Dear Reader,

Each issue of Mission Frontiers is in some key ways a “continued story.”

This time two mission leaders talk about a fundamental transformation that is essential for the U.S. church. Lay people are being offered a superficial religious way of life, they say, but are still restless and, in any truly meaningful way, unemployable. How does this relate to our continued story?

Patt says the DNA of the U.S. church is what ends up on the mission field. And that is all too true – the weaknesses of the church here are often the weaknesses of the church there. We are offering (or achieving) little more than a part-time religion, whether here or there, that barely addresses either major earthly problems or the Kingdom meaning of daily work.

Really, many major problems are mainly unaddressed by today’s Christian movement even at its best.

Why? Because we are still chewing on the toughest and most difficult question of all: “What does God want me to do?”

A traditional answer is not enough, as John Eldredge puts it in his neat little book, The Epic:

Not the Christianity of proper church attendance and good manners. Not the Christianity of holier-than-thou self-righteousness and dogmatism (p. 14).

What is needed is for millions of Christians to move beyond part-time Christianity. What churches call people to do for and through the church after hours is good but not good enough. Our whole lives, including our 40-hour workweek, need to make sense in the global battle for the glory of God in all nations.

Whoever you are, dear reader, if you have chosen to fully follow Jesus as Lord of your life, you no doubt hope and pray and seek for “your utmost to be His highest.” You should certainly hope that the main hours of your week would significantly lead to His glorification.

Your money or your life!

We all know that the money we earn, whatever our work, can be used to glorify God — if we do not use it all up on ourselves.

If you do not feel called to be a missionary, would you be willing nevertheless to adopt the income level of a missionary and set aside the rest of your income for strategic investment in His Cause?

In that case you can call up your favorite mission society and discover the financial level of a missionary in your situation and region. You can then deliberately limit your personal expenses, and adjust your lifestyle, to that arbitrary level. You may have little left over, or you may have a great deal.

Almost immediately will arise the perplexing question of how you should use the extra money accumulated — how to use it in a way that will be of maximum value to the Kingdom. This will take homework and time to figure out.

But an even more significant question is “How do I maximize the impact of the very work I do in my 40-hour week?” Sermons don’t address this issue very often.

A Harvard professor commented, “If the God of the Intelligent Design people exists, He must be a divine sadist who creates parasites that blind millions of people.”

You could switch jobs to become a missionary yourself — and let others’ excess income support you. That is a well-understood option. Obviously not all believers can do that! From where would their support come?

Right now missionaries are about one out of every 800 Christians in this country. That means Christians give a theoretical average of 1/8 of one percent of their income to missions.

We do need missionaries, but...

But becoming a missionary (although we desperately need more!) nevertheless does not help answer the question of what might be the Kingdom significance of the daily work of lay believers, the 799 who are not missionaries. I am not speaking of the many nice things which believers can do “after hours.” I’m speaking of their 40-hour week.

Here is the dilemma: millions of believers are caught in a job that may seem humdrum, meaningless, or oppressive, or all three. They can’t easily get a different job, and in any case they are not at all clear about what other job would be a greater contribution to the Kingdom.

Young people, however, might be urged to seek out a strategic job — not one that would pay the best, or please the most — but one which will mean the most to the Kingdom. How about microbiology? I say this because in all the world the greatest threat to life, liberty and happiness is the colossal giant of disease. To care for the sick is important. To conquer the disease germs themselves is much more strategic.

TIME (May 29) says that the healthcare industry in the USA soaks up two thousand billion dollars a year ($2 trillion). Yet, within this mammoth healing operation, only a very small percentage is devoted to disease sources, either for sickness in this country or for diseases more common abroad.

Why so little? Because sick people

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provide the $2 trillion. They are not paying for eradication of disease pathogens but simply for healing.

Now, this concern for eradication of pathogens must seem like a very indirect form of mission. However, one of the most stubborn obstacles to evangelism of educated people in our world today is the mis-impression that our faith credits God with creating disease. Listen again to my often-quoted statement from a Harvard professor, “If the God of the Intelligent Design people exists, He must be a divine sadist who creates parasites that blind millions of people.”

Thus, if Christian institutions and Christian missions do not become involved in recognizing “evil design” and in fighting against disease pathogens in the Name of Christ, that lapse will continue to allow God to be misrepresented. It also allows millions of precious believers around the world – mothers, fathers, children, infants – to continue to be subjected to avoidable yet dreadful suffering due to conquerable diseases!

Is our $2 trillion annual commitment to healing the sick blinding us to the need to eradicate causal pathogens? At a Christian college graduation I attended last week, out of 420 graduates there were only 24 in biology, chemistry or biochemistry, and none specifically in microbiology.

My point: it is not irrelevant how we earn a living. What we get paid is in exchange for what we do, but what we do is as important as what we get paid. Jobs are not all the same in this respect. Making a good living by manufacturing Beanie Babies is not as crucial as exterminating Hepatitis B and C. In a 1636 sermon entitled “The Christian’s Calling,” John Cotton said,

The Christian would no sooner have his sins forgiven than to have his life established in a warrantable calling.

It seems certain that the “new shape of the church” must include,

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds … not giving up meeting together (Heb. 10:24-25).

Note: we must understand an expanded definition of “good deeds,” meaning the most strategic causes within our grasp affecting the glory of God. If we meet regularly with other believers to seek better ways of “love and good deeds”, could this take the advance of the Kingdom more seriously?