

An Intellectual/Professional Autobiography of David W. Gill

(updated April 25, 2023)

For those interested, here, in ten pages, are the rough contours of my intellectual/professional autobiography. The complete story is in my 450-page *What Are You Doing About It? The Memoir of a Marginal Activist* (Wipf & Stock, 2022). This is the story of how I came to the convictions, perspectives, and activities which have been central in my life and work. In my book title, I don't mean "marginal" in a pejorative, negative sense; it's about location, about living and working on the edge rather than in the mainstream.

I have an aversion to labels. You could say that I grew up as a sectarian Christian in the free church, Anabaptist, believers' church, or "restorationist" mode. Because I am not a separatist or anti-intellectual I can't be called a "Fundamentalist" though I affirm the fundamentals of classic, orthodox Christian faith. For many years I was ok with the label "Evangelical," and I am still in accord with the core theology (as far as it goes) but I cannot stand the intimate marriage of so many so-called Evangelicals to a right wing, nationalist, consumerist, and often violent orientation. Those are serious departures from the teaching of Jesus and Scripture. It didn't used to be that way. I am not a conventional Liberal in politics or theology—but neither am I a Conservative. What I am really is a passionate, Jesus-loving, Bible-teaching disciple in the worldwide "Body of Christ." I don't see how it is possible to be that kind of person without becoming a kind of "radical, counter-cultural, neighbor-loving, community-building, global visioned, thoughtful servant and ambassador from the kingdom of God." That is what I aspire to be. My preferred religious label is "follower/disciple of Jesus." Professionally, I have had a long career as a professor of Christian ethics and professor of business ethics. I have been a busy writer and am the author of ten books. My website www.davidwgill.org provides details.

Growing Up PB in the Bay Area

I grew up in Oakland and San Leandro in Northern California. My father, Walter Gill, spent his whole career as an accountant at Crown Zellerbach (a large paper business) corporate headquarters in San Francisco. My dad was not especially bold or ambitious but he was a stickler for accuracy, hard work, and uncompromised values and ethics. My stay-at-home mom, Vivian Wurz Gill, along with my dad, made my upbringing a joyful, positive, warm, supportive experience so I naturally bought into their faith, values, and ethics as well. I always had jobs and made my own money from mowing lawns, washing cars, delivering newspapers, pumping gas (high school job), and factory labor (college job) from my youth onward. Sports were always a huge part of my life and I can hardly remember a day that I got home from school before 6 pm because I was at football, track, or baseball practice and competition. In high school especially, football taught me to sacrifice for the team—and track taught me to be tenacious on my own. Music was also a big part of our life, lots of piano and singing in my house. I bought a guitar and paid for my own guitar lessons starting at age 14 or so and had a lot of fun with that until about age 30 when I decided to put it away and focus on other interests.

My parents raised me and my three sisters in a small Protestant Christian sect called the Plymouth Brethren. Garrison Keillor is the most famous "alumnus" of this group; F.F. Bruce, Stacey Woods, Jim Wallis, Tom Skinner, Al Erisman, Ruth Hayhoe, Katherine Hayhoe, David Horner, Ward & Laurel Gasque, Carl Armerding, Sharon Gallagher, Jim Houston, Paul Stevens, Dale Ryan, Don Tinder, and Bill Pannell are some other names of current or former "PBs." Plymouth Brethren were instrumental in founding InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Regent College (Vancouver BC) and many other organizations and movements. The PBs were a renewal movement based in England that started in the 1820s and spread throughout the world.

Like many renewal movements and Christian sects through history, the PBs felt the established churches were too cold, formalistic, and accommodated to the culture around them. They yearned to get back to the simplicity and vitality they saw in the New Testament. They got rid of all hierarchy, bureaucracy, and tradition, and tried to make the Bible alone their constitution and authority. Since they did not see anything about vestments and choirs in the New Testament, they prohibited them. They believed that all Christians had spiritual "gifts" they should be

prepared to exercise at the prompting of God's Spirit—and rejected the idea of a special class of clergy over the laity. All Christians are ministers, they believed.

There are many similarities between the Plymouth Brethren movement of the 19th century and the Quaker movement of the 17th century. I was the fourth generation on my father's side (and third on my mother's side) to be in the narrow, closed, "Exclusive" PB movement (same as Garrison Keillor, Al Erisman, and Dale Ryan). The upside to this story is that I memorized vast amounts of the Bible as I grew up and I accepted without question the idea that whatever my day job might be in the future the most important thing was to deepen my knowledge and understanding of the Bible, theology, the history of Christianity, etc., and be prepared to teach it as well as practice it all in my life. Although my dad was an accountant, he spent his evenings studying Bible commentaries and theological books so he could be prepared to participate in the teaching and pastoral leadership of our church ("the Meeting," we called it) in Oakland. My dad had a bigger theological library than most pastors I have known. It was assumed by everyone, including me, that one day I would be such a leader as my father, grandfather, and great grandfather had been. Just a little pressure there! But I really didn't mind.

By the time I was 18 I was asked occasionally to preach; by the time I was 20 I initiated and led what became a weekly teaching/preaching/publishing outreach at the Alameda County Juvenile Hall (1966-71), often preaching sermons to 300 juvenile detainees and leading weekly evening Bible studies for a dozen or two of the older guys at the Senior Boys Ranch. This is why I say that I have been a teacher for fifty years (since 1966). By the time I was 22 I occasionally led the celebration of Communion/the Lord's Supper and would be invited to guest preach when I was in other cities wherever the PBs had a church. I was mentored by my father and some other older veterans. I began as a teenager acquiring and reading lots of books on theology, ethics, church history, and commentaries on the Bible. This was our PB version of a seminary education. By the time I was out of this church group (1971) I was too deeply involved in my academic career track to be able to go back and do a conventional seminary education, although I often wished I could have done so.

Like many little "perfectionist" movements, the Exclusive PBs were most critical of other churches, especially those most like themselves (other branches of the Exclusive Brethren and the "Open Brethren" were always viewed as the worst alternatives). This is an important part of the story because none of us in our church could or would ever go to a Christian or Catholic or religious school of any kind (or even participate in any student religious group)—all of us were steered to public schools and universities where you would not be risking any exposure to "false teaching" and where you would always know where you stood! This often strikes people as humorous or ironic but as a result I grew up to be a passionate, radical Christian in a pluralistic, diverse world—like UC Berkeley which I entered as a freshman in the fall of 1964. My takeaway for life was that one's faith and values are essentially worthless if you only adhere to them in some homogeneous "huddle" of like minds. It's all about being present in a positive, constructive way in a larger community where we embrace difference while staying true to our own foundation. Our biblical lingo was that we were "in the world" but "not of the world" (John 17).

Berkeley, Francis Schaeffer, and Jesus People

Berkeley and Oakland in the Sixties and Seventies were in a constant ferment: Free Speech, Black Panthers, Vietnam War, counter-culture, feminism, the environmental movement, etc.. Since I was not raised with a nationalistic, conservative, or reactionary political ideology, I was delighted to be in the middle of all this questioning of authority. I read a lot of books of Christian apologetics and was happy to argue for the Christian faith at any opportunity. But I was also increasingly committed to the goal of integrating my Christian faith and values with my studies and thinking. In my personal/theological life I believed in a God who cared about and acted in human history in some mysterious way; but in my history major at Berkeley no one ever talked much about religion, still less God, having any role in history. After I graduated from Cal (1968) I began teaching public high school and junior high school for four years and did my MA part-time over three years at SF State (1971). My MA thesis was on "Contemporary Christian Philosophies of History: The Problem of God's Role in History." My thesis committee did not have any Christian or religious believers on it as far as I could tell.

My larger project was to learn how to create and articulate an integrated, constructive Christian perspective in a diverse, pluralistic, marketplace of ideas. I was getting pretty pumped up about the possibilities and I was very exasperated with Christians who were content with dualistic, segregated minds and lives where faith and work and thought never met each other. My college friends and I were inspired a lot by Francis Schaeffer's swashbuckling writings attempting to articulate and promote a robust Christian worldview. About this time, I was also formally excommunicated by my Plymouth Brethren church for getting involved with the "Christian World Liberation Front" —an exciting movement of thoughtful, activist, radical "Jesus People" in Berkeley. In particular I worked with Sharon Gallagher as co-editor of *Right On/Radix* magazine from 1971-73 and also organized "The Crucible: A Forum for Radical Christian Studies," a counter-cultural Christian study center inspired by L'Abri.

In my longer memoir I write about sleeping in Flamingo Park while covering the 1972 Democratic Convention in Miami Beach with my *Right On* press pass . . . about interviewing and following Edwin Hawkins and the modern Gospel music movement beginning with "O Happy Day" . . . about our interviews and interactions with Bobby Seale, Elaine Brown, and the Oakland-based Black Panthers . . . about sitting in in Senator Alan Cranston's office to protest the B-1 bomber . . . about our amazing Monday Night Meetings and a whole lot more.

During the early 1970s I was increasingly convinced that it was not nearly so important for Christians to argue intellectually for their faith as it was to demonstrate ethically what their faith and values required. Not just "talk it" but "walk it." This is why I migrated from engineering to history and finally to ethics as my field of study. What's the right thing to do about Vietnam? about the Black Panthers' issues and demands? about free speech and advocacy at the state university? Ethics is the field that explores this kind of questioning. I knew that's where I wanted to end up. It wasn't just a theoretical interest but a practical one. What do Jesus and Scripture require of us in terms of our behavior in the world? How do those convictions play out in a world where people do not share the same philosophy, religion, or values?

USC, Technology, Values, Jacques Ellul

I moved to Los Angeles and the University of Southern California in 1973/74 to enter an exciting, interdisciplinary PhD program in Social Ethics. At USC we studied the whole "canon" of moral philosophy from the Greeks to the post-modernists. We also looked at issues in applied ethics as they related to business, politics, health care and other arenas. My own work came to a focus in my doctoral dissertation on the great French sociologist of technology, Jacques Ellul (1912-94). Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*) and many others had been calling attention to Ellul in their own writings and interviews. From 1971 onward I found Ellul's understanding of technology and its impact on our culture, politics, communication, business, entertainment, religion and other domains to be nothing less than brilliant.

For Ellul it is not the technological "machines" that are most important; it is a way of thinking, a method of subjecting every problem, every sector of life to scientific, rational, quantitative analysis. But the technological method that is so successful in building bridges can be enslaving and dehumanizing when it is applied to human relations, art, and other domains. The quantitative can obscure the qualitative. We live in an era of "raving rationalism," Ellul wrote. The problem is not "technology" per se but what we could call "technopoly" (Neil Postman's term). Ellul taught me that technology is not value-neutral but carries with it a set of values (efficiency, power, speed, quantifiability, rationality, artificiality, normality, predictability, etc.). These are not "bad" values but we must recognize them for what they are and make sure that our technologies serve our mission and purpose and don't become ends in themselves.

In addition to his great sociological works such as *The Technological Society*, *The Political Illusion*, *Propaganda*, *Autopsy of Revolution*, *The Technological Bluff*, Ellul also produced a series of fascinating challenges to the Christian church to fight against its conformity to some of the worst aspects of the culture (including the worship of technology, the appeal to the state to solve all our problems, the worship of Mammon (money), and the idolatry of one's nation) and rediscover its radical, distinctive witness in the world. Ellul provided a very fresh interpretation of Jesus and the message of the Bible---which I analyzed in my PhD dissertation (1979) *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul*.

I exchanged many letters with Ellul from 1972 to 1982. I met and interviewed him in person in 1982, then spent every other Friday afternoon of my 1984-85 sabbatical in discussion with him at his home in Bordeaux, and met with him many more times until his death in 1994. In 2000 I organized the founding of the International Jacques Ellul Society which adopted the *Ellul Forum for the Critique of Technological Civilization*, a semi-annual journal many of us “Ellulians” had organized and sustained since 1988. (Visit www.ellul.org for more information). Ellul’s work followed a two-track “yin and yang” dialectic between sociology and theology. Both poles (or tracks) have value and you can’t just split the difference and take half of each, or mix them together in some simple formula. Ellul’s favorite philosopher (and one of my top five) was the Danish “father of existentialism” Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55)—who also wrote two parallel but distinct series of books: on the one hand the philosophical works like *Either/Or*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*; on the other hand “edifying discourses” on Christian faith such as *Works of Love*, *Training in Christianity*, and *The Attack upon “Christendom.”* Kierkegaard was relentlessly “anti-modern” in the sense that he didn’t believe that a rationalistic philosophical system could capture the truth about human existence (neither did Ellul, neither do I). Just as Kierkegaard “answered” his philosophical works with his creative theological works, so Ellul “answered” his sociological studies of technique and modern culture with his own very creative works on ethics, theology, and the Bible.

In my own work, the two poles that play off each other and enrich each other have been (1) Christian ethics for the Christian community and (2) organizational ethics for a global, diverse marketplace. The first and primary part of my vocation has been to reformulate a better, more biblically authentic *Christian* ethics to help Christians of any and all denominations and traditions better understand the ethics of Jesus and Scripture. Like my radical Christian mentors, Ellul and Kierkegaard, it drives me crazy to see “Christian” leaders teach and do things that are in serious conflict with what our leader, Jesus, taught. For example, the Religious Right, the “Moral Majority,” the “health and wealth” televangelists, and the flag-waving, gun-loving American Christian nationalists are in radical contradiction to the ethics of Jesus and the New Testament as well as the Ten Commandments and the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. But a “Christian Left” that sells out Jesus to achieve political influence is no better. Thus, one major goal of my research, writing, and teaching has been to formulate a better, more authentic Christian ethics.

New College Berkeley 1977-1990

As I finished my doctoral studies at USC, I organized a group of Berkeley alumni and friends who shared my passion for a more authentic, holistic Christian way of thinking and working and we (bold and reckless children of the Sixties that we were) founded a graduate school of Christian studies next to our beloved alma mater in Berkeley. Our view was that we needed a think tank at a post-graduate level, where people could earn an accredited master’s degree and both deepen their Christian faith and thought and explore ways of constructively integrating it with their “secular” vocation in business, the arts, education, health care, etc.. We were not interested in training pastors or priests; our interest was in the “laity.”

We called our place “New College Berkeley” because we could never think of a name we all liked, and after referring to it as “the new college” for many months, that name stuck. We graduated about twenty students each year with master’s degrees, became affiliated with the Graduate Theological Union and the University of California, ran annual summer schools for hundreds of students with the best contemporary scholars and writers as guest teachers (Bruce Metzger, John Howard Yoder, Carl Henry, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, John Perkins, Bill Pannell, John Stott, Madeleine L’Engle, et al), put on conferences on health care, law, business, and the arts, and created a truly amazing community of thinkers and activists.

At New College Berkeley I taught courses on Christian ethics and business and professional ethics from 1977-90, organized conferences and workshops, and eventually published *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* (1984), *Peter the Rock: Extraordinary Insights from an Ordinary Man* (1986; my Ellul-style commentary on the sort of Christianity implied by the life and letters of Peter in the New Testament), and then *The Opening of the Christian Mind* (1989; a kind of manifesto for our NCB educational goals: no more narrow, closed, empty, or neglected Christian minds). Three of my books that came out later were really a product of my passion for a better Christian education and ethics: *Should God Get Tenure? Essays on Religion and Higher Education* (editor, 1997) was a

collection of essays (including my own, “Ethics With and Without God”) on trying to think more holistically and creatively as Christians. My life-long work on Christian ethics continued through the 90s and culminated in a two-volume introduction: *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (2000) and *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (2004).

The first conversations about New College Berkeley took place in 1976. On April 7, 1977, Ginny Hearn and I walked the incorporation papers through the Sacramento state bureaucracy. Ninety-eight students attended our first academic programs in a six-week summer school in 1978 (with visiting profs Bruce Metzger, Bill Pannell, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, John Howard Yoder and others). By Fall 1979 we had a faculty, a building (right across from Peoples’ Park) and forty students sitting in our opening classes. My experience with New College Berkeley was not just in the classroom. I was the primary entrepreneur, organizer, institution builder, marketer, and fund raiser over the fourteen years that it dominated my existence. I learned a lot about institutional mission and values, about culture and performance, and about competitive realities, financial constraints, and boards of directors. I have wished that I knew then, when I was Dean and/or President, what I know now. But over the next dozen years the all-consuming fund-raising and administrative burdens of creating and sustaining a new, free-standing graduate think tank were beginning to eat me alive and completely remove me from teaching and writing.

In my Memoir (2022) I tell the larger story of this brash experiment in higher education. By the time I left in 1990 it was clearly not financially sustainable. Our students were motivated by meaning and faithfulness, not by potential professional gain (as they would have been studying for an MBA or MDiv) and the cost of living as well as of institutional operation in Berkeley had skyrocketed through the 1980s. I proposed a radical restructuring of the school which our Board of Trustees liked, but our core faculty refused to move away from their comfortable traditional roles. To make a long story short, my successor president immediately sold our major asset, our student residence house, and spent all the equity as well as all the money I had raised for our longer-term endowment on operations (mostly salaries) until there was absolutely nothing left four years later. Our faculty moved on (mostly to Fuller Seminary). Two of our participants near the heart of NCB petitioned for the NCB brand and data base and since 1994 have maintained a modest program of short-term seminars and study opportunities, mostly on topics like spiritual formation, friendship, journal-keeping, and lay Bible study. Good stuff and laudatory leadership for more than thirty years now, but something narrower than the marketplace and academy orientation of the original school. The remarkable thing is that when we began in the 1970s no seminary had any interest in our issues. Today almost every seminary has “New College-style” programs for laity and marketplace Christians.

In any case, by 1990 it was time for me to move on. I was completely burned out, had tried everything, and had nothing left. It was the hardest thing in my life to walk away from New College Berkeley with it reeling and me powerless. So what might be next for me? In early 1989 Rich Mouw, then the Provost of Fuller Seminary, called me to ask if I would consider being a candidate to succeed Lew Smedes their retiring, long time, beloved ethics professor (and the guy who invited me to teach my first course there in Fall 1976). I agreed and for the next many months Rich periodically called me to update me on the search committee’s progress and make sure I was still on board. But in the fall of 1989 Rich called to tell me he would no longer be chairing the ethics search because he had just agreed to become president of Fuller but he said they had whittled the candidate list down to ten and I would soon hear from his replacement chair, history professor James Bradley. A month or so later I got a call from Bradley informing me that the committee had determined a final list of six candidates and they had me in fourth position and it was very unlikely that I would get the job offer. Since I basically knew everyone in my field in those days and they had advertised for a senior scholar with publications and my profile was not unlike Lew Smedes’s at my age . . . I was curious about who they rated above me? Bradley’s answer: “well it was decided to reserve the top three spots for women and minorities.” I later discovered that the other three were all unpublished and unproven. The candidate they chose was offered the job, accepted, then backed out at the last minute forcing Lew Smedes back into the post for a couple more years before they finally landed Glenn Stassen who went on to make a long-term, great contribution to Fuller and the whole field.

I was of course baffled a bit by the Fuller experience but I actually applauded them for acting more aggressively and intentionally to hire women and minorities. And I also was kind of relieved not to be headed back to the appalling traffic, culture, and climate of Southern California. And at this very moment I was being recruited to

another school more to my style in a beautiful city. New College Berkeley was inspired by the example of Regent College at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver BC. Their distinguished, long-time professor ethics, Klaus Bockmuehl, had died in 1989. I was invited to campus, interviewed by faculty and administration, and told I would be the only candidate and was perfect for the job. But—hello!—early in 1990, I was informed that a significant shortfall in student applications in this tuition-dependent school, had caused their board to cancel all faculty searches, including mine. I tell these stories of job rejection and disappointment because I know so many people have similar experiences. Throughout my whole life my testimony is that I needed to be patient and just “keep on keepin’ on” until the right thing opened up. As I look back, I can clearly see how my disappointment at one stage left me free to move through an open door that in hindsight was way better. Makes you believe there is a God and he has a plan.

University Covenant Church (1990-92) and North Park University (1992-2001)

On leaving New College Berkeley, with the jobs at Fuller and Regent disappeared into thin air, I accepted a call to serve as Interim Senior Pastor at University Covenant Church in Davis, California, a congregation of about 350 members. This two-year experience was a delight and taught me a lot about the potential and reality of local congregations. I often wished that I could have had a second life as a pastor of such a church. I loved being a pastor.

But my primary calling has been as a professor, so from 1992-2001 I moved to North Park University in Chicago where I was appointed to a newly-endowed post as the inaugural Carl I. Lindberg Professor of Applied Ethics. This position put me in charge of an “ethics-across-the-curriculum” project. I was now teaching in the philosophy and business departments of a liberal arts college in the city of Chicago—my kind of town in the middle of the USA: blue collar, jazz and blues, art and architecture, black and white—we loved it for the next nine years. I read and studied intensively the growing literature in business, technology, communication, and bio/health care ethics—created and taught courses, gave lectures, and organized conferences. My proudest achievement actually is that in 1993 with some of my Black students I started the North Park Gospel Choir as their faculty sponsor and protector.

While in Chicago I also began to do some organizational ethics consulting. I guided major organizational ethics projects for Swedish Covenant Hospital and for a large retirement village in Pennsylvania and I worked as subject matter expert for the emerging Cardean University/UNext.com online MBA project. While I continued to teach and work on the Christian ethics vocation (and prepared *Becoming Good* and *Doing Right* for publication), my focus now was shifted to the second task: an organizational ethics for a diverse, global marketplace. Can you imagine if I had been stuck at Fuller instead of this? Thank you Lord for slamming that door shut. As I focused my attention on the growing business ethics literature I became increasingly dissatisfied with the way it was approached. The typical business ethics book or course consisted of analysis and discussion of hard cases, such as the wreck of the Exxon Valdez oil tanker in Alaska, the Challenger space disaster, the deadly explosion at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India, or the scandal of Nestle’s marketing infant formula to African mothers without a clean water supply—along with some obligatory discussion of sexual harassment and non-discriminatory hiring and promotion policies. Business students were given a quick summary of the ethical theories of Kant, Mill, and two or three others and then urged to choose one of these theories to help them unpack the ethical dilemma and determine what went wrong and who was at fault.

My friend Al Erisman used the very apt phrase “damage control ethics” for this kind of approach. My criticism of this sort of ethics was that it never really addressed the causes and contributing factors to these problems. It was reactive, narrow, and negative. It was also not terribly practical to focus so much attention on spectacular exceptional cases that few managers would ever encounter. I was deeply influenced by Alasdair MacIntyre’s books *After Virtue* (2nd ed., 1984) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (1990) which I still regard as the most important works in philosophical ethics in generations. MacIntyre shows why both Modernity (“Encyclopaedia,” the rationalistic ethical theories of the European Enlightenment such as those of Kant and Mill) and Postmodernity (the cynical individualism of Nietzsche and most of our contemporaries) can and must fail to actually guide our moral discernment and action. The answer is to rediscover and appropriate in new ways “Tradition” (especially the approach of Aristotle). It isn’t possible to pretend we are in ancient Greece

and re-instigate the Traditional/Classical approach to ethics lock, stock, and barrel. But the way forward will require us to learn profoundly from this classical, traditional approach.

What all this means is that ethics is not just a matter of figuring out a set of rules (even a set of universal rules) and a method by which to apply them to cases. Rather, ethics is always related to communities and purposes. What is our purpose (Greek, *telos*)—our mission and vision? It is this basic choice which will ultimately drive our ethical performance. Is it a purpose that will bring out the best in people (e.g., in our employees and owners)? After we figure out and commit to our purpose, we then ask “what kind of community—and what sort of individual character—do we need to enable us to achieve our purpose with excellence? This question points to our corporate culture and the core values and virtues we must seek to embed throughout the organization to optimize our prospects of achieving our mission and vision. In this light and on this foundation of mission and culture, then, our code of ethics will serve as our shared guidelines for “how we do the things we do” in our organization in order to succeed. Yes, it is, on first glance, a “relativistic” approach to ethics; we are not looking for some kind of universals and moral absolutes but for “rules of the game” and “principles of the village” in a sense. However, everything is not, in the end, relative because we have in common our basic humanity which cuts across all organizations and world cultures. As a Christian I believe this is because there is one God who has created every man, woman, and child in his own image (Genesis 1).

Theological ethicists like Stanley Hauerwas and Peter Kreeft were also influences on my shift toward virtue ethics. Some business ethics scholars, such as Robert Solomon, were on the same track in rethinking business ethics in terms of purposes, communities, and character. Business writers like Jim Collins (*Built to Last* and *Good to Great* best-sellers) were also showing how “preserving the core” (purpose and values) was the starting point of great companies. In fact, as I thought about my study of the Ten Commandments (eventually published as *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles*), I recalled how the great rabbis and Hebrew scholars had often insisted that the Decalogue was really one command and nine corollaries: first, get your god straight (“I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me”)—and the ethical guidelines will follow (i.e., get the Creator on the throne and he will guide you away from killing, adultery, theft, covetousness, false witness, idolatry, etc.). Same basic lesson: get your ultimate End, purpose, mission, or vision straight and the appropriate ethics will follow.

Into the Marketplace: The IBTE (1996-2003)

In the mid- and late-Nineties my main conversation partner on business ethics was a long-time friend who was an executive at Boeing in the Seattle area. Al Erisman had a PhD in Applied Mathematics and was the Director of Boeing’s IT research and development team of 300 or so techies and scientists. Al was a technology-lover and creator, a big-league business executive, and a guy of complete integrity who had a zero tolerance for unethical behavior in business or elsewhere. We rapidly escalated our conversation about business, technology, and ethics to a point where we co-taught a course in summer 1996 at Regent College in Vancouver BC and co-lectured at Penn State, University of Washington and elsewhere. By 1998 we had gathered a small group of business leaders around us and together decided to found the Institute for Business, Technology, and Ethics (IBTE) whose major product would be a bimonthly magazine called *Ethix*, for which Al would write a regular “Technology Watch” column, I would contribute a regular “Benchmark Ethics” column, and we would jointly interview some leader in the business, technology, or ethics domains (www.ethix.org). Three years later, in 2001, we decided to have a go at it full-time so Al retired from Boeing and I walked away from my tenured, endowed post in Chicago and moved back home to the San Francisco Bay Area. Unfortunately, all of this happened just as the Silicon Valley economic bubble was bursting and just before 9/11 shattered the world. Realizing that a free-standing consulting organization like IBTE was not at that time sustainable, I left the organization in 2003 and became a sole practitioner business ethics educator, writer, and consultant under a new flag: EthixBiz.com. The exciting sequel to this story is that Al and I were again—better than ever—able to work as a teaching team in many courses we led for Gordon-Conwell.

St. Mary's College and Harris & Associates (2004-10)

I learned a great deal with Al Erisman and the IBTE as we debated and discussed the issues, read voluminously, and went around interviewing CEOs such as Jim Sinegal (Costco), Phil Condit (Boeing), Lew Platt (HP), and Jonathan Klein (Getty Images), and thought leaders like John Seeley Brown, David Korten, and Carl Mitcham. But my learning curve ratcheted upward even more dramatically after 2002/03 when I was able to test out all I had learned about organizational ethics in working on the ground with companies and organizations such as East Bay Municipal Utility District, Harris & Associates (construction and project management), Paradise Foods, Nikon Precision, and several others. I have had overwhelmingly positive reactions from business leaders and managers “in the trenches” that my holistic mission/culture/practices approach “works” and leads to sound ethics and business success.

After IBTE I also moved back into the classroom, especially at St. Mary's College (2004-2010), which had launched the first executive MBA program in the Bay Area back in the early Seventies. At St. Mary's (and occasionally at USF and Seattle Pacific University) my business ethics teaching was exclusively with MBA students, most of them currently in management positions at various levels. This was no ivory tower academic exercise but an intense weekly “ethics workout” in the midst of busy business careers with all of their challenges and opportunities. And of course, the consulting work took place at the heart and core of working business enterprises. I was also superbusy making speeches in various business and professional settings, at Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs and even (twice) at the historic Commonwealth Club of California. It was a direct result of my Executive MBA teaching, organizational consulting, and intense immersion in the marketplace milieu that I wrote my general market book *It's About Excellence: Building Ethically Healthy Organizations* (Wipf & Stock, 2008/2011).

Gordon-Conwell & the Mockler Center (2010 - 2016)

I had no intention of ever leaving the SF Bay Area or the business community again but Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the Boston MA area called me with an offer I couldn't refuse: a brand new professorship had been endowed by Tom Phillips, legendary CEO of Raytheon, and Joanna Mockler, widow of *Good to Great* “Level 5” Gillette CEO Colman Mockler. I became the inaugural “Mockler-Phillips Professor of Workplace Theology and Business Ethics.” There was no comparable position anywhere in higher education. Gordon-Conwell, one of the largest and most influential seminaries in North America was interdenominational and had a strong presence in urban Boston. Now they were making a serious, strategic commitment to the marketplace. They spent a couple years searching for someone with a PhD in ethics and the academic *bona fides*—and with credibility both in the business world and in the theological world. I couldn't resist—all my confidants both in the business world and the theological world (and in my family) urged me to take the offer.

Before I left the Bay Area I went through the examination process and was ordained to the pastoral ministry at Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland. Pastor J. Alfred Smith Sr had been a long-time friend, mentor, and hero of mine and I shared the faith and witness commitments of Dr. Smith, Allen Temple, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention. I had been licensed as a minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church during the 1980s and 1990s but now I was finally ordained, something I thought was especially important as I was now being “sent” from my home town to teach for my first full-time post in a theological seminary.

One thing that had happened to me by then over thirty years was a growing conviction about the basic harmony of Christian ethics with a sound business ethics. In the Sixties and Seventies, I saw only radical contrast between my two worlds. But the more I worked in depth with business—and the more I studied in depth, and taught, biblical ethics—the more I saw echoes, resonances, and parallels. I came to believe that this is because all people (religious or not) are made in the image and likeness of God—and thus the more we understand God, the more we will understand people-made-in-God's-image. I began to translate theological concepts into “business-speak”—and also to listen and learn more profoundly and expectantly from business observers and veterans. I had learned a lot about how Christians could share their values and insights in a constructive way in a diverse, global marketplace. Gordon-Conwell wanted me to teach their seminarians (future pastors) how to think this way and how to help their workplace, business members of congregations to think, talk, and act this way. As professor I taught those things in courses—and as Director of the Mockler Center for Faith & Ethics in the Workplace I organized events on

and off campus to promote the creative, constructive integration of biblical faith with “secular” work. I organized the first ever major Faith@Work Summit Conference in Boston in October 2014 bringing 280 movement leaders together from around the world. I also created an urban Boston/Roxbury-based course on “Entrepreneurship in Church & Community” in which my co-teacher Larry Ward and I coached forty-five local men and women in starting up new small businesses. My 2020 book *Workplace Discipleship101: A Primer* is really the summation of my lifelong project as well as more specifically my six years at Gordon-Conwell.

Family & Personal Life

It is impossible to completely separate the personal from the professional so let me add a few other factoids to this story. At San Leandro High School I met Lucia Paulson when she was a sophomore and I was a senior. Our first date was November 1, 1963. We were married September 9, 1967; our daughter Jodie was born March 29, 1971, and our son Jonathan September 14, 1972. Lucia graduated from UC Berkeley with a BA in French—something which became a huge benefit to me in my work with Jacques Ellul. We both became francophones and francophiles. She has been my best friend, advisor, and confidante for sixty years and deserves a lot of credit for whatever I have managed to accomplish. We are also blessed by a lifetime together of loving to worship in church, sing, study, travel, dance, walk, play tennis, read, bicycle, swim, exercise, listen to jazz, classical, opera, and gospel music, cook, entertain, remodel our houses, garden, and enjoy good food and beverages together with friends. We love being parents of Jodie and Jonathan, now we love being grandparents to the six grandchildren they brought into our family. I also confess to being a lifelong gym rat and a persistent bogey (more or less) golfer.

Postscript

At age 70, after six years away from my home base in Oakland and Berkeley, California, away from our children and grandchildren, it was time to come home in summer 2016. I had been teaching since 1966 (when I started a weekly, weekend gig at the Alameda County Juvenile Hall while a Junior at UC Berkeley). Fifty years I realized! And it was forty years since I taught my first graduate course as an Adjunct Professor at Fuller Seminary in Fall 1976. The number of outside speaking gigs . . . the conferences and other events I had organized . . . the independent study projects and masters’ and doctoral theses and dissertations . . . the countless articles, reviews, interviews, introductions, and cover blurbs . . . to say nothing of all the unsigned articles and bylaws, promotional paragraphs . . . and all the letters and emails to and from a multitude . . . I realized that I was completely “gassed.” I had suffered three TIA mini-strokes and my doctors, family, and close friends were on my case to slow down and get healthier.

In my seven-and-counting “retirement years,” I have continued to write out of an irrepressible desire to “think on paper” and share what I have learned with anyone interested. In 2022, I finally finished what turned out to be the long (450 pages!) *What Are You Doing About It? The Memoir of a Marginal Activist*, mostly because I wanted to write about the endlessly interesting characters I have known at all stages of this story—but also to reflect on my calling to live and work on the margins, the edges, of the academic world, the business world, the church, and the culture. It took me a few decades to see this pattern but, when I did, I realized what a great calling and location that has been, just right for me. Actually, most of my tee shots in golf also wind up on the edge of the fairway, not in the middle. See what I mean? I have led a few seminars and done interviews on “workplace discipleship” (my preferred terminology over “faith at work” or “marketplace Christianity”) and organized a small non-profit we call “Workplace 313” (focused not on the 52 Sundays but the 313 “work days” of each year).

When I griped about anything as a kid, my dad would often challenge me “Well, what are you doing about it?” My marginal activist life has been my answer. *Soli deo gloria.*