

# ***God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement***

**by David W. Miller**

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**Reviewed by David W. Gill**

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David Miller spent 16 years as an executive in the USA and England with IBM, State Street, and HSBC. He earned a PhD in ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary and taught at Yale for five years before coming to his current position as professor and director of the Faith & Work Initiative at Princeton University. He is also the co-founder (1999) and director of the Avodah Institute ([www.AvodahInstitute.com](http://www.AvodahInstitute.com)). "Avodah," he likes to point out, is a Hebrew word that means "work," "worship," and "service" --- a rich overlapping brew that is embraced by pretty much everyone in the faith at work movement.

Miller divides the history into three phases. First is the era of the Protestant Social Gospel and Catholic social encyclicals that more-or-less ended with the two great World Wars. The second era was roughly 1946 to 1985 when the "ministry of the laity" was ascendant. Third, since the mid-1980s we have seen a huge and exponentially growing proliferation of faith at work and marketplace ministry movements, publications, and programs. Miller points out that the faith at work movement has developed mostly outside of and parallel to the churches and only recently has that begun to change.

In Miller's narrative you will encounter Walter Rauschenbusch, the YMCA, Charles Sheldon, Bruce Barton, the Gideons, Frank Buchman and Moral Rearmament, the Christian Business Men's Committee (founded 1930 in Chicago), R. G. LeTourneau, Russell Conwell, Elton Trueblood, Hendrik Kraemer, Mark Gibbs, Demos Shakarian, Howard Butt, and Sam Shoemaker, among other fascinating figures. Around 1985 the contemporary faith at work movement began in earnest, according to Miller, centered on a quest for integration. Earlier movements often (not always) were weak or uninterested in a biblical theology of work and focused more on fellowship, evangelism, and personal discipleship challenges in one's career. Miller argues that the integrative project tends to fall into four foci: ethics, evangelism, experience, and enrichment.

Miller scolds the churches, theologians, and seminaries for failing to address the theology of work, for the lack of sermons on, and liturgical affirmations of, the workplace realities of both Scripture and parishioners' lives. With modest exceptions (Regent College, Gordon-Conwell's Mockler Center, Fuller's DePree Center) the seminaries aren't doing much to change things, Miller wrote (in 2007). Miller reviews the emerging publications, web sites, corporate

chaplains, and other non-church drivers of the movement. He returns to his four “E’s” and promotes this as the appropriate framework for moving forward.

*God at Work* is an exciting and valuable study and warrants this review even six years after its initial publication. There is a lot to learn and a lot to think about. A lot has happened during the past six years and it would be great if Miller would do a revised, augmented, updated edition. I am not crazy about his four “E’s” framework. Seems kind of forced to me. And I also have to add that I don’t see my own fifty-year pilgrimage (or that of my friends and associates) reflected in Miller’s account --- and yet our passion for faith at work has been second to none. For my friends and me, the foundations of our passion were first of all the radical discipleship of the Bible itself. What did the Lordship of Jesus Christ mean for our university studies, our politics, our racial attitudes, our work and career choices?

The Christian business groups and executive prayer groups we met didn’t seem to care at all about this kind of discipleship. The Anabaptist tradition (John Howard Yoder’s writings for example) and the Black church (John Perkins for example) were much more inspiring to us with their holistic discipleship including its economic and social dimensions. Then there was Francis Schaeffer (and the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Regent College, Harry Blamires) and the pursuit of an all-embracing “Christian mind” and “world-view.” My mentor Jacques Ellul, despite his negative theology of labor, had organized “associations of protestant professionals” for study and mutual support in Bordeaux back in the 1950s. These were our foundations for the quest for integration. We started a graduate school program next to our alma mater, the University of California, which became the obsession of my life for 14 years. Thousands of people came through our courses and attended our conferences on the integration of faith and business, law, science, the arts, etc..

I have no doubt that the authors and movements David Miller mentions were and are extremely important. But he only covers part of the story. Many (most?) of the figures and movements mentioned by Miller were pretty disconnected and independent. The bottom line is that the faith at work movement, which surely exists and is gathering momentum more every year, is a God-thing. Nobody is in charge. There is no central headquarters and no uncontested set of purposes or strategies. It is a movement of God’s Spirit. But we should be very grateful for the large swathe of this movement captured by David Miller’s book.