personal co-operation with God tied to framing it explicitly as a calling or vocation? The answer is that when we look at the interview data, we find that some of those who had the most vivid sense of working with God did indeed use the language of calling, but others with an equally vivid sense of working with God did not. Framing your work as a calling or vocation, it seems, is not the only way of seeing it as being important, nor is it the only way of experiencing it as co-operation with God.

Examples of those who felt called to their work included management consultant Harry, whose experience of communication from God that confirmed his sense of calling we have already reported. He said:

> [Pause] So I feel called to my work which is ... exciting and challenging and um and encouraging as well. It gives me a sense of purpose. When I say I feel called, I have repeatedly had confirmation from God through various different means that that is the place which he has placed me in for this season. (Harry)

Care home proprietor Daniel, with his many experiences of God's providential intervention, used the language of calling to explain why he felt so committed to his job:

> So I think, but because you feel so responsible, because you feel that actually you're contributing, you're doing something for a lot of people, you know, so you feel you're responsible and God is using you because, you know, if God doesn't give you the training, the capacity or the ability to do those things, you won't be able to do it. And since you're still able to do it, then you continue to do it even though it's tiring, even though sometimes it's painful, and it comes with a lot of responsibility, a lot of risk and everything, you carry on because you think, well, that's your calling. (Daniel)

Primary teacher Isla said something similar about her work:

> I've always felt it's what I should be doing, and I just can't imagine doing another job - [Overlap I: OK] - in the same way. So for me it's a vocation and I think, you know, it's what God wants me to do. (Isla)

She explained how she saw the difference between a vocation and a job:

> I do ... I couldn't do my job without my faith because it ... it is a vocation I think rather than a ... it's not a job you do to earn the money and go home. Um, and it ... you have to put a lot of yourself into it ... and you need to know that you ... you're working for the children but I think overall I know that I'm working for God and that is so important, um, because I think otherwise, I don't know I think would have fallen apart years ago … (Isla)

For these participants, the motivational power of construing their work as a calling, of feeling that they are doing what God has personally called them to do is clear. It gives credence to the thrust of the Church of England vocational literature and it lines up with the positive findings of social science research into calling mentioned earlier.

There were other participants, however, who also said that they were where God wanted them to be in their jobs, or that God was working through them at work, but who did not label their job as a calling or vocation. This was the case, for example, with HR professional Alex, and private equity partner Liam, both of whom believed God had put them where they were, even though for Liam God's reason for doing so was not entirely clear. GP Sofia and nurse Georgie are particularly interesting cases in this respect. Both of them were committed to their professions. In Sofia's case, she had felt drawn to it from an early age. Both of them felt God was with them in their work and had had vivid experiences of God's provision and answers to prayer. Georgie described herself as being 'God's hands' at work. Sofia had even had a vision which she felt was God's way of affirming her in her job. Unlike the two teachers, however, who were similarly committed to a caring profession, neither Sofia nor Georgie described their work as a calling.

What might account for this difference between those who described their jobs as a calling and those who did not? One could argue that, whether or not Sofia, Georgie and others used the 'vocation' label, they viewed their jobs vocationally, as contexts to respond to the call to love God and neighbour. There would be some truth in that, but it still doesn't explain why they didn't use the label. The data seems to show that, in the absence of an obvious call from a 'heavenly voice',[99] participants did not inevitably equate God's providential activity with a calling, even when God was thought to have 'put' them in a job or role for a particular reason. Without the benefit of follow-up interviews it is impossible to be sure, but I would conjecture that for those participants who did not describe their job as a calling, either they expected special callings to come through supernatural means, or they reserved the category for calling to ordained ministry, or both. It may be significant in this context that brand consultant Edward, who had experienced God's promptings, answered

[99]This is the phrase used in *Kingdom Calling* (The Faith and Order Commission, 2020, 26).

prayer and even personal reassurance from God at work, only used the word 'call' to refer to a call to ordained ministry. At one stage he wondered whether he might receive such a call, as his two brothers had done, but it never came. He did not, however, conclude that God must therefore be 'calling' him to brand consultancy, or at least he did put it that way in interview.

The distinction between providence and vocation is alluded to by Darrell Cosden in a way that neatly summarises the experience of most if not all of the participants:

> Most of us would like to believe that we are in our particular work and at our specific place of work because God in his providence has, directly or indirectly, led us there. This is one prominent strand of our piety. *Whether we view this as a specific calling or simply where God has us for now*, we rightly want to think that, by being where we are, we are accepting the providential workings of God and are therefore living obediently – or at least not disobediently. (Cosden, 2006, 16-17, italics mine)

Whether God's providential leading is equated with special calling, Cosden implies here, is largely a matter of perspective and that seems to be borne out in the research data. This does, however, raise a further question. If people do see their job as a calling from God we have seen that this generally had positive outcomes. For others who believe that God has put them in their job and that they are partnering with him in it, is there any value in encouraging them to go further and see it as a vocation? On the whole, I suspect not. Certainly there is value in helping them to see how the call to discipleship, service and mission can be lived out in the workplace along the lines of the Church of England's *Everyday Faith* initiative and LICC's *Transforming Work* and *Fruitfulness on the Frontline* programmes. Whether adding the label of 'vocation' to one's job is always helpful, given the clerical baggage that it so obviously still has, is debatable.

Whether or not participants felt God had called them to particular jobs, we have seen in this chapter how several of them believed that they had encountered God's presence and activity in the workplace and how this enhanced their sense of their work as personal co-operation with God. What might it take, then, to experience such encounters, and are there ways in which perceiving God at work in this way can be enabled and encouraged? This is the question to which I turn in the final chapter.

Chapter 5 Practising God's presence at work

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how, for some participants, certain experiences at work, which they interpreted as instances of God's providential activity and occasionally as direct revelation, led to, or reinforced, their belief that God was personally and purposefully involved with them in their work. I argued that for these participants it was such experiences, more than any theology of work or ethical way of working, that encouraged them to frame their work as co-operation or partnership with a real and personal God. This in turn contributed powerfully to a belief that their work was meaningful and valuable to God.

We also began to see, in relation to petitionary prayer and prayer for guidance, how the experiencing of a real and personal God, with whom one is co-operating in one's daily work, could be facilitated by certain kinds of spiritual practice. In this chapter I shall expand on the argument that certain spiritual practices enhance, or even enable, the experience of work as co-operation with God. I begin by relating my participants' experiences to the findings of US anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann, who has researched how US evangelicals in the Vineyard movement hear God and perceive God to be real. Building on some hints in the interview data, and drawing on the work of Jeff Astley, Roger Walton others, I then argue that practices of attentiveness and reflection could provide an equivalent way of facilitating the perception of God's providential activity at work and relate my findings to the recent research of Dunlop et al. Finally, with reference to the work of David Clark, I focus on the role of community in theological reflection, both in the church and in the workplace and argue that the latter context deserves greater attention than it currently receives in the literature.

5.2 Making God real at work

I have been arguing that the participants with the most vivid sense of faith/work integration were those who believed that they were working not merely *for* God but *with* God. They believed that God was actively and personally involved in their work, and so in their work they were not just God's delegates or emissaries but God's partners. In this section I shall draw on the work of US anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann to explore further this phenomenon of believing that a real and personal God was present with them at work, particularly to demonstrate the crucial role of the spiritual practices that support such a belief.

Luhrmann's research into US evangelicals and their relationship with God is reported at greatest length in her two books *When God Talks Back* (Luhrmann, 2012) and *How God Becomes Real*

(Luhrmann, 2020), the latter of which also draws on her research into other faith groups. It was based on participant observation in two Vineyard churches, one in Chicago and one in California, with over two years spent in each (2012, xx). Her focus of interest is on the ways that people come to believe in the existence of 'divinity' in the absence of any direct evidence accessible by the senses or, in other words, 'how, in the face of doubt and uncertainty, does God become real for someone?' (Luhrmann, 2012, xviii). In *How God Becomes Real*, Luhrmann argues that maintaining a sense of the reality of 'gods and spirits' is a particular challenge amidst the distractions and discouragements of the 'everyday' (22)[100].

Luhrmann's work is particularly relevant to this study both because it concerns the experience of God being present and active in the everyday world, which includes the world of work, and because her research participants had a similar theological outlook to some, but not all, of my own participants. Indeed, the Vineyard movement to which Luhrmann's participants belonged has influenced the charismatic evangelical wing of the Church of England, especially via links with Holy Trinity Brompton (Hunt, 1995). As we saw in chapter 2, Holy Trinity Brompton has in turn been influential on the churches to which the participants in this study belonged.

In *When God Talks Back*, as the title suggests, Luhrmann is particularly interested in people's experiences of hearing God speak. She writes: 'One of the first things a person must master at a church like the Vineyard is to recognize when God is present and when he responds' (2012, 39). In her later book she describes the various ways in which Vineyard members understand God to be 'speaking back' to them, through Bible passages, through 'people and circumstances', through mental images or thoughts, or physical sensations. These mental events 'they identified as not being their own, but rather as having been generated by an external presence, God' (2020, 49-50). As we have seen in the previous chapter, several of the participants in my study reported such experiences. Luhrmann argues that these experiences are related to the way that one interprets one's 'mental events', a way that can be learned through a process that she summarises as follows:

> … it takes the imagined dialogues we all live with – the inner voice that comments, guides, interprets, and reflects, not always nicely – and works to make some of the dialogues more real and more good. When you talk to yourself about your upcoming presentation, you may remember the time you flubbed. When you talk to God, you should experience him telling you that you'll do a good job and that whatever happens will be for the good, and you should believe this inner dialogue. To do this, you must not only learn to feel that the inner

[100] In fact, Luhrmann's account here contributes to giving an explanation for the sacred/secular divide that is discussed in much of the contemporary Christian discipleship literature.

> dialogue is in part external; you must be able to have a helpful, soothing dialogue. (Luhrmann, 2012, p. 131)

It is interesting to note the similarity between what Luhrmann says here about talking to God about an upcoming presentation and Edward's story about preparing to run a focus group related in the previous chapter, in which he reported '… God really said, 'Don't worry. It's going to be all right'' (Edward). It is similarities like these that reinforce the relevance of Luhrmann's research to my study.

It is also important to make clear before digging deeper into Luhrmann's research that she explicitly writes from a point of view that she terms 'the anthropological attitude' (Luhrmann, 2012, xxiv). From this stance she describes the ways that people come to believe they are interacting with God while remaining agnostic about the objective reality of the God with which people believe they are interacting. The fact that Luhrmann can explain why some people have more experiences of hearing God than others in terms of temperament and training does not necessarily entail for her that this God therefore does not exist. As she explains: '[M]y methods cannot distinguish between sensory deception and the moments when God may be reaching back to communicate through an ordinary human mind' (2012, xxv). Similarly, in using Luhrmann's research to help explain the significance of practices in experiencing the presence of God at work I do not intend to reduce such experiences merely to the psychological outcomes of certain trained ways of interpreting mental events.

As suggested in the above quote, Luhrmann argues that the identification of certain mental events as having originated from an external source is the outcome of an 'interaction model […] through which congregants learn to interpret their everyday lives in accordance with a sense that God is "leading" them' (2020, 49). Her research indicates that developing the ability to interpret one's inner dialogue in this way requires significant work, and that some people (those who score high on the Tellergen Absorption Scale[101]) are more naturally adept at it than others. Luhrmann goes on to say that 'the repeated practice of interacting with a character as if the character were in a relationship with you' is one of the practices that helps 'to make the faith frame feel more compelling.' She concludes, 'All [such practices] can help to make it more personal, more meaningful, more anchored to the everyday present' (2020, 56). Among such practices, Luhrmann highlights the Ignatian spiritual exercises that cultivate 'inner sensory experience' (Luhrmann, 2012, p. 184).

Here in Luhrmann's analysis, then, we find a further explanation of why perceived interaction with God at work was so significant for those participants who reported it. In the previous chapter, Ward

[101] '[A]bsorption is a character trait, a disposition for having moments of total attention that somehow completely engage all of one's attentional resources – perceptual, imaginative, conceptual, even the way one holds and moves one's body' (Luhrmann, 2012, 199, see also 381).

provided a theological rationale for seeing links between perceived special providence, answered prayer and a personal relationship with God. What Luhrmann gives us is an anthropological explanation for the link between this perceived personal relationship and a faith frame that is as compelling in everyday life as it is in the context of church activity. While this may not describe the experience of all the participants in this study, it was certainly the experience of those who described the most vivid sense of partnership with God in their everyday work.

In my interviews I asked about spiritual practices in general but did not delve deeply into any specific practices. Several of the participants did, however, describe spiritual practices that seemed to cultivate the sense of God's providential activity and guidance that we explored in the previous chapter. We saw there how care home proprietor Daniel and accountant Mary, for example, both talked about the way that they sought God's guidance in prayer before making major decisions about job or career changes. In Mary's case it was in response to such prayer that she felt she had heard the words 'Yellow Pages' from God. For Daniel, it involved both prayer and reading the Bible. To repeat part of a quote from chapter 4, Daniel said in relation to guidance for job moves:

> […] I always pray about it and when I pray, and sometimes, you know, God will lead me to a certain passage in the Bible, I'll open the B... I can just open any, just take a Bible, just open it and then you read the verses there and then you know that actually I think God is talking to me here […]. (Daniel)

To be clear, this particular approach to reading the Bible was not typical of the participant sample, and reflects a sense of God's 'direct access to the believer' (Bielo, 2009, 56) that is more Pentecostal than Anglican. It does, however, resonate with Luhrmann's description of the way that Vineyard congregants read their Bibles:

> [they] read their Bibles in a conversation with God as if both they *and* the Bible were changing – not the words on the page but the way words intentionally lead them to respond. They describe reading as if they were conversing: they look for the way God answers, inspires, consoles, enlightens by changing the way that the text reads. (Luhrmann, 2012, p. 59)

One participant in my research, management consultant Harry, talked in terms that resonated particularly closely with what Luhrmann says about the ways people cultivate a sense of God's presence and learn to hear God's voice.

> [Pause] I've ... been ... spending a lot more time with God in in quiet. I spend a lot more time, do a lot more. But learning just to stop talking and listen and and recognizing that the

> God that I read about in the Bible ... speaks to us through various means and, whether it's directly, whether it's a booming voice, which I suspect is not what you probably want to hear because it's more like shouting at you and trying to get your attention or whether it's imputed thought which y... or knowledge, which you've never had before or couldn't possibly have or whether it's ... just very similar to your thinking but in alignment with the Bible. I suppose I've been practising trying to ask God questions, wait for for thoughts to come to mind, checking them against the Bible and then practising and the [unclear - overlap] actually acting out on those things with with the necessary um, um sort of caution, but in order to see ... to test that and as I've been doing that I have increasingly discerned what I believe is his voice, and the consistent theme is it it always is underpinned by his word and his character within the Bible, and and always has quite amazing ... cont... or when I've seen direct consequence they've always been amazing and in the long run I've looked back and thought 'Wow' and when I sort of look through my journal where I've taken notes and things have really connected - [Overlap I: Yeah] - and made made sense, sometimes in the moment, sometimes looking back. So, so I've prayed about what God has for me, um, and I felt him speak to me through my thoughts, I want you at [company name]. (Harry)

Harry here describes a process of learning to recognise God's voice that echoes something that Luhrmann observes about Vineyard congregants. In a chapter entitled 'Let's Pretend' Luhrmann describes how playlike, imaginative, acting as though God were personally present was encouraged as a way of learning how to encounter God (2012, 72-100). For Harry, there is a similar element of 'play' in practising asking God questions as well as the recognition that one's own thoughts could be mistakenly identified as God's voice and the consequent need to exercise a degree of scepticism.

When I asked Harry whether he has a dialogue going on with God when he is at work, he replied:

> So actually it's funny you ask because a few weeks ago I started setting an alarm during the, during the day because in the busyness of it it's very hard to, I find, to to keep focused on, or or stay in tune with God while I'm doing other things. So I was reading a book, a fantastic book recently called *With* uh by Skye Jethani[102] and he talks about the different, so so Jesus always walked alongside God, um, or walked in God's ways and and always was open to to God's leading, but then he also went off and had his quiet times and met with God without the distraction and he was saying that it's not like he left God ever, but what would happen is he would just in those quiet, as I said remove remove the distraction and and and have this dedicated time with God, and I think that's really important. But I do believe that I, that

[102] Jethani (2011)

> we should all be aspiring to having an open channel of communication with God all the time. I don't think I'm there. I would love to be. I'm actually trying different things to try and, um, trick myself into doing that [chuckles] to to to encourage me to actually do that. Yeah. Just thinking wouldn't it be great if I just started more regularly remembering God and that sounds awful, but that is my aspiration. I don't, you know much like like my wife or my parents, I wouldn't want to sort of just forget about them. Equally when they had, were they to be in God's position where they're always there to support and go through life with you the whole time, then I would want to walk with them, if I'm at the shops with my wife, I want to be remembering the whole time that she's there and it's the same thing God is there. I just can't see him. So it's a bit more challenging but I do believe that it should, shouldn't actually look fundamentally - [Overlap I: Yeah] - too different on some levels. (Harry)

Against the background of Luhrmann's research, we notice here the play-like act of imagination required to think of God as being 'always there to support and go through life with you' in the same way as a spouse or parent. Luhrmann explains the role of play in maintaining what she calls the 'faith frame'[103] in everyday settings:

> People can function quite effectively in the world without thinking about gods and spirits, and often they do – even when they are ostensibly religious. […] The challenge, then, for those who want to be faithful is to think with the faith frame as much as they can, despite how easy it can be to get distracted or discouraged, despite the competition from and contradictions of the everyday. The best comparison for this task is play: an as-if frame in which someone acts according to the expectations of the play frame, while still remaining aware of the realities of the everyday world. (Luhrmann, 2020, p. 22).

There is a potentially instructive contrast here with senior IT professional Brian. Brian was an alumnus of LICC's *Executive Toolbox* programme (LICC, 2022b), from which he had learned about practices designed to help you 'interrupt your thoughts to think about God and to glorify God in your … day.' The sound of a church bell, for example, could be 'an opportunity to … think of God at that time.' One suggestion that Brian had found practical and useful in his own work environment was 'every time you use a lift to lift your eyes to the Lord.' While that last phrase might indicate an attempt to cultivate awareness of God's presence, in the overall context of the interview it is more

[103] Luhrmann explains the 'faith frame' like this: '[T]o have a sustained commitment to the reality of invisible agents, the deeply held feeling that gods and spirits are real in a way that matters, someone must interpret the world through a special way of thinking, expecting, and remembering. I will call this a faith frame' (Luhrmann, 2020, xii).

likely to indicate a prompt to 'think about God'. In other words, as far as I can tell from the interview data, Brian's aspirations for this sort of practice did not extend to the kind of dialogical relationship with God at which Harry was aiming.

Reflecting in this context on the fact that Luhrmann's research was into charismatic (or 'renewal') evangelicals, it seems significant that those whose spirituality could be inferred from the interviews to be at the more charismatic end of the evangelical spectrum, such as Daniel, Georgie, Harry and Mary[104], were more likely to report (or perhaps even aspire to) direct experience of God's presence and activity in the workplace. As mentioned previously in chapter 2, one of the features of charismatic spirituality, including its expression in the Church of England, is an expectation that God will intervene, guide and speak (Goldingay, 1996; Francis et al., 2000). It may also not be a coincidence that three of the four participants just mentioned were the only participants other than the two teachers who referred to their job as a calling or said they had been called to it. Referring back to the discussion about vocation in chapter 4, there seems to be a connection, for these participants at least, between charismatic expectations of God's intervening, guiding and speaking and a framing of one's work as something to which one has been called by God.

It is also salient to remember that St. Peter's was not homogenously charismatic in its membership or teaching but covered the spectrum from more charismatic to more Reformed, and this range in tradition was reflected in the participant sample, though not by design. Consequently, there was not the same degree of shared expectation about sensing God's presence, activity and communication that one would find in a Vineyard congregation. In other words, the expectation of being able to hear God in the way that some participants reported was at least to some degree predicated on a particular form of spirituality or faith frame that will not be found in every church setting. I suspect that this expectation would not have been present for members of the conservative evangelical church studied by Strhan, for example, (Strhan, 2015), thus excluding one possible avenue of faith/work integration in that context.

Having said the above, it is not only Christians with a more charismatic spirituality who might expect to encounter God in the workplace. The Church of England's Everyday Faith initiative is aimed at the whole church rather than any particular tradition and it is described on their website as 'a wide range of activities across the Church of England that support and equip us all to 'find and follow God' in our everyday lives – Sunday to Saturday' (Church of England, 2022b). The language of 'finding and following God in everyday life' will no doubt mean different things to different people, but it does

[104] This was not something I asked about directly in the interviews hence it had to be inferred from the interviews and from my own personal knowledge of the participants.

imply God's presence and leading in everyday contexts. What those seeking to support and encourage Christian disciples in their everyday work need to consider in choosing their approach is what models and expectations of God's presence and activity are operating in their particular context. With that caveat, what follows in the next three sections is perhaps more generally applicable across churches in different traditions.

5.3 'Learning to see' at work: the role of attentiveness and reflection

Having explored ways in which Christians at work might 'make God real' by learning to hear God, we now switch attention to 'seeing' God at work, something that was not so limited to a particular spiritual tradition. In this section I shall examine two interrelated kinds of 'seeing' that were central to participants' faith/work integration and explore how they might be facilitated by spiritual practices of attentiveness and reflection. I had already recognised the potential of theological reflection for workplace discipleship before encountering the work of Luhrmann, but it was her insight into what it took for people to learn to hear God that suggested to me the equivalent role for practices of attentiveness and theological reflection in helping people to 'see'.

The first kind of seeing in workplace discipleship is the one found in Derek Walmsley's short definition of vocation quoted in the previous chapter. Vocation, according to Walmsley, 'is really about *seeing what God is up to* and joining in' (Walmsley, 2020, p. 438, italics mine). One of the sources Walmsley draws on for this view is Rowan Williams, who identifies 'the attentiveness of the birdwatcher' as a key skill for discipleship. In part, this means

> […] learning a new level of attentiveness to all persons, places and things; looking at everything with the eye of expectancy, waiting for something of God to blossom within it; being in Christ's company, learning attentiveness and practising this kind of still alertness; looking and waiting for the light to break through. (Williams, 2016, p. 23)

In the previous section we were talking about some participants' expectations of hearing God. Here we note that Williams writes of 'the *eye* of expectancy' [italics mine]. In relation to work, this attentiveness is a crucial skill for disciples to learn if they are going to be able to frame their work fully as co-operation with God. If you are going to 'join in' with God at work, then you need to have some perception of what it is that God is doing. In general terms you might be able to derive this from a theology of work or an understanding of Scripture. To perceive what God is doing right now, in my particular workplace, however, requires the kind of attentiveness that Williams writes about, and that we can already see in the experience of several of the participants.

In the previous chapter we saw several examples in the data of participants seeing, or at least thinking that they might have seen, what God was up to in their work, from Sofia sensing the Holy

Spirit as she prayed for her patients, to Daniel and Georgie both sensing that God 'put' them into situations where they were able to help others. Sometimes this seeing resulted from an attentiveness in the moment, along the lines suggested by Williams, and sometimes it was more a question of hindsight, developed more slowly and reflectively. An example of the latter is Alex, who earlier in the interview had said that, workwise, he felt he was where God wanted him to be. When I asked him to extrapolate, he pointed to two things that led him to that conclusion. One was his desire and efforts to 'witness to [God's] love' at work over the years. The other was the opportunities that he had had over his career to influence the culture of the company:

> I guess I've always found, you know the more senior I became, the more influence I've been able to have on ... on the more senior people in the company. [I: Mm mm] And hopefully that's a good thing. Through to making some, you know, impact in the direction of how we treat people ... you know, and the values of the company and … so, you know, I was never solely accountable for … all those things, but I have been a member of [Company Name]'s most senior HR team for, whatever it is ... 15 years. So there's something about how, you know, how do you build a system and a culture of how you treat people. You know I've been a part of that - [I: Mm] - and I guess I've always hoped that God was able to use me [unclear] building a place where people can come, be treated fairly, respectfully
>
> […]
>
> But hopefully by the way I've been part of that ... you know God was able to shine through me. – [I: Right] - You know, there's a question I've often asked about, you know especially in the last four or five years, you know when I was diagnosed, my consultant said, 'You'll probably want to give up your job.' - [I: Right] - I really thought, you know, am I supposed to be there or do I do something else? And I always had a real sense, you're in the right place right now. (Alex)

There is a hesitancy here as Alex talks about what he hopes, rather than knows for sure, to have been the case. Nevertheless, there is also a perception, a seeing, of how God may have been able to use him and 'shine through' him. We shall look at what practices might facilitate this kind of seeing later in this section, but first we turn to another, related kind of seeing.

If the first kind of seeing that is key to workplace discipleship is 'seeing what God is up to', the second kind is 'seeing as God sees.' In an article on 'Forming Disciples' (Astley, 2015) Jeff Astley argues that 'learning to see' in this second way is a particularly apt metaphor for the formational

aspect of Christian discipleship. He draws this conclusion partly from a reflection in his earlier book *Christ of the Everyday* on the way that apprentices are formed. As an apprentice, he writes,

> You learn not only to act like your mentor-master acts, with the saw and plane. You also learn – to an extent – to be as he is. In modelling yourself on your teacher, you come to see the wood, the joints and the whole craft-practice as he sees them. You are formed with and in his vision. (Astley, 2007, p. 9)

So, what kind of thing were participants learning to see as God sees? On one level they were all learning, as we have already observed in many instances, to see their own work as part of God's work in the world, the work of the kingdom, but there are other levels, too. Georgie, for example, had learned to see herself in her work as being 'God's hands' on her patients. Even more striking is the example of Daniel, which will lead us into looking at practices of discernment and reflection.

Several years ago, Daniel had made the move from being a senior financial executive involved in mergers and acquisitions to being the owner/manager of a number of care homes. One of the results of this significant switch in career is that he had come to see people differently:

> […] I see that for me [pause] you know firing people, closing down factories and getting synergies and everything and saying, [unclear] it's a business and we've got targets and we've got this to achieve, it's a complete U turn for me - [Overlap I: Oh right. So ...] - to now coming to a different place where you actually see human beings as human beings … (Daniel)

Before his career change, Daniel had seen people, specifically the employees of companies being bought and sold, as little more than numbers on a balance sheet, at least according to the account he gave in our interview. Now, as he encountered his care home residents on a daily basis, learned their stories and met their families, he was learning to see these people as human beings. This kind of learning to see in 'depth', or seeing beneath the surface, is exactly what Astley says Jesus challenges his disciples to do:

> We are goaded by [Jesus'] words to see the complexity and the value of people and things, unveiling features that usually lie beneath the surface. (Astley, 2007, p. 17)

Part of this change in Daniel's perspective, no doubt, was to do with the much closer proximity that he now had to the people in question. Unlike the employees of companies being bought and sold in his previous career, the care home residents had names and faces and stories that he knew. What is more, Daniel had not seen everyone as a number in his former career. He had told stories of colleagues in his previous jobs where clearly he had seen them as people he could help. Still, Daniel

felt that a profound shift had taken place in the way that he saw people, one that for him was a kind of conversion. In fact, Daniel likened the 'U turn' that had taken place in his life to the Damascus Road conversion of St. Paul. Paul, as Daniel described it, had gone from being a 'villain' who 'tried to chase everybody around' to 'taking the gospel to everywhere'. After his conversion Paul still faced considerable challenges but was helped by 'the inner belief and that that sense of yes, this is the right thing to do'. He was now someone who was able to 'go and preach to the same people that you've actually been working for them before and say, actually, you know, we were doing the wrong thing before'. Just as Paul had come to a new way of seeing things, one that resulted in treating people in fundamentally different ways, so had Daniel.

One more biblical connection that Daniel made in our interview is relevant here. When I asked how he thought God sees the work he does, Daniel replied:

> [Pause] I don't know, but I believe, I believe that he, you know, I see what we do as like, almost like, you know, those lepers in those days that, you know, people really don't want to deal with them because they have been outcasts and and not supposed to be, you know, the old people, our old people have contributed, they've a lot of great things for generations, they have lovely stories if you really sit down and talk to them. They tell you fascinating stories that, you know, for some of them [unclear] but at the same time I can tell you I don't think anyone honestly can pay anyone working in that industry enough money for what they go through to care for old people. (Daniel)

Here again is an example of seeing people in 'depth', specifically in this case older people with dementia[105]. Whereas, in some cases at least, older people with dementia might be treated as outcasts because of their challenging behaviours, Daniel had come to see them differently, as people with stories, who have not always been the way they are now. Daniel believed that, in God's eyes, the role of the care homes and their staff was to treat these modern day 'outcasts' with the same love, care and respect that Jesus had shown to lepers in his day.

How might disciples learn how better to see in these various ways, seeing God in action, seeing in depth and seeing in a way that resonates with Scripture and therefore is taken to be in line with how God sees? One answer, suggested by what we have already learned from Luhrmann, is that it might be done through spiritual practices. Daniels and Vandewarker, in the preface to their book *Working in the Presence of God*, write: '*Spiritual practices open our eyes and tune our ears to where we may have missed God working'* (Daniels & Vandewarker, 2019, p. 10, italics in original). This potential role

[105] The next part of the interview makes it clear that Daniel is talking particularly about older people with dementia, whose dementia results in challenging behaviours.

for spiritual practices is to some degree borne out in the interview data. We saw in the previous section how Harry was engaging in a specific spiritual practice in order to facilitate a sense of being 'with' God and hearing from God. As for Daniel, with hindsight, it would have been instructive to have asked more about the processes by which he had come to see people differently and how he had come to make the connections with the stories of Paul and Jesus' treatment of lepers. What are presented in the interview are insights that appear to have come about through reflection of some kind, but in the interview itself we did not explore how that reflection had taken place. Later in the interview, however, after relating something he had learned from the story of David sparing Saul's life[106], Daniel talked about ways in which he was learning:

> As for me, it's, you know, I don't want to be … [sc. someone who leaps to judgement and revenge, unlike David in the story], and that is because I've learned from, you know, listening to sermons, you know, listening to on-line, you know, er tapes from different people um and [unclear] actually programmes that we do regularly from, you know, er going with Men's Breakfast - [Overlap I: Men's Breakfast] - [unclear] and also my my brother, you know, he calls me almost every other day to pray even though he's in [name of country], so we use Bible verses and he will give me some testimonies of his own and and so it it just helps you to develop as a Christian so a lot of different ways that you develop. We also do uh something that about three couples we decided that, OK, we just want to do kind of we call it couples pr..., you know, praying couples, so the three of us or the three couples, so six of us we'll go to each other's house and have worship, we'll sing songs and we'll read, we'll pick a particular topic. So each one of us will pick a different topic at different time to educate and we contribute and we discuss and we pray, and then we'll eat and, you know, have a social life as well. So that different ways that you do that. (Daniel)

Along with the habits of personal Bible reading and prayer that he mentioned elsewhere, what Daniel describes here is a rich and varied combination of spiritual practices and communities. Within a spiritual landscape like this he has opportunities to encounter God (within his faith frame), Scripture and the wisdom and experience of other Christians in multiple different ways. One can see how many, if not all, of the ingredients are in place for the kind of reflection and discernment that might result in the insights and transformed ways of seeing that came out in interview and it is to these practices that we shall now turn.

As far as attentiveness is concerned, Luhrmann in her research pays particular attention to the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, which are enjoying somewhat of a resurgence in some Protestant

[106] The story is in 1 Samuel 24.

circles (Luhrmann, 2012, pp. 172-184)[107]. Luhrmann argues that the practise of the *Exercises* is a form of '… inner sense cultivation – the deliberate, repeated use of inner visual representation and other inner sensory experience, with interaction, interweaving, and sensory enhancement' (p. 184) which develops the ability to 'hear' God. When it comes to the ability to discern, or 'see', God's activity in one's life, one Ignatian practice seems particularly applicable, and that is the practice of Examen. Indeed, Daniels and Vandewarker devote a whole chapter to 'The Prayer of Examen for Work' (Daniels & Vandewarker, 2019, pp. 204-227). They explain its suitability for nurturing workplace discipleship in ways that echo what we have seen already in this chapter:

> We are called not to go through life sleepwalking – just going through the motions – but as people awake to the actions of God in our midst. The examen is an ancient practice that can aid us in this wide-awake life. By practicing [sic] daily reflection on where we saw God at work or even where we missed God's activity, we awaken to the reality of God's presence around us and through us. This is the heart of the practice of the examen, paying attention and being alert to the activity of God in our everyday lives. As we become attuned to the presence of God, we also become more aware of God's longing to be in relationship with us. (p. 204)

While Daniels and Vandewarker have developed a detailed practice of 'Examen for Work', similar encouragement to be attentive to what God is doing at work can be found in less detailed form in many places in the practical literature. It is there, for example, in the regular review question 'Where have you seen God at work?' in LICC's *Transforming Work* programme (Greene et al., 2015) and in the question 'Where do you think God is active in your daily life?' in the Church of England's booklet *Calling All God's People* (The Church of England, 2019, p. 14). Here, then, is one practice for developing attentiveness that is both well attested to and widely resourced in the literature.

The specific practice of Examen could be seen one component of the broader spiritual practice of reflection. Referencing the earlier work of Green (2009) and Heywood (2009), Astley advocates the role of reflection in discipleship formation:

> Much spiritual vision is down to Christian nurture or formation ... . The church teaches itself to be Christian and inducts new members into its faith primarily through speaking the Christian language and beliefs, expressing the Christian attitudes and affections, and

[107] Intriguingly, Ignatian reflective practices have also been identified in the secular business literature as possible ways of enhancing ethical thinking Moberg and Calkins (2001) and leadership (Lozano, 2017).

> practising the Christian behaviours in its worship, witness and service. (And only secondarily by talking about these things, through specific forms of instruction.)
>
> But this needs to be supplemented by... individuals or (preferably) small groups *self-consciously* and *explicitly* [seeking] to relate the Christian tradition to their own perceived beliefs, and their reflections on their own practices and situations... [in a] conversational, hermeneutical process... [that] itself depends on nurturing the character and capacities of spiritual vision and imagination, in order that these wider connections may be seen. (Astley, 2013, pp. 51-52, quoted in Astley, 2015, p.14)

In recent years there have been calls to strengthen the specific practice of theological reflection in ministerial training (Heywood, 2017, 2021; Thompson et al., 2008) and to continue to extend the practice more widely into the church (Walton, 2012). Walton advocates the practice of 'faithful reflection' (the name for theological reflection that he prefers in *The Reflective Disciple*) as 'vital to the practice of Christian discipleship. He identifies five practices which he sees as 'basic exercises for nurturing faithful reflection' (Walton, 2012, p. 135). The first two of these relate directly to learning to see God in action and learning to see as God sees, namely the practices of 'attentiveness' and 'making connections' (Walton, 2012, pp. 136-138).

All this is to say that the literature strongly points to theological reflection as a useful practice in encouraging the attentiveness and 'seeing' that was already being evidenced by some of the participants, and particularly those participants who had the strongest sense of their work being co-operation with God. There are other signs in my data that point to the potential for theological reflection, and I shall explore these in the next section by comparing and contrasting my data with the findings of recent research into the practice in a similar context.

5.4 Theological reflection in practice

In 2021, Sarah Dunlop, Catherine Nancekievill and Pippa Ross-McCabe reported on research into the practice of theological reflection among Anglican churchgoers[108] that was carried out against the same background of the Church of England's Everyday Faith initiative as my own study (Dunlop et al., 2021). In the research study, Dunlop et al. aimed to 'unpack' assumptions about the 'perceived gap between 'Sunday' and 'everyday'' by exploring ways in which churchgoers were already bridging that gap through informal theological reflection. The researchers used semi-structured interviews followed by photo elicitation[109] to explore how participants processed a 'significant life incident … in

[108] 'The sample included a balance of women and men and was drawn from a range of ages and traditions within the Church of England' (p. 312).
[109] Photo elicitation is a method described in Dunlop and Ward (2015).

the light of faith' (Dunlop et al., 2021, pp. 312-313). They then looked at their data against six criteria for 'theological reflection at its best' (312) adapted from Ross-McCabe (2020). Comparing their findings with my own data is helpful in analysing the degree to which my own participants were already engaging in theological reflection, if only informally.

Dunlop et al. found several criteria being met in ways similar to my own interview data, such as 'openness to the divine' and connection to everyday life (Dunlop et al., 2021, p. 316). While several of their participants reported the process or reflection as being transformative, another criterion of theological reflection, this could not be inferred from my data. As we have seen in the case of Daniel, with his 'Pauline conversion' and his understanding of the 'outcast' status of older people with dementia, there were instances where transformation and reflection had both taken place in the past. Without inquiring further into the reflection process, however, the connection between the two cannot be established on the basis of the interview data alone.

In relation to one of the criteria of theological reflection, however, there is an apparent difference in findings between Dunlop et al.'s research and my own which may be instructive. Dunlop et al. observed low levels of engagement with Scripture and Christian tradition, which they take to indicate that this particular feature of theological reflection was 'undeveloped' in the processing of their participants (p. 317). It is not straightforward to compare this with my data as I asked my participants directly for examples of biblical stories or characters that had helped them connect their faith with their work. Indeed, it was this question that elicited Daniel's response about St. Paul. Nevertheless, it may be significant that nearly all of the participants in my research were forthcoming with such examples and that references to Scripture, though not, it has to be said, to wider Christian tradition, came up in other sections of the interviews as well.

For example, two of the participants referred to the 'fruit of the Spirit'[110] in terms of what they were trying to exhibit in their ethical behaviour at work. Kath made references to the command to the Israelites to teach the faith to their children, to biblical warnings to teachers, and to Jesus' instruction to 'let the little children come to me and do not hinder them'[111] in relation to her work as a teacher. The most common kind of reference to Scripture, however, was to what New Testament scholar Richard B. Hays terms 'paradigms', which he defines as 'stories or summary accounts of characters who model exemplary conduct (or negative paradigms: characters who model reprehensible conduct)' (Hays, 1996, p. 209). Jesus, not surprisingly, was cited by several of the participants, variously as model servant leader, teacher, healer and even as brand hero. Other

[110] See Galatians 5:22-25.
[111] See Deuteronomy 6:7, James 3:1 and Mark 10:14 and parallels.

biblical characters mentioned included Joseph, as someone with leadership gifts providentially put in a position of authority and influence by God, Esther, similarly placed in God's providence 'for such a time as this'[112], Abraham with his great faith, Nehemiah as leader of a 'collective endeavour' and, as we have seen in the interview with Daniel, Paul and David.

Overall, then, my interview data seems to indicate a greater engagement with Scripture on the part of my participants than that found by Dunlop et al. with theirs. As I said earlier, this could be accounted for by the different nature of the interviews and questions asked, though the instances of unsolicited references to the Bible might suggest that this is not the only reason. Without knowing more about the church traditions of Dunlop et al.'s participants, the difference may also reflect the evangelical background of most of my participants, and the evangelical ethos of the churches they attended. Those churches placed a high value on bible teaching, with an expository style of preaching being the norm. Many of the participants also mentioned that they were members of midweek small groups in which bible study played a significant part. Some also mentioned a regular personal practice of bible reading, with two participants, Alex and Jeremy, specifically in the habit of reading the Bible in One Year, a resource originating from Holy Trinity Brompton[113]. As I have already mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, St. Peter's had also provided leadership- and work-related courses and conferences and courses in past years, all of which had had a strong biblical component. Other sources of biblical inspiration came from outside regular church life. Brian credited the LICC Executive Toolbox programme with drawing his attention to a passage in Jeremiah where the prophet visits the house of a potter. Kath referred to her time teaching in a Christian school where the whole educational enterprise was explicitly carried out within a Christian framework and during which time she had attended a conference for Christian teachers. Similarly, Mary had encountered the idea of Jesus as a "Level 5" leader at a Christian conference.

So, many, if not most, of my participants had been exposed to bible-based teaching and some had received such teaching with an explicit work focus. The result of this was that they were already at the time of the interviews able to relate their work to the Bible to a degree. In doing so, one could argue that they had been engaging in informal theological reflection, in some cases with striking results, such as Daniel's reflection on his Pauline-like conversion. This is not to say that their processes met all of Dunlop et al.'s criteria for fully developed theological reflection, but the data does suggest that they already had plenty of raw material, in terms of Bible knowledge and informal reflection, with which to build a more mature practice in the future.

[112] Esther 4:14 (NIVUK).
[113] https://bibleinoneyear.org/ Retrieved May 18, 2021.

5.5 Communities where reflection takes place

In this final section before my conclusion I shall consider what my data says about the context in which theological reflection on workplace discipleship does and could take place in order to foster the experience of work as co-operation with God. While reflection was taking place to a degree in midweek church-based groups, I highlight workplace Christian groups as communities with great potential in this area that is often understated in the practical literature.

Dunlop et al. in their conclusions emphasise the importance of community for theological reflection: '… the most common mechanism for reflecting theologically is conversation with others'. For this reason, they commend to church leaders the potential of 'one to one and small group work in the life of the community' (Dunlop et al., 2021, p. 319). In the practical literature this is echoed, for example, in Walton, who devotes a whole chapter in *The Reflective Disciple* to the topic of 'Christian Communities in which Disciples Grow' (Walton, 2012, pp. 143-181). In both cases, the primary community that they have in mind appears to be the church community, and for many of my participants this was the context in which their informal reflection seemed to be taking place.

We saw earlier how Daniel had many contexts in which he was able to discuss faith with other Christians. In fact, most of my participants were members of some kind of small group in which Bible study was a component. Many talked about the support and encouragement that they received in such groups, as well as things that they learned that were applicable to workplace discipleship. Brian, for example, spoke about how small groups had been helpful to him:

> Well, partly from a prayer point of view. - [I: Yeah] - prayer and support and particularly around particular issues. ...
>
> And then I think probably also in terms of discussion or consideration of matters affecting work. And then partly also the closer relationship that you have with ... with people in a life group[114]. … (Brian)

While the kind of Bible study in which my participants were engaged in their small groups might not have been textbook theological reflection[115], comments like those above demonstrate the potential of small groups as a context for such reflection.

Having said that, my research raises the question of whether there might be particular benefit in engaging in reflection along with people who share the same, or similar, work. Mark Greene, in

[114] 'Life group' was the title given to small midweek groups at St. Peter's.
[115] Most small groups were broadly using an inductive method that begins with Scripture and tries to apply it to life situations rather than beginning with experience and exploring it in the light of Scripture and Christian tradition.

Supporting Christians at Work, suggests that church leaders consider facilitating 'job-specific groups where people in similar jobs or at similar levels can speak to people who understand' (Greene, 2001, p. 23) and the desirability of this was borne out by the experience of several of my participants. Brian, for example, in addition to his small group, particularly appreciated being in a prayer partnership with another senior IT professional. Similarly, Isla placed great value on her friendship with other Christian teachers because 'they understand being a Christian in that profession'.

Whether or not such job-specific groups would provide an especially fertile environment for theological reflection on workplace discipleship would be an interesting subject for further research. As it happens, no such groups to my knowledge existed in the participants' churches at the time. Nor did any of the participants seem to be actively engaged with Christian professional networks or parachurch organizations operating in their area of work[116] and only one of them was regularly involved in a Christian group at their current place of work, with busyness cited by three participants as the main barrier to involvement.

The one participant who was regularly involved in a workplace Christian group at the time of the interviews was management consultant Harry, who reported that he felt that he had had 'clear words from God […] that he's particularly interested in me being involved in the Christian network […].' Harry's description of the group and its activities, while not explicitly including all of Dunlop et al.'s criteria for theological reflection (Dunlop et al., 2021, p. 312), does suggest many of the features, such as 'openness to a divine agent', connection with everyday life and a seeking for transformation, are already in place:

> It's it's not a church in the conventional sense, in terms of building but it is a church in the sense that we're lots of people with a shared heart for God and um actually would like to help people, help point people to God, to empower them ... well, help them to search out their gifting and and understand their calling from God which is helping them to look to God and hear from God, um, and empower them then to live that out. (Harry)

There is enough here to suggest that this is a community that could provide a fruitful setting for theological reflection. What is more, a community of workplace colleagues would seem to offer a unique opportunity to practice attentiveness to 'see what God is doing' in one's workplace alongside other people who are scanning the same terrain.

[116] For example, the Association of Christian Teachers. See https://christian-teachers.org.uk/ Retrieved April 10, 2022.

Alongside the experience of Harry, there is strong theoretical support for theological reflection about work taking place in a workplace community, and not just in a church setting, in the research and writing of David Clark. In his book *The Kingdom at Work Project* (Clark, 2014), Clark argues for 'a communal approach to mission in the workplace' (the subtitle of the book), whereby workplaces are transformed from within by communities that both manifest and look out for the kingdom gifts of 'life, liberation, love and learning'. Central to this transformation are the practices of discernment and intervention, where discernment is specifically of 'the presence of the gifts of the kingdom community' (Clark, 2014, p. 73)[117] and meets most, if not all, of Dunlop et al.'s criteria for theological reflection.

Clark's vision is broad in scope and the process he describes is very detailed, but it can be seen as a sophisticated practice-based version of Walmsley's (following Bosch, Newbigin and Williams) 'seeing what God is up to and joining in' in the workplace (Walmsley, 2020, p. 438). It takes very seriously a holistic missional approach to Christian presence in the workplace and stresses the role of community discernment. In relation to the present thesis Clark's approach provides a robust framework for connecting Christian faith and everyday work, with a clear place for practices of attentiveness and reflection. Crucially it does so with a focus on the workplace community that is often lacking in the practical workplace discipleship literature. While that literature often emphasises the need for the support and encouragement of other Christians, and sometimes underscores the value of engaging with Christians in the same line of work, it has much less to say about the value of workplace Christian groups. This is somewhat curious given the potential of such groups for encouraging communal mission above and beyond individual discipleship in the workplace, potential that we can see clearly realised in the case of Harry, but also latent in the experience of several other participants.

The underplaying of workplace groups in the practical literature and lack of research into them is also curious given the widespread occurrence of such groups. Transform Work UK, an organization supporting Christians 'living out their faith in effective workplace ministry' (Transform Work UK, 2022c) lists what must be hundreds of workplace Christian groups on their website. A search for academic articles in this area suggests that there is a dearth of research into the practices and effectiveness of workplace Christian groups in encouraging Christian discipleship[118]. However, my research data strongly hints that when it comes to encouraging the practices of attentiveness and of

[117] The book launched a project, about which more can be found on the St. Peter's Saltley Trust website (Saltley Trust, 2022)

[118] Most current research into workplace Christian groups seems to be carried out from an organizational or human resources perspective, for example looking at the impact of anti-discrimination legislation.

theological reflection by workers about their work, workplace Christian groups should not be overlooked as a setting for such practices. Indeed, church leaders may be serving their congregants better in regard to workplace discipleship by encouraging and resourcing them for theological reflection in the setting of a workplace group or network, where one exists, than in a church group.

5.6 Conclusion, summary of implications for practice and suggestions for future research

The particular contribution to academic knowledge that this thesis makes is the highlighting of the dimension of proximity, or closeness, and its salience for Christians' experience of work. I have argued that the participants in my research connected their everyday work with their Christian faith most strongly, and experienced their work as co-operation with God, when they perceived themselves and their work to be close to God and God's purposes. To begin with, seeing God's purposes being achieved at the micro level of everyday close-up interactions with beneficiaries tends to be more salient than the perceptually more distant macro level of an enterprise's overall activity and purposes. By drawing on the findings of social science research, particularly organizational psychology, I have given an explanation of this phenomenon that adds nuance to theological accounts of work that tend to overlook the significance of organizational levels.

This experience of proximity to God and God's purposes was intensified for some participants by having perceived experiences of God's presence and activity at work that led them to frame their work even more vividly as personal co-operation with a personal God. The ability to perceive such close encounters with God was facilitated both by prior expectations about how God works in the world and by practices that helped people to 'see', and in some cases to 'hear', God at work. In this thesis I have connected theological accounts of special providence with social science accounts of spiritual practices to give a fresh perspective on how Christians may experience their work as co-operation with God.

Several implications for practice arise from the research. First, efforts to teach a theology of work that helps laypeople to see what they do every day as being part of God's mission in the world will be strengthened by recognising the different levels, from micro to macro, at which this happens. Second, workplace disciples, especially those in less faith-friendly work environments, may need to be helped to understand how God's mission is not limited to evangelism and the conversion of individuals. Third, there is a particular need to explain how doctrines like common grace and the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world can account for ethical behaviour in individuals and organizations outside the church and how this need not be perceived as perplexing or threatening to Christian witness. Fourth, the category of vocation remains problematic and potentially confusing when applied to particular jobs or careers and the way it is used in the literature of everyday faith

could usefully be revisited. Fifth, there is great potential in the practices of attentiveness and theological reflection for helping people to experience their work as co-operation with God. Finally, workplace groups deserve greater attention as contexts in which such practices might be developed.

Returning to the limitations of the research raised in chapter 2, I would suggest that none of these implications for practice, nor the more theoretical findings of this research, necessarily applies only to Christians in senior roles in professional occupations like most of the participants in this study. In fact, it seems plausible that focussing on micro level connections to God and God's purposes might be even more salient to those with less influence over the overall culture of their organization and its impact on wider society. It also seems reasonable to expect, however, that the organizational levels perspective would be less significant in much smaller organizations than those represented by most of the participants in this study or for the self-employed. In such cases one would expect the distinction between micro, mezzo and macro level connections with God and God's purposes to blur or even disappear. An exception might be people, like self-employed consultant Edward in this study, who provide goods or services to large organizations. For them, perceived mezzo and macro level connections with God and God's purposes might exist by extension via the operations of the client organization.

The significance of organizational level and one's position within an organization is one area where further research with participants from different sectors, organization sizes and levels of seniority, choice and efficacy would enable comparisons to be made with this study and could yield fruitful results. The same could be said for further research into cohorts with a wider ethnic diversity or from different denominational backgrounds or spiritual traditions, all of which have a potential impact on the way a Christian connects their faith with their experience of work. One final possible avenue would be action research to explore the impact on Christians in secular employment of sustained spiritual practices of attention and reflection on their workplace experience. Such research could take place within a church setting or perhaps, as suggested in section 5.5, in the setting of the workplace itself.

There is, then, much more to explore in the Christian experience of daily work in its many dimensions, not least the dimension highlighted in this thesis, of proximity to God and God's purposes. What seems clear is that lived Christian experience in the workplace is set to be a topic of interest for academy and church, as well as for the organizations in which Christians work, for many years to come.

Appendix 1 – Participant Information Sheet

September 2018

Participant information sheet

Christian discipleship and daily work: how do British Christians make the connection?

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The workplace is often seen as somewhere where it can be difficult to live out the Christian faith in daily life and yet for many Christians it is one of the most significant contexts for their discipleship.

The aim of the study is to explore Christians' experiences of connecting their faith and their daily work and to understand what helps to make this connection. The research is part of my studies towards a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology at the University of Chester. I hope that the study will play a part in helping the church to understand the experiences of Christians in the workplace and so to equip them better for discipleship in that context.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you have responded to an advertisement inviting people to participate in this study.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This will not prejudice your pastoral care or church involvement in any way.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign the consent form and complete a simple three-question questionnaire. The questionnaire will only be used for sampling purposes if more than 15 people are willing to participate in the study. In that case, 15 will be selected This will give your consent for the researcher (James Leach) to contact you and invite you to be interviewed about how you connect your faith and your work. You can choose where you would like the interview to take place. The interview is likely to take between one and two hours. After this first interview you may be invited to take part in a follow up interview which will take approximately one hour. You will also be asked whether you are willing to participate in a focus group of 6 to 8 people to discuss the preliminary findings of the study. This will take place at Saint James Centre and will last approximately one and a half hours. Consent to be interviewed does not commit you to take part in the focus group.

With your permission, interviews and the focus group discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will be given a copy of your transcribed interview to check for accuracy. At that point you may request any section of the interview to be excluded from the writing up of the research. Transcriptions will be anonymised so that you and your workplace are not identifiable (see confidentiality section below).

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

You may have concerns about confidentiality. Please see the section above and the section on confidentiality below. It is possible that pastoral issues (e.g. difficulties at work) may come up during the interview(s). It is important to be clear that the interview is for research purposes and is not to be seen as a pastoral conversation. If pastoral concerns do arise, you will be referred, if appropriate and with your permission, to one of the researcher's clergy colleagues for pastoral follow up after the interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You may welcome the opportunity to share and discuss your experience of discipleship in the workplace. By taking part, you will be contributing to a greater understanding of discipleship in this context, which will hopefully help the church in its equipping of disciples in the future.

What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact:

Professor Wayne Morris

Chair of the Ethics Committee

Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies

University of Chester

Parkgate Road

Chester

CH1 4BJ

w.morris@chester.ac.uk

Tel. 01244 511066

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential so that only the researcher carrying out the research will have access to such information.

Interview and focus group recordings will be kept securely by me. Transcripts will be 'coded' for anonymity so that no names or identifying details will appear in them. They will be used by me for the purpose of my research and kept securely by me for a period of not less than ten years, as prescribed by the Data Protection Act. Participant list and identifier codes will be kept securely separately from transcripts. Interview data will be quoted verbatim when the research is written up, but pseudonyms will be used unless you explicitly request (via email or letter) that your own name be used. I will not disclose your participation in the study except by your written consent (via email or letter) Transcript data may be shared with my supervisor during the writing up process, but any such data will be anonymised and kept securely.

Prior to the focus group, participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality form stating that they will respect the confidentiality of the group discussion.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The study will be written up as a dissertation which will form part of my doctoral portfolio.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am organising and funding this research myself as part of my studies for a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology at the University of Chester.

The involvement of participants in interviews and the focus group is entirely voluntary. No payments of any kind will be made to participants.

Who may I contact for further information?

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

James Leach

james.leach@saintjames.org.uk [this is my work email address will already either be known or easily accessible to participants]

Thank you for your interest in this research.

Appendix 2 – Participant Consent Form

Consent form

Title of Project: **Christian Discipleship and Daily Work**

Name of Researcher: **James Leach**

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated September 2018 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my church involvement being affected. ☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of Person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 3 – Interview Guide v. 3

N.B. Participants will have filled out a 3-question pre-interview questionnaire used for a 'purposive sampling frame' (King & Horrocks, 2010, 35) in order to have some gender balance, a variety of length of Christian experience (i.e. how long the participants would say they have been a Christian) and a variety of work sectors.

Preparatory

Explain the nature of the research – exploring the way Christians make connections between their faith and their daily work

Explain anonymity and right to withdraw

Explain role as researcher vs. role as pastor

FAITH BACKGROUND

1. Tell me a bit about how you came to be a Christian?
2. What part would you say your faith played in your life generally?

WORK - DESCRIPTIVE

3. Tell me about the work you do

   Prompts:

   - What is your current job title?
   - How long have you been doing this job for?
   - Describe your current work to me. What do you do?
   - How would you describe your work environment?
     - Where do you work?
     - Size of organization?
     - How many people do you work with?

WORK – EVALUATIVE (IMPLICIT FAITH / WORK CONNECTIONS)

4. What do you love about your work?

   Prompt: What aspects of your work do you find most rewarding?

   Prompt: What aspects of your work do you find most meaningful? OR When does your work feel most meaningful? OR Can you think of an episode or an aspect of your work that feels especially meaningful?

   Probe: What was first attractive about this job to you? What did you see in the job

5. What part would you say your work plays in your life as a whole?

6. What aspects of your work do you find most challenging?

   Prompt: ethical issues? What causes stress?

EXPLICIT FAITH / WORK CONNECTIONS

7. In what ways do you feel that your faith and your work connect?

   Prompt: In what different ways do you feel you express your faith in and through your work?

   Prompts: observable behaviours; attitudes; motivations; Christian groups; praying at / for work

   Prompt: are there ways that you approach your work differently from your colleagues because you are a Christian?

   Prompt: what, if any, is the 'official' line at work on expressing faith in the workplace?

   Probe: How important would it be / is it for you to be able to express your faith at work?

8. Can you think of any occasions when you have felt a conflict between your faith and your work? Could you tell me a bit about that?

   Prompt: Ethical issues; work / life balance; ability to engage with church activities / disciplines

9. How do you think God sees your work?

HOW CONNECTIONS HAVE BEEN MADE

10. What (if anything) has helped you to find / make connections between your Christian faith and your work?

    Prompts: e.g. Scripture, books, spiritual disciplines, preaching / teaching, courses, conferences, other Christians, mentors

    Prompt: Are there any Bible books, characters or passages that you feel are relevant to your work? What are they?

    Probe: How do they connect with your work?

    Probe: how have they impacted the way you connect your faith with your work?

    Prompt: Is there anything you are doing at the moment to help you make connections between your faith and your work? E.g. reading, courses, groups

    Probe: How is that helping?

11. Is there anything else you would like to say about your work and your faith and the way that they connect?

Thanks

I'll let you have a transcript to check that

Would you be willing to take part in a focus group (probably early next year) to check on preliminary findings?

Appendix 4 – Faith / Work Integration Frameworks

1. 6 Ms (LICC)

- Models godly character
- Makes good work
- Ministers grace and love
- Moulds culture
- Mouthpiece for truth and justice
- Messenger of the gospel

(Greene, 2014; Greene et al., 2015)

2. The Integration Profile (Miller/Princeton)

- **Ethics** accents doing the right the good, and the fitting. Its two sub-orientations are:
    - Self (personal values, ethical standards) and
    - Community (business ethics, social responsibility).
- **Expression** looks at verbal and non-verbal communication of faith at work. Its two sub-orientations are:
    - Verbal (discussion of faith, evangelization) and
    - Non-verbal (symbols, attire, or actions).
- **Experience** involves questions of vocation, calling, meaning, and purpose. Its two sub-orientations are:
    - Outcome (work as means, purpose/meaning) and
    - Process/Activity (work as end, calling).
- **Enrichment** focuses on practices such as healing, prayer, meditation, and transformation. Its two sub-orientations are:
    - Individual (devotional practices, individual prayer) and
    - Group (small groups, worship communities).

(Miller et al., 2019)

3. Faith at Work Scale (Lynn et al.)

TABLE I Dimensions and indicators of Judaeo-Christian workplace religion

Dimension	Indicator
Called to relationship	Aware of God's presence in the workplace
	God guides at work
	Co-creates with God
	Integrates work and faith
	Trusts God and receives strength and peace
Called to meaning	Sees work as part of a calling, a mission
	Attributes work talents as gifts from God
	Pursues healthy work habits*
	Personal identity is not defined by occupation*
	Is competent and applies gifts in service to others
	Learns and grows in skill and wisdom
Called to community	Cares for coworkers who reflect God's image
	Witnesses for Christ in word and deed
	Suffers for Christ and loves sacrificially
	Reserves time for family, church, friends, and community*
Called to holiness	Consistently ethical even when challenged*
	Aware of injustice and acts to correct it
	Practices morality and encourages others to as well
Called to giving	Sees work as worship, prayer, and a gift to God
	Contributes to the common good through work
	Stewards rather than owns material things so all can benefit
	Conserves natural resources out of love for others*

* Removed from the final scale after psychometric testing.

TABLE V Faith at Work Scale core dimensions and items

Dimension	***Item***	
	Abbreviation	***Complete wording***
Relationship	Aware	I sense God's presence while I work
	Partnering	I view my work as a partnership with God
	Meaningful	I think of my work as having eternal significance
	Integrated	I see connections between my worship and my work
	Coping	My faith helps me deal with difficult work relationships
Meaning	Called	I view my work as a mission from God
	Equipped	I sense that God empowers me to do good things at work
	Diligent	I pursue excellence in my work because of my faith
	Growing	I believe God wants me to develop my abilities and talents at work
Community	Accepting	I view my coworkers as being made in the image of God
	Witnessing	My coworkers know I am a person of faith
	Caring	I sacrificially love the people I work with
Holiness	Moral	When I am with others and alone, I practice purity in my work habits
Giving	Just	I view my work as part of God's plan to care for the needs of people
	Stewarding	I view myself as a caretaker not an owner of my money, time and resources

(Lynn et al., 2009, 236)

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