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On the Cover



*Abraham Beerstraaten
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The Blauwpoort in Leiden in the winter.
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Symposium

Gene Edward Veith

Benjamin B. Phillips

John M. Yeats

Craig Vincent Mitchell

Theology of Work Project, Inc.

Introduction

Theology of Work Consultation

Symposium

Christians today urgently need to revive their commitment to whole-life discipleship. Millions of churchgoers are “Christians” for a few hours every week. Christianity is something they practice on Sunday morning rather than a way of life. The withering of discipleship is one of the gravest threats facing the church today.

One of the main causes of the problem is that churches and seminaries have disconnected discipleship from everyday life. Too often, pastors and professors talk about one’s “walk with God” and “stewardship” almost exclusively in terms of formally religious activities such as worship attendance, Bible study, evangelism, and giving. As important as these activities are for every Christian, they will never take up more than a tiny percentage of life for those who are not in full-time ministry.

The largest portion of life—work in the home and in jobs—is excluded from the concepts of discipleship and stewardship. Most churches and seminaries have nothing spiritually powerful to offer for the activities that define most people’s daily lives during the other six days of the week. This leaves the church in particular preaching a faith that is not relevant to the totality of people’s lives.

It is urgent for the future of the church that we recover a whole-life model of discipleship that understands every legitimate human activity as responding to a call from God. Every human being is called to be, in all of life, a steward of God’s creation. Our individual discipleship, our church communities, and our Christian witness to society must recover a holistic theology of stewardship and

calling. The church must reintegrate its model of discipleship with the call to cultivate the world.

The Church and Civilization— The Economic Connection

God intends the church to be distinct from the world (e.g., 1 John 2:15–17). He also intends that the church have a transformative impact on the world and not exclusively through evangelism (e.g., Jer. 29:7; Matt. 15:13–16; Matt. 25:14–46). As the church has lost influence over the last century, our civilization has lost its grounding in the call to serve others with our work.

Economic work is a key connection between the church and the world because it is the engine of all human civilization. Obviously, civilization involves much more than just economics, yet nothing in civilization happens without economic work—just as a car is much more than an engine but does nothing without one.

Because economic work drives civilization, and Christians spend most of their lives doing economic work, the church's potential impact on civilization is enormous. If we integrated our economic lives with our discipleship, Christianity would once again have a transformative effect on the making of civilization.

Without such integration, no model of church and/or world relationship can be stable and successful over time. Within the limits of a faith-work dualism, there is only a choice between isolationism or various inadequate models of engaging the world (such as triumphalism or assimilationism). Integrating economic work and discipleship is the necessary starting point for a sound approach to the church-world problem.

Pastors and Christian business leaders are increasingly alienated from one another as a result of an increasing faith-work dualism among both groups. In the church, Christian business leaders have the most potential for impacting civilization. Their special gift is to organize and direct the civilization-building work of many people at once. They are the fulcrums that create leverage for the gospel to transform not only people's hearts but also civilization. Today, however, the Christians whose full-time job is to preach the word of God and the Christians whose full-time job is to produce civilization typically do not talk much to one other, do not understand one other, and oftentimes do not trust one other.

Efforts to rectify the lack of a biblical and theological perspective on economics—the social sphere of work—have been a hit-or-miss endeavor. Some practitioners who see the need for God's people to engage with economics are rushing in to meet the need without first carefully studying Scripture and developing a

well-rounded biblical perspective of this sphere. As a result, they unconsciously adopt an unbiblical and materialistic approach that conceives of human beings primarily as *consumers* whose problems can be solved by giving them money rather than conceiving of individuals as image-bearing *producers* of value whose main economic need is for opportunities to liberate their God-given talents and apply them in service through the work to which they are called.

This symposium on the Theology of Work, which will appear serially in the spring issue of the *Journal of Markets & Morality*, was created to be forum whose aim is to contribute valuable perspectives that lead to an integrated perspective on stewardship, work, and economics for leaders in the seminary, church, and business communities.

Vocation: The Theology of the Christian Life

Gene Edward Veith
Patrick Henry College

The Reformation contributed three major teachings that would characterize Protestantism in all of its diversity: (1) justification by faith, (2) the authority of Scripture, and (3) the doctrine of vocation. The first two still have currency, despite recent criticisms. However, the concept of vocation has been gradually lost. First, it was turned into a “work ethic”; then it turned into a pious attitude empty of specific content; then it was reduced to just another synonym for “a job.”

Yet, in the Reformation, vocation was nothing less than the doctrine of the Christian life. Vocation was the locus for other important teachings, such as the priesthood of all believers, good works, and sanctification. It was not merely a theoretical teaching; rather, as taught in the early Reformation catechisms and sermons, the doctrine of vocation gave practical guidance to Christians in their marriages, parenthood, economic activity, and citizenship.

The doctrine of vocation shows Christians how to live out their faith in the world. It has to do with God’s presence in the world and with how he works through human beings for his purposes. For Christians, vocation discloses the spirituality of everyday life.

Today, Christians are greatly confused about how they should relate to the world. This is evident in the controversies about political involvement and cultural engagement. On the personal scale, champions of “family values” have a soaring divorce rate. Many Christians compartmentalize their lives, conforming to a consumerist and materialistic culture, while pursuing transcendent spiritual experiences that have little to do with their everyday lives. Christians today are

variously—and sometimes simultaneously—waging culture wars, withdrawing from the world, and conforming to it.

The church today desperately needs to recover the doctrine of vocation. Doing so would show Christians how once again they can be the world's salt and light and revitalize contemporary Christianity.

Vocation in the Bible

The word *vocation* is simply the Latinized term for “calling.” The best biblical formulation of the concept is 1 Corinthians 7:17: “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.” Thus, God assigns different kinds of life for each Christian and then calls each Christian to that assignment.

The immediate context of that passage has to do with ethnicity (being a circumcised Jew or an uncircumcised Gentile), social position (being a slave or being free), and family status (being married, single, or a widow). The apostle Paul has much to say about such callings. In Ephesians 5–6, he explores the relationships of husband and wife, parent and child, and master and servant. Here, we find not just moralizing or practical instructions; rather, we are told that God himself is manifest in these ordinary earthly relationships. Marriage is an image of Christ and the church. Parenting has to do with God the Father and, implicitly, God the Son. Servants (or slaves) are serving not so much their masters but Christ. Masters, in their treatment of those who serve them, must remember that they, too, are servants (or slaves) of a master in heaven. In Romans 13, we are told that all authority comes from God who gives his authority to human beings in various offices. God works through earthly rulers as his instruments, his agents, to restrain evil and to protect those who do well. Thus, God not only calls and assigns people to different stations in life; he evidently inhabits these stations.

Other biblical texts describe God's calling people to his service and then giving them specific gifts that enable them to carry out that service. He does this for prophets and for kings—including kings of unbelieving nations—but he also does this for seemingly more mundane kinds of work. For example, he calls the artists who are to make the art of the tabernacle and gives them their talents:

Then Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every

skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer.” (Ex. 35:30–35)

Lest we think Bezalel and Oholiab had a unique *charism*, we are told that God called and gifted other artists, the sign of which was their own desire to create art. “And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work” (Ex. 36:2).

Luther on Vocation

The great theologian of vocation is Martin Luther. To understand vocation, it is important to start with Luther and the Lutherans. Calvin and the Puritans also talked about vocation—and contemporary English-language scholarship about the topic tends to focus on their contributions—but they emphasized God’s calling in terms of his demands on his followers and what they are to do. This may be part of it, but in order to grasp the magnitude of this teaching, it is essential to first understand the sense in which vocation is *God’s* work. For Luther, vocation, like justification, is a function of God’s grace. In vocation, God providentially works *through* human beings to care for his creation and to distribute his gifts.

When we pray the Lord’s prayer, to use one of Luther’s illustrations, we ask God to give us this day our daily bread, and he does. The *way* he gives us our daily bread is *through* the vocations of farmers, millers, and bakers. We might add truck drivers, factory workers, bankers, warehouse attendants, and food service workers. Virtually every step of our whole economic system contributes to that bagel, piece of toast, or Danish we had for breakfast. Thus, when we thank God for our food before we eat, we are right to do so. He provides our food, and he does so by means of vocation; that is, ordinary people just doing their jobs.

To use another example from Luther, God could have chosen to create new human beings out of the dust to populate the earth as he did with the first man. Instead, he chose to create new life—which, however commonplace, is no less miraculous—*by means of* mothers and fathers, wives and husbands—the vocations of the family.

To continue the point, God protects us through the vocations of earthly government, as detailed in Romans 13. He proclaims his Word by means of human pastors. He teaches by means of teachers. He creates works of beauty and meaning by means of human artists, to whom he has given particular talents.

When someone we care about is hospitalized, we pray for healing. God uses vocation—doctors, nurses, anesthesiologists, and other health care workers—to deliver that healing. God’s normal way of working in the world is through means. God does not have to use means, and he is capable of working immediately. He can heal with a miracle, just as he once provided the children of Israel with their daily bread—the manna of the wilderness—without farmers and bakers. However, God’s normal way of operating is through human beings. This is because he desires us to serve each other.

According to Luther, vocation is a “mask of God.”¹ God is milking the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid. God is hidden in vocation. We see the milkmaid or farmer or doctor or pastor or artist. However, looming behind this human mask, God is genuinely present and active in what they do for us.

Similarly, as we carry out our various vocations, we, too, are masks of God. Evangelicals often talk about what God is doing “in” their lives. Vocation encourages reflection on what God is doing “through” our lives. Just as God is working through the vocation of others to bless us, he is working through us to bless others. In our vocations, we work side by side with God, as it were, taking part in his ceaseless creative activity and laboring with him as he providentially cares for his creation.

The Christian’s Multiple Vocations

Luther taught that Christians have multiple vocations that, in turn, exist in four estates that God has established to order human life: the church, the household, the state, and what Luther called “the common order of Christian love.”²

The first calling, or vocation, that every Christian has is to the estate of the *church*. Every Christian has been called through the gospel into the life of faith (Rom. 8:30), becoming a member of Christ’s body, the church. In the words of Luther’s *Small Catechism*, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel.... even as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth.”³

God works providentially through nonbelievers as well as believers in their labors. Was the farmer who grew the grain for our daily bread or the police officer who kept us from getting robbed a Christian? Strictly speaking, as far as God’s working through human beings, it does not matter. Nonbelievers can be said to occupy stations or to hold offices. Vocation, strictly speaking, applies to Christians—those who hear themselves addressed in God’s Word. Christians

respond to that Word in faith. What they do in their other callings is the fruit of their faith.

God also calls people to tasks and offices in his church. Pastors speak rightly of being called into the ministry, whereupon God works through them to teach his Word, distribute his sacraments, and give spiritual care to his people. Laypeople, too, are called to do tasks in the local congregation—serving in its different offices, singing in the choir, serving on committees, serving meals, and in other ways blessing their fellow members.

The second estate is the *household*. For Luther the estate of the household includes both the family and the activities by which it supports itself. He had in mind the concept expressed in the Greek word *oikonomia*, the laws of the household. This is the source of the English word *economy*. For Luther, in his day of family-based labor, economic life is connected with family life. Since then, family life and economic life have been split into two realms, and today they are often in conflict with each other. The doctrine of vocation brings them back together.

Although today we think of vocation primarily in terms of economic activity, Luther has more to say about the vocations of the family. God established marriage, and being a husband or a wife is a vocation. Being a father or a mother is also a vocation. So is being a son or a daughter. So is being a brother or sister, a nephew or uncle, a grandmother or grandfather. One person holds multiple vocations within a family; for example, a woman may be the wife of her husband, the mother of her children, the daughter of her mother, the sister of her brother, and more, with each vocation having its particular dimensions of service.

The third estate is the *state*. This includes earthly government, but it is also more than that. We might say it is society, or, better yet, because it is more particular, culture. This estate involves the many social networks that we are part of. If *the household* includes the particular economic labor that an individual pursues (as in microeconomics), the state includes the larger economic interrelationships (as in macroeconomics). Thus, Luther sometimes discusses particular economic vocations in this category as well.

At any rate, we were each born into a particular time, place, and society. The cultural context in which we find ourselves is part of the life that God has assigned us. We thus have responsibilities to our government and to our culture as a whole. Some Christians are called to positions of authority in the government. Americans have the unusual calling of being both subjects and rulers at the same time because our democratic republic places the governing authorities themselves under the authority of the people who elect them. Christians therefore have the vocation of citizenship, which means that politics, civic involvement,

and cultural engagement are all realms of Christian service. (Notice how the doctrine of vocation speaks to current controversies about Christians' involvement in politics. The church can have no political agenda as such because the estates are distinct and God operates in each of them in his own way. Yet, Christians do have a vocation as citizens, and they are obliged to work for the betterment of the social system in which they find themselves.)

Our formal positions in the family, the workplace, the church, and the culture are not the only spheres of service to which God assigns us and to which he calls us. Journalists like to refer to themselves as “the fourth estate,” but Luther’s fourth estate is what he called the “common order of Christian love.” This is the realm where people of different vocations interact informally. In Christ’s parable of the good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite were on the way to serve in their vocations but ignored the man who was bleeding by the side of the road. In the ordinary course of everyday life and in our relationships with our friends and neighbors, and even with our enemies and strangers, God also calls us to service.

In stressing the spiritual significance of these ostensibly secular estates, Luther was challenging the Roman Catholic practice of reserving the terms *vocation* and *calling* for religious orders—to an individual’s calling from God to become a priest, a monk, or a nun. To enter into these spiritual offices required taking a vow of celibacy (thereby rejecting marriage and parenthood), poverty (thereby rejecting full participation in the economic life of the workplace), and obedience (which involved substituting the authority of the church for that of the state). Luther countered medieval Catholicism by affirming the very kinds of life that the clerical vows renounced—marriage, parenthood, economic activity, secular citizenship—as being true vocations from God.

Luther’s *Small Catechism*, used for religious instruction for laypeople to this day, includes a “Table of Duties,” which is described in the headnote as being certain passages of Scripture for various holy orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities.⁴ The phrase *holy orders*, of course, is the terminology for being ordained into the priesthood. In this section of the catechism that was used to teach the doctrine of vocation, the holy orders are not only pastors but also husbands and wives, parents and children, magistrates and subjects, employers and “male and female servants, hired men, and laborers.”⁵

Luther insisted that the Christian life does not require *withdrawal from* the world but rather *engagement in* the world. The Christian faith is to be lived out not primarily in the activities of the church—which is the realm of the gospel, where one receives the forgiveness of sins—but in vocation. Good works belong not so much to the church—to its acts of devotion and its exercises of piety—but to the world, which becomes the arena where faith bears fruit in acts of love.

What this meant in practice is that the spiritual disciplines moved out of the monastery and into secular life.⁶ Celibacy became faithfulness in marriage. Poverty became thrift and hard work. Obedience became submission to the law. Most importantly, prayer, meditation, and worship—while still central to every Christian’s vocation in the church—also moved into the family and the workplace.

Today, even Protestant Christians have often slipped into the assumption that serving God is a matter of church work or spiritual exercises. Churches set up programs that can take up every night of the week. Some Christians are so busy doing church activities, making evangelism calls, or going to Bible studies that they neglect their spouses and children. Some Christians are preoccupied with the Lord’s work while letting their marriages fall apart, ignoring the needs of their children, and otherwise sinning against the actual responsibilities to which God has called them. According to the doctrine of vocation, the church is the place where Christians meet every week to find the forgiveness of Christ, feed on God’s Word, and grow in their faith. Then they are sent out into their vocations—to their spouses, children, jobs, and culture—for that faith to bear fruit.

That the Christian life is to be lived out in vocation is made explicit in the *Small Catechism*, which also demonstrates that despite this priesthood of all believers, the doctrine of vocation teaches a high view of the pastoral office. The section on confession—which Lutherans practice both privately and corporately in the liturgy for the Divine Service—asks: “What sins shall we confess?” The answer emphasizes vocation: “Here consider your station according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, a man-servant or maid-servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, slothful; whether you have grieved any one by words or deeds; whether you have stolen, neglected, or wasted aught, or done other injury.”

After this moral scrutiny of one’s vocations, the sinner confesses those sins to the pastor, whereupon “we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, as from God himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.” The pastor, by virtue of his vocation, becomes a channel for God’s grace. Just as God supplies daily bread through the vocation of the farmer, he supplies the bread of God’s Word through the vocation of the pastor. The forgiven sinner, built up in his faith through the gospel, is then sent back into his or her vocations to live out that faith.⁷

The Purpose of Vocation

What does it mean to live out faith in one's callings? The Bible is clear: "only faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6); "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). Here we come to the ethical implications of vocation and to the relationship between good works and justification by faith. According to the Reformation doctrine of vocation, the purpose of every vocation is to love and serve our neighbors.

God does not need our good works, Luther said, but our neighbor does.⁸ Our relationship with God is based completely on *his* work for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification by faith completely excludes any kind of dependence on our good works for our salvation. We come before God clothed not in our own works or merits but solely in the works and merits of Christ that are imputed to us. Having been justified by faith, God then sends us into the world, into our vocations, to love and serve our neighbors. Though we may speak of serving God in our vocations, strictly speaking, we do not serve God; he always serves us. We are to serve our neighbors—the actual human beings whom God brings into our lives as we carry out our daily callings. To the monastics who insisted that they were saved, at least in part, by their good works—the prayers, devotions, and acts of piety they do in the cloister—Luther asked in what sense these are even good works. Who are they helping? Luther criticized monasticism for valuing not only separation from the world but also (in the cases of some of the most honored monastics: the hermits and the anchoresses) of separation from their neighbors. For Luther, good works must not be directed to God; rather, they must be directed to the neighbor, which happens in vocation. Thus is fulfilled "all the Law and the Prophets," first to love God ("not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" [1 John 4:10]; that is, a love that comes from faith), and second to love the neighbor, which is also the working of faith (Matt. 22:37–40).

Every vocation has its particular neighbors. In the church, pastors are to love and serve the members of their congregations, and the members of the congregation are to love and serve their pastor and each other. The family is a network of mutual love and service. The vocation of marriage entails only one neighbor. Husbands are to love and serve their wives, and wives are to love and serve their husbands. Parents are to love and serve their children who, in turn, are to love and serve their parents. In the vocations of the state, rulers are to love and serve their subjects. The subjects love and serve their rulers and each other. Workers love and serve their customers.

In the economic vocations, workers of every kind are to carry out their labors in love and service to their customers. In the simplest terms, a business that does not provide goods or services that people need or that does not help them in some way will not stay in business. Vocation, in many ways, replicates the division of labor and the laws of economics. However, there is a difference. Free-market capitalism posits each person in the economic order acting in his or her enlightened self-interest; that is, in loving and serving himself. Economics in light of vocation may follow the same laws of supply and demand, competition and markets. For the Christian, economic productivity is not just a matter of self-interest; it can be a way of loving and serving others. Vocation counters the materialism and self-centeredness of economic pursuits by giving them a new meaning and a new orientation.

Vocation also transforms the nature of authority. Certain vocations do exercise authority over others. However, this is not just a matter of exercising power over them. Instead, authority must be used in love and service to those under the authority. Jesus said:

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:42–45)

According to Jesus, having authority is not a matter of lording it over other people; rather, it is a means of serving them.

Vocation clarifies moral issues. Parents are called to love and serve their children, not abuse them. Doctors are called to heal their patients, not kill them. The text on the vocation of government leaders (Romans 13) has often been used to quell dissent and to justify absolute obedience to the political status quo. However, the leaders, described as agents of God's authority, are charged with punishing evildoers and protecting those who do well. Leaders who do the opposite, who punish the good and protect evildoers, have no calling from God that would authorize such behavior. Leaders are called to love and serve those under their authority, and thus have no warrant from God to exploit and tyrannize them. Tyrants sin against their vocation, and God, who has called them to do justice, is not present nor is he working through their office when they violate their callings.

Vocations have their authorities, but they also have their authorizations, to the point that some actions are sinful when done outside of vocation but good works

when done within vocation. Luther gave as examples the soldiers' authorization under a Romans 13 chain of command to "bear the sword," and the judges' authorization to punish criminals, while the Christian without these callings must forgive his enemies and wrongdoers.⁹ The principle also explains why sex outside of marriage is immoral, but sex within marriage is a good work. The difference is not "a piece of paper." It is vocation. We have no calling from God that would authorize having sex with someone to whom we are not married. Within the vocation of marriage, sex is not only authorized, but it becomes the means by which God creates a one-flesh union, engenders new life, and builds a family.

The Priesthood and Its Sacrifices

Vocation has to do with the priesthood of all believers. This teaching does not mean that every Christian is a minister or that ministers are no longer necessary. As we have seen, the doctrine of vocation was generally accompanied by a high view of the pastoral office. Notice that Protestant clergy, with the exception of Anglicans, are generally not called priests. Instead, they are *ministers*, which means "servant"; or *pastors*, which means "shepherds"; or, popularly, *preachers*, which focuses on the work of the office. This is because a priest is someone who performs a sacrifice. Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches do have priests who offer up, in the mass, the sacrifice of Christ. Protestants, including Anglicans, have always taught that we no longer need sacrifices for our sins, since Christ, our great High Priest, offered himself as our sacrifice once and for all (Heb. 9:26). Yet, in light of that sacrifice, God calls us "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1).

Loving and serving in vocation involves an act of self-denial for the sake of someone else. That is, it involves a sacrifice. Again, Mark 10 says that rulers are to serve as Christ did, giving his life as a ransom. Today's "Gentiles" not only seek to lord it over others, they are obsessed with self-fulfillment and self-assertion. Vocation, on the contrary, focuses on self-sacrifice. Thus, vocation involves bearing the cross. Jesus said: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). This happens in the "general estate of Christian love," as well as in the church, the society, the workplace, and the family.

This spirituality of self-sacrifice for the neighbor illuminates the scriptural passages about different vocations that are so difficult for modern Christians—in our culture of self-assertion, self-actualization, and self-fulfillment—to understand. For example, the Bible instructs wives to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. At the same time, though, the Bible instructs husbands

to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). The husband is not to receive the wife’s submission in domination or in lording it over her, seeing as that was not how Christ loved the church. Instead, he is to emulate Christ precisely in “giving himself up” for his wife. Thus, both the wife and the husband are called to sacrifice themselves for each other. Both are presenting themselves as living sacrifices.

The father, coming home from work dead tired, has presented his body as a living sacrifice for his family; so has the mother who drives her kids to soccer practice when she has many other things she would rather do; and so has the worker who has put in long hours to do the best job possible for the company’s customers. Christ, who is present in vocation, takes up all of these sacrifices, small or great, into his sacrifice. He loves and serves his creation by means of our love and service in our vocations.

To be sure, we often sin in and against vocation. Instead of serving, we want to be served. Instead of loving our neighbor, we often use our neighbor for our own selfish purposes. We constantly violate God’s design and his calling. As a result, our relationships are often twisted and unhappy—a source of conflict and misery. We must confess our sins against our vocations and against our neighbors and receive the forgiveness of Christ who bore all of those sins in his body on the cross. Then, in faith, we find love again and work to restore those relationships. This is the Christian life.

Vocation and Transfiguration

The Swedish theologian Einar Billing in his classic work on vocation entitled *Our Calling* observes: “In all our religious and ethical life, we are given to an incredible overestimation of the extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary.”¹⁰ We expect our religion to give us miracles, spectacular events, and mystical experiences. We often think of morality in terms of major stands on world issues and heroic action, but vocation discloses the spiritual significance of everyday life. Our spiritual and moral lives are to be found in our relationships and in our tasks in our families, the workplace, the church, and the society. Vocation transfigures our ordinary, mundane existence, charging it with spiritual significance and with the very presence of God.

Luther said that changing a baby’s diaper is a holy work.¹¹ A child doing his chores and a servant girl cleaning the house are outperforming the Carthusian monks in works of holiness.¹² By extension, we can see the office desk, the factory machinery, the computer screen, the class podium—likewise the voting booth, the marriage bed, the dining room table—as altars on which we exercise

our royal priesthood. Luther rhapsodizes on how ordinary tools are sacred means of loving and serving the neighbor:

If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools—at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure—and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tiny that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen.... All this is continually crying out to you: “Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbor just as you would want your neighbor to use his property in his relations with you.”¹³

Vocation changes the quality of what we do. Artists with a sense of vocation will create not just out of self-expression or ambition but also out of love and service—not to corrupt or denigrate—their audience. Workers and business executives who see their customers as the objects of Christian love will serve them with their very best work.

From the outside, the economy has to do with the division of labor, individuals pursuing their own self-interests, laws of supply and demand, and other impersonal forces. Therefore, it is a part of God’s created order. From the inside, however, the economy can become transfigured into a vast network of mutual dependence and mutual service, and economic activity can become an expression of love.

Vocation is where sanctification happens as Christians grow spiritually in faith and in good works. Vocation is where evangelism happens as Christians teach their children and interact with nonbelievers. Vocation is where cultural influence happens as Christians take their places and live out their faith in every niche of society. Vocation is the theology of the Christian life. Luther sums this up in one of his greatest works, *The Freedom of the Christian*:

A Christian ... should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbor.... Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.¹⁴

Notes

Note: Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

1. *Exposition of Psalm 147*, quoted by Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Evansville, Ind.: Ballast Press, 1994), 138. See Wingren also for the other illustrations and concepts from Luther that are cited here.
2. See Luther, “Confession of 1528,” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 37:364–65.
3. The Apostle’s Creed, third article, “The Small Catechism,” in *The Concordia Triglotta*, trans. W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. See Einar Billing, *Our Calling* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 30.
7. Luther, *The Small Catechism*.
8. Wingren, 10, paraphrasing Luther’s *Kirchenpostille*.
9. Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 46.
10. Billing, *Our Calling*, 30.
11. Luther, “The Estate of Marriage,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45.
12. Luther, “The Fourth Commandment,” *The Large Catechism*, in *The Concordia Triglotta*.
13. Luther, “Commentary on The Sermon on the Mount,” in *Luther’s Works* 21:237.
14. Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Luther’s Works*, 31:364–68.

A Creature among Creatures or Lord of Creation?

The Vocation of Dominion in Christian Theology

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The apologetic context of the doctrine of creation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is the supposed ecological crisis of modern civilization.¹ Lynn White Jr. articulated the classic critique of Christianity as the driving force behind the modern ecological crisis, saying that Christianity bears “a huge burden of guilt.”² White linked the rise of ecologically destructive science and technology to the values of Christianity.

The basic argument linking tyranny over and exploitation of nature with Christianity may be identified as the “mastery hypothesis.”³ The argument is generally made along three major lines: (1) Christianity is said to have killed off humanity’s wonder and awe of nature by desacralizing nature; (2) it promotes an anthropocentrism that legitimates human rule and dominion over nature; and (3) it relegates the physical world to a lower status and value than that which is spirit.⁴ Our concern shall be with the second of these charges—the “dominion mandate.”

The environmental movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has almost uniformly seen human impact on nature as negative. For some, humanity is a “cancer of the earth,” which, if left unchecked, will consume and kill the naturally healthy organism that is the terrestrial biosphere.⁵ Unlike other animals, which establish a natural equilibrium with their environments, many environmentalists see humanity as a virus in the body of Mother Earth.⁶ The natural solution to which this imagery points is the eradication of the disease.

For others, the problem is not so much the existence of humanity *per se* but the dominion project that humanity has, particularly in the Western world, undertaken. Their assertion is that if the goal of human dominion over nature can be

rejected, then humanity can take its place as part of a healthy whole. Deep ecology attempts to undercut the concept of dominion by denying a unique, hierarchically superior position for humanity. It affirms an “ecosphere egalitarianism” in which everything, including humanity, is interrelated and has “equal intrinsic value.”⁷

Jürgen Moltmann has taken up this theme in his understanding of humanity and creation. For Moltmann, humanity must first be understood as part of creation, within nature, as *imago mundi*, the image of the world.⁸ To be a human being is first and foremost to be “a creature in the fellowship of creation.” As the image of the world, the human person is a microcosm of the world and can only exist and be understood within that community. Moltmann insists that the central teaching of the Old Testament account of the creation of humanity is that the human being is a creature within creation.⁹

The Doctrine of Dominion

Scripture, however, teaches that humanity has a special, hierarchically superior place in creation. As the *imago Dei*, humanity has been called to exercise dominion over creation as a gift of God (Gen. 1:26–30; 9:1–7). Despite man’s apparent frailty, God has given humanity supremacy in creation (Ps. 8:3–8). Acknowledging humanity’s kingly role and how it has been perverted is critical to understanding the value of humanity as the *imago Dei* and the vocation of humanity in creation.

God Has Granted Humanity Dominion over Nonhuman Creation

Against the view that man is merely a creature among creatures, the Scripture teaches that God has granted humanity dominion over God’s nonhuman creation. God granted “rule” over nature to humanity and called upon man to “subdue” the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28). Ruling is the function of royalty (cf. 1 Kings 4:24; Ps. 8:5–6; 72:8; 110:2; Isa. 14:2; Ezek. 34:4) and yields a definition of dominion that has traditionally been understood to entail authority and the right to command obedience. The first-century *Epistle of Barnabas* affirms: “‘And let them increase and multiply and rule over the fishes.’ Who is it who is now able to rule over the beasts or fishes or the birds of heaven? We should understand that to rule implies authority, so that one may give commandments and have dominion.”¹⁰

Twentieth-century commentators typically see this dominion as being an implication of the *imago Dei* in humanity, part of the royal role or function of humanity in creation.¹¹ It is in virtue of God’s will and power in creating man that

humanity has dominion. This contrasts sharply with the vision of pagan mythology in which humanity (or a group of gods) gains power over creation as an act of rebellion against the Creator(s).¹² God has granted humanity mastery—humanity takes up the role of “master within the created universe” by the grace of God.¹³

The emphasis in Genesis 1 is placed on human dominion over the animals but also includes the rest of creation.¹⁴ Dominion over the animals is highlighted as both domestic and wild animals come under humanity’s authority (Ps. 8:8–9).¹⁵ Yet, plants also are given over to humanity for food (Gen. 1:26–30). Everything has been given over to man for his use.¹⁶

The dominion of man was first exercised in Eden, where God placed Adam to till and keep the garden he had planted (Gen. 2:15). Even in the original Paradise, human authority to intervene in nature is affirmed (till). However, this authority is also conditioned by the idea of keep[ing]. The implication is that the garden planted by God displays a divinely established order and harmony that Adam was to maintain. The command to till the garden does imply the benefit of food for Adam and Eve, but this is not the sole purpose of their work. Human authority over creation begins with conserving a God-given exemplar of creaturely harmony and beauty in Eden.¹⁷

The dominion mandate of Genesis 1, applied in the garden by the commands of Genesis 2:15, nonetheless does not reflect a static nor merely conservationist agenda. The dominion mandate to rule the earth indicates a dynamic and progressive call that begins with tending the garden and moves outward through the rest of the world (fill the earth) to subdue it. Cal Beisner correctly notes that Eden was a discrete section of God’s creation “in the east” (Gen. 2:8).¹⁸ Rivers flowed from it to other lands (Havilah, Cush, and Assyria [Gen. 2:10–14]). Eden was also bordered by the lands to which Adam and Eve were expelled (Gen. 3:23–24), and it had an entrance that could be guarded by an angel with a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24).

The geographical distinction between Eden and the rest of creation, along with differences in commands between Genesis 1 and 2, implies that earth was not yet a “garden planet” but rather that the garden-paradise was to be expanded by human work as humanity “fill[ed] the earth.” God’s command to till and keep the garden was complemented by his command to rule and subdue the rest of the earth. The dominion mandate of Genesis 1 thus appears to be a command to transform the world outside of Eden into conformity with the God-given paradigm of the garden.¹⁹ The vocation of humanity then, is precisely to intervene in otherwise “untouched, pristine nature.” Though God’s creation is certainly good (Gen. 1:4), God has graciously chosen to call humanity as collaborators in causing that creation to achieve the full flowering of its potential beauty and bounty.

The idea of a garden suggests the beauty of harmony and order as the primary result God intended for human dominion of the earth. Yet, Adam and Eve were also placed in the garden so that they might benefit from the food it produced (Gen. 2:16, cf. Gen. 1:29). This idea is also implied in the idea of tilling, which one does precisely in order to produce crops and in greater quantity than would otherwise occur naturally.

Animals also served to benefit humanity. Although none were found to be a fully suitable helper for Adam (Gen. 2:18–20), Adam and Eve together would have presumably benefited from the labor of animals in tilling the soil, as their descendants did.²⁰ Even after the Fall, humanity began to acquire the benefits of technology and skills that served to increase the beauty (lyre and pipe, Gen. 4:21), and the bounty of the earth (tents and the keeping of livestock, Gen. 4:20; the development of bronze and iron tools, Gen. 4:22).²¹

If humanity's dominion mandate is correctly understood as a commission to bring the earth outside of Eden into harmony with the beauty and bounty of the garden, then it reflects and extends the work of the Creator. God created the world *ex nihilo* and brought order to that which was in chaos (Gen. 1:2–3). In this way, God made the earth beautiful and bountiful for the life of the creatures he placed in it, including humanity. The human vocation of dominion calls people to become creators, enhancing the harmony (beauty) and productivity of the earth. As the Cornwall Alliance's "Renewed Call to Truth" puts it, "people more fully express this creative aspect of His image as they make more and more out of less and less."²²

This understanding of the dominion mandate also makes sense of God's command to humanity to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Human dominion over the earth is exercised and extended not primarily through technological innovation but through procreation.²³ In practical terms, one person (or one couple) can only till and keep so much ground. The more people there are, the more ground can (and will need to be) tilled and kept.

In light of the God-given pattern of the garden, as well as the explicit dominion mandate itself, the dominion of humanity over creation is constrained by God's superior rule. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1), but under God's absolute ownership of all creation, "the earth He has given to the sons of men" (Ps. 115:16 NASB). God remains the ultimate master of creation but has delegated authority to humanity as his representative in creation.²⁴ The submission of human dominion over creation to the superior will of God (as revealed by the garden of Eden) points to the concept of humanity as caretakers or stewards of God's creation.²⁵ The Mosaic law presupposes this concept when it legislates

care for animals (Ex. 23:5, 12; Num. 22:32–33; Deut. 5:14; 22:1, 3–4; 22:6–7, 10; 25:4), trees (Deut. 20:19–20), and land (Lev. 25:2, 4; 26:34, 43).²⁶

Human Dominion Has Been Impaired by the Fall and the Curse

The divine intent in the dominion mandate calls humanity to be stewards of God's good creation, expanding the borders of the garden of Eden by subduing more and more of the earth until all is brought into the full harmony and productivity of the God-given pattern in Eden. Yet, the force of the environmentalist objection to the Christian assertion of a dominion mandate lies in the ecologically destructive impact that humanity has clearly and repeatedly had on the earth.²⁷ The environmentalists' claim is that when people are free to pursue their own interests, individually through entrepreneurship or collectively in corporations, then it seems they inevitably have a negative impact on the environment.²⁸

Scripture explains the perversion of the dominion mandate as a consequence of humanity's rebellion against God and God's judgment of that rebellion. In the Fall, humanity submitted to a creature (the snake) and disobeyed God's command not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 3:1–7). Humanity's rejection of the sovereign rule of God was judged by God with the curse (Gen. 3:14–19, cf 5:28–29; Rom. 8:20–22). The ground now requires toil and sweat in order to produce for humanity, and it produces thorns and thistles more readily than food (Gen. 3:17–19). Nature rebels against human dominion in a way not dissimilar to humanity's rebellion against God's dominion.²⁹ This judgment is extended to the animal kingdom in the wake of the Noachic flood (Gen. 9:2).

The curse also imposed consequences directly on humanity that significantly impaired human ability to exercise the dominion mandate appropriately. When humanity was exiled from the garden of Eden, man lost the paradigm for harmony and bounty that would otherwise have served as a model for subduing and ruling the rest of the earth (Gen. 3:22–24). Exile also ended man's direct access to God who once walked in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). The lack of immediate access to God deprived humanity of the benefit of divine guidance, which mitigates the limited ability of finite minds to judge the wisdom of competing options in ruling the earth.³⁰ Human acts will do damage to creation out of ignorance. Furthermore, the depravity of the human heart and the perversion of human reason (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 1:18) means that human dominion over nature will often be harmful through negligence or malice.

Although the doctrine of the Fall and the curse would seem to be a substantial point of agreement between Christianity and the environmental movement, there is actually a critical difference in perspective. For the environmentalist, negative human impact on the environment is virtually inevitable. The ideal is “pristine nature,” untouched by human intervention. The mere existence of humanity seems to be the problem. For Scripture, however, humanity’s negative effect on the environment is not inherent in humanity as such. Humanity has inherent dignity and value as the *imago Dei*, and God designed the world to benefit from a benevolent human dominion. The key to the impairment of this dominion lies in the sinfulness of humanity and the judgment under which God has placed all creation as a result of that sin.

Dominion Is Being Restored According to the Already-But-Not-Yet Paradigm

The late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century environmental perspective effectively constitutes a rejection of the dominion mandate as appropriate to humanity’s place and work in the world. Some evangelical authors have taken up this position by adopting a nature-knows-best attitude and affirming that “nature does not need our interventions or (for that matter) us.”³¹ There are several serious problems with this perspective. First, denial of the divine mandate to rule the earth is itself an act of sinful rebellion against God (as is a refusal to fill the earth). Moreover, it is naïve to think that upwards of six billion people can live on earth without intervening in nature in some way! Indeed, it is precisely this fact that has led some notable environmental activists to hope for drastic reductions in the human population of the earth. For example, Dr. Eric Pianka, an ecologist at the University of Texas (Austin), and the 2006 Texas Distinguished Scientist acknowledged: “I actually think the world will be much better when there’s only 10 or 20 percent of us left.”³² Clearly, this cannot be an option for a genuinely Christian position on the value of humanity and human dominion.

Another perspective that amounts to a rejection of the dominion mandate is the stereotypical ecological attitude ascribed to the premillennial evangelical. This let-it-all-burn attitude is represented by a quote attributed to former Regan-administration Secretary of the Interior, James Watt. In testimony before Congress, Watt is supposed to have said: “After the last tree is felled, Christ will come back.”³³

It is difficult to find a notable evangelical who holds this view, however, including James Watt. Rather, the attitude of evangelicals is better reflected by what Watt actually said in his testimony: “I do not know how many future generations

we can count on before the Lord returns, whatever it is, we have to manage with a skill to leave the resources needed for future generations.”³⁴ What Watt articulated is a classically stewardship-oriented perspective on human responsibility for nature. While differing widely in their understanding of the personal- and public-policy implications of the concept of stewardship, evangelicals appeal to both biblical authority and pragmatic economic considerations as a basis for the good stewardship of creation.³⁵

In spite of the Fall and the curse, the dominion mandate is still in effect. God reaffirmed humanity’s dominion in the midst of the curse that greatly impairs its practical application (Gen. 3:17–19 still has Adam tilling the ground to produce food). Both dominion and procreation are reaffirmed in the new, more hostile context of the postdiluvian world.³⁶ All of what Genesis 1 affirms about humanity’s kingly role in creation is reaffirmed by Psalm 8.³⁷ Yet, despite these strong affirmations, full dominion has not yet been restored or attained.

The classically modern approach to achieving and/or restoring man’s dominion over nature was articulated by Sir Francis Bacon.³⁸ Bacon shared a fascination for the development and exercise of human power with other Enlightenment writers. However, Bacon’s unique contribution was an agenda that affirmed science as the path to power.³⁹ His dominant theme was “knowledge is power.”⁴⁰

Bacon proposed a science that aimed at the production of inventions that would go beyond minor adaptations to ultimately affect the course of nature. The goal was to develop a technology that would have the power to “conquer and subdue” nature.⁴¹ Scientists would become the benefactors of humanity, “the propagator[s] of man’s empire over the universe.”⁴² Science had value as the source of “that knowledge whose dignity is maintained by works of utility and power.”⁴³

Bacon defended his view of the purpose of science by connecting it to God’s blessing humanity with dominion over nature. Christian theology has consistently affirmed that human dominion over creation had been lost, or significantly marred, with the fall of Adam and Eve. On this basis, Bacon drew a brilliant parallel between the function of the church and the function of science. The role of the church was to lead humanity back to the goal of original righteousness and innocence while the role of science was to aid humanity in regaining some measure of the lost promise of dominion. “For man by the fall fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses however can even in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by arts [technology] and science.”⁴⁴

Bacon’s agenda has some four hundred years of scientific and technological advancement to commend it, along with all the benefits that humanity has accrued. Yet, it is precisely the great ecological disasters made possible by this

increased knowledge and technology that form the foundation for the environmentalist critique of the “mastery hypothesis.”⁴⁵ Herein lies the fatal flaw of Bacon’s proposal for restoration of human dominion over creation. To the extent that humanity remains twisted by sin, the curse will continue to apply—creation will remain in rebellion against humanity and human intervention in nature will be perverted by sin. The very fact that the same fundamental insights and discoveries can yield both wonderful benefits and ever more powerful possibilities for destruction demonstrates that the character of those who wield dominion lies at the crux of the issue.

If the key to understanding the perversion of human dominion is an appreciation of the impact of the Fall and the curse, then the core of the problem is clearly a spiritual issue—sin and judgment. For this problem, the redemption found in Christ is the only solution. Scripture indicates that Christ’s atoning work secured benefit not only for humanity but also for creation (cf. Rom. 8:18–25; Col. 1:15–20; Rev. 21; see also Isa. 65:17–25).⁴⁶ However, as with humanity, these benefits are only experienced partially now. Their full manifestation awaits the coming of the eschatological age.

Justin Martyr affirmed that worthiness to rule over creation with God was tied to righteousness in humanity.⁴⁷ Insofar as humanity is in rebellion against God’s dominion (sin, unrighteousness) so will creation be in rebellion against man’s dominion (the curse). Insofar as humanity is rightly related to God (righteousness), so will creation be properly submitted to man.

This vision of righteous dominion became a hermeneutical lens for both intertestamental rabbis and Christian interpreters. The rabbis found Adam’s authority to name the creatures, Noah’s gathering of the animals into the ark, Samson’s use of the foxes in judging the Philistines, and Daniel’s survival of the lion’s den to be examples of the peace that exceptionally righteous individuals could have with nature.⁴⁸ Christian interpreters saw much the same thing in Paul’s encounter with the viper on Malta, in the life of Saint Anthony, and in the fellowship with the animals attributed to Francis of Assisi.⁴⁹ Some measure of harmony with nature is possible in this life if only for the most Christlike of saints. When the sons of God come into the fullness of their glorious freedom from sin, then will the groaning creation be fully liberated from the curse also (Rom. 8:18–25).

Beneficial and appropriate dominion is grounded in the righteousness of the one(s) exercising the dominion mandate. While science and technology certainly aid human dominion, they are mere instruments capable of being used for ill as easily as for good. The appropriate exercise of the dominion mandate to subdue and rule the earth grows from the righteous stewardship of that plot of dirt under our most immediate control—ourselves (cf. Gen. 2:7).

Ultimately, addressing environmental problems, especially those caused by human beings, requires not just the multiplication, redirection, limitation, or expanded use of technologies, but a renovation of the human heart that can only be accomplished by the work of the Spirit through the Gospel of salvation from sin and its consequences.⁵⁰

Conclusion: Dominion and the *Imago*

The widespread perception of a long history of ecological damage by humanity creates an apologetic context that calls the Christian vision of dominion into serious question. Nevertheless, Scripture accounts for the current strife and destruction in nature by reference both to sin and judgment—the Fall and the curse. The problem with human dominion over nature is not humanity as such; the problem is fallen, sinful humanity. The answer to this problem is not rejection of human dominion over nature, nor rejection of the value of humanity entailed by the *imago Dei*. The answer is not, at its most fundamental level, the development of yet more technological innovations. Rather, the likelihood that human dominion will have positive results increases to the degree that dominion is wielded by increasingly virtuous, increasingly Christlike individuals, and by communities shaped by the Christian vision of service and stewardship.

The connection between imaging God righteously as *imago Christi* and the human vocation of dominion over creation lays an important foundation for a Christian theology of work. The dominion mandate is universal, it was given to humanity as such and remains in effect for humanity as a whole, both Christian and non-Christian. Because a theology of work will inevitably be grounded in the dominion mandate, theologians will be tempted to construct a natural theology or universal theology of work devoid of a Christological center, appealing to a non-Christologically determined understanding of the *imago Dei*. If the argument of this article is valid, however, then dominion cannot be fully and appropriately exercised under God apart from redemption in Christ and the development of sanctification (Christlikeness).

The work of the Christian in the vocation of dominion is not spiritually distinct from the work of the Christian in evangelism and discipleship. The world of work and the world of the church are not ultimately separable spheres of Christian life, nor is work merely an instrument by which church ministry, missions, and personal evangelism are made possible.⁵¹ The dominion mandate is to humanity's relationship to creation as the Great Commission is to the Church's relationship to humanity. Both callings have inherent dignity as a fundamental mandate of God that structures human vocation; the one with respect to creation, the other

with respect to humanity.⁵² Each helps to define what it is to live Christianly in the world. Both are callings that apply to all Christians, whether their paychecks come from a corporation or a church.

Notes

1. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, The Gifford Lectures 1984–1985, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 20. Note: The extent (and even existence) of a worldwide ecological crisis, usually discussed in terms of anthropogenic global warming is coming under increasing scrutiny and debate. It is not my purpose here to pursue that debate, much less to affirm the actual existence of catastrophic global warming or any other humanity-caused worldwide ecological crisis. Instead, I affirm that the *perception* of such a crisis does indeed form the apologetic context in which Christians speaking of creation-ethics must operate.
2. Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–7.
3. Cameron Wybrow, *The Bible, Baconism, and Mastery over Nature: The Old Testament and Its Modern Misreading* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 6.
4. David Kinsely, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995), 103.
5. Douglas Looney, “Protection or Provocateur?,” *Sports Illustrated*, May 27, 1991.
6. Paul Watson, “On the Precedence of Natural Law,” *Journal of Environmental Law and Litigation* 3 (1988): 82.
7. Tongjin Yang, “Towards An Egalitarian Global Environmental Ethics,” in *Environmental Ethics and International Policy*, ed. Henk A. M. J. Ten Have (New York: UNESCO, 2006): 24.
8. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 31, 51.
9. *Ibid.*, 186–87.
10. *Epistle of Barnabas* 6:18.
11. Paul Sands, “The *Imago Dei* as Vocation,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (2010): 28–41.
12. Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, ed. G. Ernest Wright, et. al., trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 144–45.

13. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19, ed. David Hubbard and Glen Barker (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 108.
14. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, ed. G. Ernest Wright, et. al., trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 57.
15. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 108; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion S.J. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 159. Westermann argues that dominion can only be exercised over the living, thus only the mention of animals here, not the whole earth. This does not mean, however, that the rest of creation is withdrawn from human disposition.
16. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Hildon C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 183.
17. “God does not create the garden to supply man, rather he creates man to manage and keep order and harmony in the garden that God created for man.” See Richard Young, *Healing the Earth: A Theocentric Perspective on Environmental Problems and Their Solutions* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1994), 163.
18. E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute; Eerdmans, 1997), 13.
19. Cf. James Jordon, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988), 148.
20. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 400.
21. Note that the development of technology and skills, though presented as good things in Genesis 4, are relativized by three factors. First, it is the descendants of Cain who are credited with their development. Second, these developments lead to the furtherance of their sinful pride. Third, by contrast, the development of true religion and/or piety is credited to the line of Seth (Gen. 3:17–26).
22. Craig Mitchell, et al., “Chapter 1: Theology” in *A Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection for the Poor: An Evangelical Examination of the Theology, Science, and Economics of Global Warming*, ed. Cal Beisner (Washington, D.C.: Cornwall Alliance, 2009), 8, accessed 11/12/2010 at <http://www.cornwallalliance.org/articles/read/a-renewed-call-to-truth-prudence-and-protection-of-the-poor/>. The “Renewed Call to Truth” goes on to point out that,

We can transform raw materials into resources through ingenuity and hard work, making more resources than we consume, so that each generation can pass on to the next more material blessings than it received, and—through godly subduing and ruling of the Earth—can actually improve the environment. The well-documented phenomenon of declining inflation-adjusted and

wage-indexed prices of all extractive resources (mineral, plant, and animal) running right alongside increasing population, affluence, and technology contradicts the environmentalist view and confirms this Biblical view.

23. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 399. Note the point is not that technological innovation is irrelevant or inappropriate to human dominion over creation but rather that technological innovation is not the primary expression of this dominion. New technologies are fruits of human capital accrued through the collaboration and increased learning made possible by larger and larger pools of innovators, entrepreneurs, and so forth.
24. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 108; von Rad, 58.
25. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 399.
26. Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 17.
27. To cite incidents such as 3-Mile Island, Chernobyl, the Union Carbide disaster in India, and the recent BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is only to glimpse the tip of a Titanic iceberg of ecological disasters resulting from human intervention in nature.
28. Cf. Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1971), 39.
29. Mitchell, “Chapter 1: Theology,” 13.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*
31. Vincint Rossi, “Theocentrism: The Cornerstone of Christian Ecology,” in *Ecology and Life: Accepting Our Environmental Responsibility*, ed. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Issues of Christian Conscience Series, ed. Vernon Grounds (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988), 158–59; Lionel Basney, *An Earth-Careful Way of Life: Christian Stewardship and the Environmental Crisis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 39.
32. Cathy Young, “Environmentalism and the Apocalypse,” *Boston Globe*, April 17, 2006, A15. This statement is almost as stunning for its casual misanthropy as for the implication that its author would welcome the death of as many as 5.4 billion human beings!
33. David Neff, “Second Coming Ecology: We Care for the Environment Precisely Because God Will Create a New Earth,” *Christianity Today*, July 2008, accessed 11/12/2010 at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/july/23.35.html>.
34. *Ibid.*
35. See Benjamin B. Phillips, “Getting into Hot Water: Evangelicals and Global Warming,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 315–35.
36. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 398, 400.
37. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 185.

38. Francis Bacon (1561–1626), was an anti-Aristotelian English philosopher who argued that the only knowledge of value to humanity was that which was rooted empirically in the natural world. His greatest work was the *Instauratio Magna*, of which only two parts were finished, *Novum Organum* and *De Augmentis Scientiarum*. His work and ideas on the methods and goals of science came to serve as the paradigm of the new science of the Enlightenment and modernity. Cf. Charles Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), esp. 1–22.
39. W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: Hobbes to Hume*, vol. 3 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), 75.
40. *Ibid.*, 73.
41. Bacon, “Description of the Intellectual Globe,” in *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 5, ed. John M. Robertson (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 506.
42. R. W. Church, *Bacon* (New York: Harper, 1902), 67.
43. W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: Hobbes to Hume*, 75.
44. Bacon, “The New Organon,” in *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 4, ed. John M. Robertson (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 247–48.
45. While it is the case that there are significant ecological disasters that have been made possible because of advancing human technology, the environmentalist critique fails to recognize that the overall effect of advancing technology has been beneficial to the environment. One indicator of this correlation between poverty and environmental damage identified by Jack Hollander, *The Real Environmental Crisis: Poverty, Not Affluence, Is the Environment’s Number One Enemy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
46. Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 23 (see n. 42 for a lengthy list of evangelical sources making this point).
47. Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 1:10.
48. Kenneth Jobling, “And Have Dominion ...” *The Interpretation of Old Testament Texts Concerning Man’s Rule Over the Creation (Genesis 1:26, 28, 9:1–2, Psalm 8:7–9) from 200 B.C. to the Time of the Council of Nicea*, (Ph.D. diss.: Union Theological Seminary, 1972), 133.
49. *Ibid.*, 134.
50. Mitchell, “Chapter 1: Theology,” 13.
51. Certainly, working to earn money does enable one to do spiritually significant things such as support one’s family, tithe, and give offerings through the local church and other ministries, as well as provide a context in which evangelism can happen. The

point here is that work possesses not only this kind of instrumental value but also inherent dignity as fulfilling the dominion mandate laid down at the beginning of creation.

52. The dominion mandate has the significance of being temporally prior to the Great Commission. Yet fulfillment of the Great Commission is the necessary precondition in a fallen world for the transformation of sinners into Christlike saints who will be the kind of people who will exercise the dominion mandate righteously. Just as physical procreation is an important part of fulfilling the dominion mandate, spiritual regeneration (rebirth!) becomes the way in which the population of the righteous comes to “fill the earth.”

In Praise of Industry: Early Nineteenth-Century Concepts of Work

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In short, the way to wealth, if you desire it, is as plain as the way to market. It depends chiefly on two words, industry, and frugality; i.e., waste neither time nor money, but make the best use of both.

—Ben Franklin¹

So spoke America's fount of practical wisdom, Benjamin Franklin. His various addresses in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, published from 1732–1758, urged the nascent American nation to seek success through "industry." For Franklin and many others of the early Industrial Revolution in both the colonies and Britain proper, the advances in technology meant a new outlook for success.² The creative, the tinkerers, the doers of this new age held the keys of the future, and their work became the *prima exemplar* of the spirit of the age. Yet, for all the successes of the few who launched their futures in this period, there were many who were unable to break free from the proverbial Weberian "Iron Cage." Extreme poverty crippled not only large portions of Britain in urban centers such as London but also in more rural environments such as Cheddar, a city to which we will later turn.

For countless individuals of modest means in England (as well as America), aiding the poor became a dominant focus.³ Aid societies throughout the British Isles sprang into action attempting to alleviate the ailments of the poor. While many of these societal movements sought simply to ameliorate the physical needs of the underprivileged, after the 1760s, some of these charity structures shifted their focus to teaching and training individuals so they could better their position

in society. This educational endeavor frequently focused on practical, skills-based instruction, including securing apprenticeships for young adults where appropriate. Most important of all was instruction in reading, for, if children could read, the Bible and its wisdom would be available to their young minds.

Of course, training in literacy was a difficult task as most children and young adults worked every day with apprenticeships starting even as young as seven to eight years of age. Work schedules for children, thanks to many evangelicals who wanted children to have free time to learn, were eventually limited in 1802 to a paltry twelve hours per day. Children experienced “free play” only on Sundays, much to the chagrin of church attendees who were frequently disturbed by the rowdy youths playing in the alleys and streets. A key watermark in the availability of education for all children came as William Raikes began Sunday schools around 1780 to instruct poor children in reading as well as societal virtues.⁴

It is to one of these virtues the article turns—industry. Instruction on this particular virtue flooded books in the growing late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century body of juvenile literature—a unique subset of literature that began to appear in force around the 1770s. Through the idealistic language of virtue narratives, concepts are distilled to their base form, granting us insight into the theological underpinnings of the concept of industriousness. In the process, this article will examine one of the more prolific female authors of literature relating to the topic and will pose questions for further research.

Concepts of Industry

What is *industry*? In the minds of many authors during the early Industrial Revolution, *industry* meant setting one’s mind to the work at hand no matter the difficulty, knowing that rewards for such toil would ultimately be adjudicated by God. The goal of the industrious is, according to Hannah More (1745–1833), “to learn and labor truly to get their own living, and to do their duty in that state of life, unto which it hath pleased God to call them.”⁵

The juvenile virtue narratives dealing with industriousness assume this *Weltanschauung*. The tales are woven in such a way that the main characters of the stories are born into overwhelming circumstances that frequently include the loss of parents. Later stories place the young men and women in difficult ethical or moral situations only to have them rise above the fray to greater success due to their hard work and honesty. In many cases, the protagonists rise above their difficult circumstances to become independent of all other support supplied by the church or extended family.

By way of example, take Mary, the heroine of *The Lancashire Collier Girl: A True Story* by Hannah More. Mary loses her father, which creates such mental distress in the mother that the children are removed from the home. The parish does all it can to care for the needs of the children and the distraught mother. As a young person of industry, young Mary sets to work to care for her own needs.

Prior to the tragedy, Mary's parents worked with her and her siblings to teach them how to be industrious so that after grieving the loss of her parents, Mary, only twelve years of age, "determined to maintain herself, like a little independent woman, by her usual work in the coal pit, where she was generally able after this time to earn at least a shilling a day."⁶ Because a shilling was enough for daily sustenance, More, the storyteller, moralized by asking how Mary "employed the fruit of her industry." Was it in "vanity of dress, in nice eating and drinking or other needless expense?" This rhetorical leading question brings us to the crux of the application of our definition of industry: "She, in the first place released the parish from the burthen of maintaining her mother," which she accomplished by the age of sixteen.⁷

However, there is a divine twist to many of these stories. The encouragement for the reader of Mary's story was to understand the power of industriousness in the divine plan that God will eventually bless all those who labor well and trust God for the results. More encouraged her reader to understand, "that they can seldom be in any condition of life so low, as to prevent their rising to some degree of independence, if they chuse to exert themselves." Not only does God use difficulty of life to provide opportunity to develop character and virtue, but he will bless and protect those who labor well.⁸

The writings of Hannah More are not a solitary voice, however. Contemporaries Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849), John Aikin (1747–1822) and his sister, Anna Barbauld (1743–1825), Thomas Day (1748–1789), Sarah Trimmer (1741–1810), and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) formed the inner core of what Isaac Kramnic called the new "Bourgeois Ideologues."⁹ These individuals, to a great extent, defined a new generation of literature for the consumption and instruction of children with the aim of encouraging them to improve themselves.

Despite the disparate Christian theologies these leading writers espoused, the common themes of their writing is significant to note in terms of understanding the central push of industriousness and the theologies tied to them. Three of these themes carry significant import to our understanding of the period's theology of work—individual accountability, corrupt human nature and the blessing of industriousness.

Individual Accountability

Central to all of the literature of the time is the understanding that the individual child is responsible, within a limited sense, for his or her own destiny. While far short of the modern individualism that permeates Western culture, the idea that the young adult could somehow shape his or her own future fits within the context of the Romanticism in which the Industrial Revolution was steeped.

This individualistic charter had limits, however. Under divine Providence, the child could only excel as far as his or her calling and station allowed. As Benjamin Franklin advised, “He that gets all he can, and saves all he gets . . . will certainly become rich, if that Being who governs the world, to whom all should look for a blessing on their honest endeavours, does not, in his wise providence, otherwise determine.”¹⁰ Or, as More advised, that individuals were to be content in living according to, “that state of life, unto which it hath pleased God to call them.”¹¹ Those imposed limits on a God who was “about your path and about your bed, and spieth out all our ways.”¹²

This mooring of Calvinistic Providence provided the natural limitations so as to encourage youth to excel but then explained why certain attainments, as laudable as they were, would remain outside of the grasp of even the most industrious poor. God provided societal structures and the best one could do was to work for attainment within that structure. If God ordained authorities and the structures that were in place, then comfort for those of high station could be found as well as those of lower.

In many respects, the aim and the goal for those of lower station were to attain the middling class of individuals. In an anonymous flyleaf published in 1795 entitled, “The Contrast Between ‘the Rich’ and ‘the Poor,’” both the rich (those who “live in splendid houses, in unbounded luxury, dissipation and extravagance,” etc.) and the poor (those who “live in miserable hovels, in want of coals, food, cloathing, and every comfort, and are forced to work ten hours a day merely not to starve,” etc.) are parodied as having excess and want.¹³ While contentment can and should be found in every station of life, it is within the ranks of the contented middle class that true happiness is to be found.

In what is often regarded as the first true children’s novel written in English, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* illustrates this concept well. The anonymous author tells the tale of a young Margery Meanwell, a young orphan, who, along with her brother, is taken in by a kindly clergyman and his wife. The two are quite a pair and are described as filthy street urchins with nothing to their name. In fact, Margery has only one shoe. As the family cleans them up, Margery’s brother is sent promptly out as a sailor to earn his way in the world and Margery

is given a complete pair of shoes—the first she has ever had. She is so excited about the shoes that she runs about showing them to everyone in town thereby inheriting the name Goody Two-Shoes.¹⁴

The story demonstrates the intersection of providence (a family intervenes in the life of young Margery) but then allows for her own spirit of industriousness to make her way in the world with the modest means given to her by the hands of Providence, and work she does. In fact, she overcomes every obstacle thrown in her path to better herself in almost every way. She teaches herself to read and then begins to teach others. Her witty sayings, quite reminiscent of the early work by Franklin, encouraged her pupils to be boys and girls of industry:

He that will thrive must arise by five.¹⁵

Where vice enters the room ... vengeance is near the door.¹⁶

Industry is fortune's right hand, and frugality her left.¹⁷

Remember that all you do, is done in the presence of God. The time will come, my friends, when we must give account to God, how on earth we did live.¹⁸

And, abundance, like want, ruins many, contentment is the best fortune.¹⁹

Eventually, Margery becomes the main principal of a school and secures a solid future for herself in the middle class. Through marriage and the success of her brother at sea, Margery Two-Shoes becomes a bastion for young men and women who want to make something of themselves.

The moral of the story became simply that individuals engaged in hard work could better themselves, their families, and prove to be an asset to God, the church, and the community at large. At the conclusion of *Goody Two-Shoes*, Margery reflects: “Ah, said I, why did I long for riches. Having enough already why did I covet more? This is a lesson, a load of riches bring instead of felicity, a load of troubles; and the only source of happiness is contentment.”²⁰

Even in success, the appropriate response to all of life's circumstances is contentment.

Corrupt Human Nature

For the authors of these children's tales, the veil of sin was very thin. For authors such as Hannah More who worked directly in poor areas of the country, children hearing these tales were all too familiar with drunkenness, abuse, and the opposite of industry—laziness. Despite the theological broadness of the dissenting

tradition that undergirded many of these writers, most assumed that the essential state of humanity is fallen. In fact, those who succeed will be the young men and women who escape the very deep chasms of sin in which many of them live. In near militaristic terms, these pupils of industry were to be “united with disciplined habits of observation, tireless industry and a conscientious sense of responsibility.”²¹

To heighten the realities of the virtue, many of the stories dealing with industriousness elevate the central character as a near faultless child who must deal with a child of almost the exact opposite characteristics. Maria Edgeworth’s *Lazy Lawrence, or Idleness and Industry Exemplified* is a case in point. Edgeworth’s tale originally appeared in a collection of stories called *The Parent’s Assistant* (1796), but the tale of Lazy Lawrence enjoyed a life of its own, being reprinted in the United States and Britain well into the late nineteenth century.

The story follows Jem, a young boy whose mother suffered from severe ailments and had to mortgage their home to pay some of her bills. Without any income, one of the last assets the family owned was a horse that Jem happened to love. When Jem’s mother informed him that the auction house expected the horse within two weeks in order to pay for part of the bills, the young, industrious Jem set himself to work immediately to see if he could earn two guineas—an insurmountable sum—before the horse would be forced to go to market.

And work he did. He worked in yards; he worked in mines; he simply walked past the other children when he was asked to stop and play because he had a purpose. Jem’s peers did not understand and began to taunt him—particularly at the leading of a particular child named Lawrence—a child that “never did anything from morning to night; he neither worked nor played, but sauntered or lounged about restless and yawning.”²² Idleness was Lawrence’s undoing. His reticence to engage productive life and industry led to gambling, spending time with the wrong crowd, and eventually stealing Jem’s hard-earned money.

Without belaboring the point of the story, it is instructive to gain this point: for Edgeworth the status of both boys is equally inclined toward wrongdoing, but it is in the discipline of industry that Jem escapes the clutches of temptation and becomes a young man of honor. Jem’s mother trusts him impeccably for, “You are not an idle boy . . . so there is little danger of your getting into mischief.”

Hannah More echoes this point in her seminal *Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*. The account follows a certain Mr. Johnson, a man of some means, who encounters a very poor shepherd while on a journey through Wiltshire. Mr. Johnson strikes up a conversation with the shepherd over the weather and discovers, to his delight, a shepherd who is grateful to God for all that he has, thereby demonstrating contentment in his station. When asked about the difficulty of his life,

the shepherd simply and honestly replies: “To be sure, sir . . . ’tis not a very lazy life; but ’tis not near so toilsome as that which my GREAT MASTER led for my sake, and he had every state and condition of life at his choice, and chose a hard one—while I only submit to the lot that is appointed me.”²³

When asked about the difficulty of caring for sheep in great variances of temperature, the shepherd emphasizes the benefits of being poor and working hard:

I am not exposed to great temptations; and so throwing one thing against another, God is pleased to contrive to make things more equal than we poor, ignorant, short sighted creatures are apt to think. . . . I wonder all working men do not derive as great joy and delight as I do from thinking how God has honored poverty! Oh! Sir, what great, or rich, or mighty men have had such honor put on them, or their condition, as shepherds, tentmakers, fishermen and carpenters have had?²⁴

While life for the poor may not be as comfortable, there are certain advantages for those who work hard, according to More’s story. They are content, they appreciate all that God provides and ultimately, God blesses beyond expectation and measure. For Mr. Johnson in More’s story, he cannot help but be instructed by the “shifts which honest poverty can make rather than beg or steal; and was surprised to think how many ways of subsisting there are which those who live at their ease little suspect.”²⁵ Walking away with this humbling lesson, he determines to live with more frugality and thoughtfulness, being grateful for all that God provides.

In this respect, More’s *Shepherd* demonstrates the ideological commitment to industry as part of the moral fabric of Christian society itself. The shepherd communicates the dire circumstances of his family—including his wife’s ailments—and how the community of faith supplied for the needs of the shepherd’s family out of their own wantonness. Yet, the community knew that the shepherd’s family was industrious, and that all need came through no fault of their own. They were thereby worthy to receive true aid.

By the end of the tale, Mr. Johnson endows the parish’s Sunday school and places the shepherd in the role of church clerk where he can help other families understand the scriptural teaching relating to industriousness and thereby profit their entire community.

Hannah More, Emissary of Industry

At this point, it may be helpful to take a brief excursus to understand one of the key writers in this genre of juvenile industry literature.

More's personal story reflects much of the literature she would later write. The second to last out of five daughters, Hannah showed an early aptitude for literature and writing. She studied in the schools her father established in the region of Bristol and eventually taught in the schools themselves. As an instructor, she valued the theater as an arena for instruction and authored a series of plays for young women entitled *The Search After Happiness* that sold out numerous editions and launched More into London's social elite. She became part of the "polite society" of London that surrounded Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke. Part of the famed "bluestocking" group of women, she met and conversed with Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and other of the rising female stars of late eighteenth-century England. Her work found its greatest audience in the playwright David Garrick who helped stage her tragedy, *Percy*, at London's Covent Garden in 1777.

After Garrick's death, More moved away from London's literary society and engaged in the fight against slavery, becoming close personal friends with William Wilberforce as well as with the Clapham sect. Knowing their familiarity with the region surrounding Bristol, Wilberforce entreated Hannah to help him work to alleviate the dire circumstances of the poor in and around the village of Cheddar, England. Hannah agreed. With funding from Wilberforce himself and the help of her youngest sister, the two spent most of their final years serving this community through educational endeavors and practical job training.

Hannah experienced untold resistance from the farmers and men in the community who believed that education would be the undoing of their community and agrarian way of life. Hannah persisted. In the midst of writing numerous books aimed at both children and adults, she founded over ten schools in the region designed to "learn on week-days such coarse work as may fit them for servants.... My object is ... to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety."²⁶ Many of the positive, poor characters that appear in her later, more moralistic tales are typified by the shepherd of Salisbury—happy, contented, and industrious.

At the end of the day, More believed that the battle over the fallen nature of humanity is enjoined on the economic and spiritual battlefield. For those to whom industry is not cultivated, idleness will rule—no matter the social class. Idleness allows the heart to follow every wicked way. Thus, industry must be

followed with a healthy dose of contentment to avoid the other vices that may accompany the successes of industry itself.

Industry as Blessing

In the conclusion of many of the tales of industry, the gains are not only to the diligent. In the case of Goody Two-Shoes, her poor pupils benefit from her industry as she gives of her resources; Mary, the miner, cares for her mother and family out of her industry; Jem is eventually able to pay the debt owed by his mother and secures the favor of the “Lady Preston” who employs his mother and Jem, securing a future for both of them; the Shepherd of Salisbury is blessed by Mr. Johnson who provides the local parish with funds so that the shepherd can be a clerk for the vicar. The list goes on. Industry may be part of the expectation for the individual, but the blessings of industry go far beyond the self to the families and the communities of those who are connected. For the authors, if a generation of children would take individual responsibility and overcome their predispositions to do evil, their families and communities would benefit.

Conclusion

In reading on this topic, one becomes painfully aware of the lack of research into the world of children in much of the work on economics—whether sociologically, historically, or theologically grounded. For the purposes of this article, we have seen how three key themes—individual accountability, corrupt human nature, and the blessing of industriousness—undergird much of the burgeoning category of juvenile literature at the close of the eighteenth century in Britain. By encouraging children to become aware of these issues, they might just become the men and women of the next generation who no longer fall prey to the folly of laziness. As such, it seems that further work on the subject may shed light onto the increasing advancement of the first Industrial Revolution and how it bled right into the second. Could it be that some authors of children’s literature such as Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth, paved the way for the growth of an industrious generation bent on taming the ever-expanding western horizon of America?

One of the fascinating aspects of those connected to the earliest days of the publication of this young adult literature has to be the overwhelming number connected to strong dissenting religious communities. Hannah More excepting—she remained a loyal Anglican—many of the other writers spent time in Unitarian

or radical dissent communities even as they wrote and published their volumes. Could it be deduced that the radical nature of these groups encouraged this more “free-spirited” capitalistic industrious literature? If so, what are the direct connections between radicalized dissenter movements—especially those circles that Hannah More indulged in during her early days and Maria Edgeworth participated in a few years later—and ideas of economic liberty during the same period?

As always, further research is needed, but if scholars will simply heed the praise and virtue of industry, there is no doubt that these secrets will eventually be unlocked.

Notes

1. Benjamin Franklin, *Franklin's Way To Wealth; or, "Poor Richard Improved,"* (New York: S. Wood and Sons, 1817), 36.
2. Advances like the Watt steam engine (1763–1775) were essential to propel the movement forward. For more information on the impact of technology on economy during the period, see Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) or Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
3. While many of these issues and ideas can be traced in both America and Britain, for the purposes of this project, we will focus primarily on the British streams.
4. For more on childhood in early industrial Britain, see Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
5. Hannah Moore, “The Lancashire Collier Girl: A True Story,” in *Idleness and Industry* by Maria Edgeworth (Philadelphia: Johnson and Warner, 1811), 101.
6. Moore, “The Lancashire Collier Girl,” 92.
7. *Ibid.*, 93.
8. *Ibid.*, 100.
9. Isaac Kramnic, “Children’s Literature and Bourgeois Identity,” in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Los Angeles: University of California, 1980), 203–40.
10. Franklin, *Way to Wealth*, 36.
11. More, “The Lancashire Collier Girl,” 101.

12. *Goody Two-Shoes* as cited by Kramnic, 219.
13. Anonymous, “The Contrast Between ‘The Rich’ and ‘The Poor,’” (London, 1795).
14. The success of this story gives us the root of the eponymous English phrase “goody two-shoes.”
15. *Goody Two-Shoes: A Facsimile Reproduction of the Edition of 1766 with an introduction by Charles Welsh* (London: Griffith wand Farran, 1881), 39.
16. *Goody Two-Shoes*, 40. This is part of Lesson 2, which also includes the oft quoted, “honey catches more flies than vinegar” and “a friend in your need, is a friend in deed.”
17. *Goody Two-Shoes*, 41.
18. *Ibid.*, 42.
19. *Ibid.*, 41.
20. *Ibid.*, 144
21. Daniel Drake, *An Introductory Lecture on the Necessity and Value of Professional Industry; Delivered in the Chapel of Transylvania University, November 7, 1823* (Lexington, Ky.: William Tanner, 1823), 12.
22. Maria Edgeworth, *Lazy Lawrence, or; Idleness and Industry Exemplified, to which is added the Shepherd of Salisbury Plain by Hannah More* (Philadelphia: Johnson and Warner, 1811), 9.
23. More, *Shepherd*, 49. William Wilberforce stated that he would prefer to “present himself before heaven with the *Shepherd* in his hand.” (Fawcett, 219.)
24. *Ibid.*, 49, 52.
25. *Ibid.*, 58.
26. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Some Eminent Women of Our Times: Short Biographical Sketches* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1889), 211–12. Fawcett makes note that More would, “allow no writing for the poor” as that might distract them from industriousness and ultimately their happiness.

Contemporary Research in Religion, Politics, and Economics

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In June of this year, I spent two weeks at Boston University's Summer Seminar on World Religions. The host of this event was the renowned sociologist of religion, Peter Berger. While there, I had the opportunity to spend an hour alone with Dr. Berger. We focused on one primary question. I asked, "Milton Friedman always argued that economic liberty leads to political liberty. Does religious liberty have anything to do with these others?" He thought that this was a good question and said that, as yet, there had been no empirical study attempting to link these things. He did note, however, if what Friedman said was true, then how do you explain the situation in China? China is having considerable economic growth, yet political liberty appears nowhere on the horizon.¹

In contrast to Friedman, Daron Acemoglu argues that political liberty, or rather democracy, leads to economic liberty and growth.² Like Friedman, Acemoglu does not consider the effect of religious liberty on economics and politics. Such is often the case among those interested in political economy. However, I believe that Acemoglu has an incomplete picture and that these issues must be explored.

Deirdre McCloskey is another example of contrast. She believes that religion is not a factor leading to economic growth or liberty and neither is politics.³ Instead, a change in economic rhetoric resulted in economic growth. Economic liberty is something quite apart from religious and political liberties.

These thoughts have often occupied my mind as I have explored the relationship between economics and Christian ethics. In this article, we will investigate this issue in three different ways. The first part will explore three new fields in economics. More specifically, part 1 explains the significance of religion and

the economics of religion. Further, it will relate the economics of religion to economics as a whole. The next section of part 1 will involve a survey of the new field of the economics of happiness. Finally, the last section of part 1 will review religious, economic, and political liberty from the standpoint of New Institutional Economics. Part 2 of this article will explore the empirical work that has been done to explore these relationships. The last part of this paper will draw some conclusions about how economic, political, and religious liberties are related.

Part 1: The Significance of Religion

According to Peter Berger, secularization theory is the idea that “modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion.”⁴ Contrary to secularization theory, the world has not grown less religious with modernity. It has in fact only grown more religious. The growth of both Christianity and Islam are testaments to the fact that religion has a huge influence on politics and economics. Thus, how do these religions affect political economy?

We inherently know that religion has some kind of effect on politics and economics, but we are not sure to what degree. Samuel P. Huntington asserts that “people identify themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and, at the broadest level, civilizations. People use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity. We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against.”⁵

The Significance of Religion to Economics as a Whole

Christianity and Economic Development

The sociologist Max Weber is famous for his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*⁶ in which he studies “the fact that business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labor, and even more the higher technicality and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant.”⁷ He believes that Protestant Christianity is responsible for the economic development of the Western world. It should also be noted that in his *General Economic History*, he equates capitalism with greed.⁸ Weber’s problems arise from his philosophical presuppositions, and Deidre McCloskey shows that he combined an “idealist focus on spirit with a materialist and Marxist focus on accumulation.”⁹ McCloskey notes that Weber’s famous thesis “has been repeatedly demolished” and that he dropped it himself after 1905.¹⁰

In some ways, Rodney Stark agrees with Weber. At the same time, he provides an important corrective to Weber's view of sociology of religion. He argues that economic growth happened in the West largely because of Catholic Christianity.¹¹ Like Weber, he shows that science arose in Europe because of Christianity and not Islam and not in China or India.¹² The rational nature of Christianity also led to moral innovations such as human rights, liberty, and freedom.¹³ Eventually, Stark shows that free-market capitalism was a child of Christianity.

Walter Russell Mead is an expert in foreign policy. His work in this field has caused him to draw some conclusions about the way the world works. Mead believes that the relationship among religion, economics, and politics is best exemplified in the Anglo-American world. More specifically, he argues that

the Anglo American world synthesized its religious beliefs with its historical experience to build an ideology that has shaped what is still the dominant paradigm in the English-speaking world, the deeply rooted vision of the way the world works that lies behind the physics of Sir Isaac Newton, the political economy of Adam Smith, the constitutional theories of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and the biological theories of Charles Darwin. While many of these thinkers were not particularly or conventionally religious, their belief that order arises spontaneously, "as if by the workings of an invisible hand" from the free play of natural forces is a way of restating some of the most powerful spiritual convictions of the English speaking world. The idea that the world is built (or guided by God) in such a way that unrestricted free play creates an ordered and higher form of society is found in virtually all fields and at virtually all levels of the Anglo Saxon world.¹⁴

Mead suggests that "a belief in an emergent order in both the physical and social universe, and that we cooperate with God's (or nature's) work by allowing the process of historical development to proceed, powerfully reinforces the idea that change signifies progress rather than decay."¹⁵

Mead is not alone in his views about the Anglo-American world. In the nineteenth century, religious believers in Britain and America saw the technological and economic progress in a positive light. According to Benjamin Friedman, "as the years passed, in both Britain and America, it became ever more difficult to distinguish religious thinking about world affairs from the secular view of progress."¹⁶

When he examined America, Alexis de Tocqueville found that "men have an immense interest in making very fixed ideas for themselves about God, their souls, their general duties toward their Creator and those like them; for doubt about these first points would deliver all their actions to chance and condemn

them to a sort of disorder and impotence.”¹⁷ Hence, without God, men fall into disorder. Such a state is incompatible with economic growth or political stability. Tocqueville understood that the reason that revolution caused America to prosper while allowing France to flounder was religious belief. He adds: “When religion is destroyed in a people, doubt takes hold of the highest portions of the intellect and half paralyzes all the others.”¹⁸

It is clear that de Tocqueville understands that religion controls corruption in a free-market system when he writes: “The principle business of religions is to purify, regulate and restrain the too ardent and too exclusive taste for well-being that men in times of equality feel; but I believe that they would be wrong to try to subdue it entirely and to destroy it. They still will not succeed in turning men away from love of wealth; but they can still persuade them to enrich themselves only by honest means.”¹⁹

Islam and Economic Development

Timur Kuran acknowledges the fact that the Middle East is economically behind “the West” or Western Christendom, but he would not agree with the reasons typically given for this disparity.²⁰ He asserts: “The Middle East fell behind the West because it was late in adopting key institutions of the modern economy. These include laws, regulations, and organizational forms that enabled economic activities now taken for granted in all but the most impoverished parts of the globe.”²¹ According to Kuran, the Middle East was economically on par with the West until about 1000 A.D. After this period, the Middle East fell behind the West.

Islamic law (rather than Islam) played a key role in the failure of the Middle East to keep up in commerce and finance.²² Kuran cites the corporation as an example of an institution that Islamic law did not allow. Kuran also lists the inheritance system, marriage regulations, opposition to interest, and the lack of merchant organizations as other factors that slowed economic development in the Middle East.²³

Economics of Religion

This much is clear: Religious liberty leads to religious marketplaces. In a very real sense, the laws of supply and demand work just as easily here as they do in economic marketplaces. The study of the religious marketplace is known as the economics of religion. The history of this subject goes all the way back to Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. Laurence R. Iannaccone is perhaps the most significant figure in this field today. He explains:

I am increasingly convinced that mainstream economics genuinely needs the economics of religion—and not merely because we now study such non-market topics such as marriage, health, and discrimination. The traditional heartland of economics (including trade, finance, banking, unemployment, and growth) desperately needs better understanding of beliefs, norms, values, self-control, social capital, social networks, institutions, and culture. Where better to start than religion, the context in which these things are most clearly described, nurtured and measured? Indeed, I would strongly discount any model of beliefs, norm, or values that has *not* proved relevant to religion.²⁴

In other words, political economy cannot really be understood apart from an understanding of ethics based in religion. Religion provides many of the values and constraints necessary to make an economy grow.

Social welfare theory, a subject within microeconomics, teaches us that the social optimum is reached at equilibrium, the point at which supply equals demand. This is no less true in the religious marketplace. It is only when there is a religious marketplace or religious liberty that one has freedom of conscience. With freedom of conscience, both the individual and society as a whole have the opportunity to flourish. Recent work in the economics of happiness confirms this assertion. Further, evidence exists that religious liberty results in an increase of faith.

The Economics of Happiness

One of the newer areas of study is called the economics of happiness. By using survey information and regression analysis, they are able to draw some conclusions about flourishing. Bruno Frey is a leader in this newly developing field. He cites three reasons why this field is revolutionary: (1) *measurement*: The measurable concept of happiness or life satisfaction allows us to proxy the concept of utility in a satisfactory way; (2) *new insights*: Happiness research teaches us how human beings value goods and services, as well as how they value social conditions; (3) *policy consequences*: Happiness research suggests that many policies deviate significantly from those derived in standard economics. With respect to current economic policy, the research on happiness reveals that the goal of increasing income often implicitly or even explicitly assumed in received economics is not an effective way of increasing utility in a sustainable way.²⁵

Historically, some type of consequentialism has been the accepted theory of ethics for economics. In the modern period, since Adam Smith, everyone has assumed that utilitarianism, as well as cost-benefit analysis is the most consistent with standard welfare economics. Contemporary moral philosophers—Simon Blackburn,²⁶ Daniel Hausman, and Michael McPherson—also believe that this is the case.²⁷

It can be argued, I believe successfully, that social-welfare economics is more compatible with virtue ethics. S. T. Lowry asserts that in Aristotle's *Politics* we find that economics is a moral discipline.²⁸ Aristotle and the other premoderns understood all moral theory to be in accordance with virtue ethics. To be sure, neither Aristotle nor Aquinas developed social welfare theory, but they did understand that economics has a strong moral component, which was their primary concern.²⁹ They were not interested in understanding all of the aspects of how an economy functions. The medieval concern for economics, as well as law and politics, focused on the common good, which meant social or civic flourishing.³⁰ In other words, they were interested in achieving the social optimum.

In any case, the economics of happiness has much to offer the study of religion, politics, and economics. Part 2 of this article is a brief exploration of the empirical research done in this field.

New Institutional Economics

New Institutional Economics (NIE) is an approach to understanding how economies grow. It suggests that neo-classical economics by itself cannot explain why some economies work and others do not.

The essential idea of the NIE is that the success of a market system is dependent upon the institutions that facilitate efficient private transactions. While neoclassical economics assumes that all mutually beneficial transactions will occur, the NIE observes that conducting a transaction requires numerous elements other than the possibility of mutual gain: information about the potential traders, ability to conduct the bargaining, and confidence that the agreement will be carried out once reached. Those conditions are dependent upon information exchange, commercial law, and enforcement mechanisms.³¹

New Institutional Economics realizes that free markets are a necessary but not a sufficient cause for economic growth. In *Good Capitalism/Bad Capitalism*, Baumol, Litan, and Schramm argue that institutions play an important role in economic growth. In fact, institutions play a role in three of the four elements of a successful entrepreneurial economy.³² More specifically, they write: "Economists who stress the importance of institutions typically point to the enforcement of rights to property (both physical and intellectual), contracts and limited liability for investors in companies as being among the most important of these rules."³³

New Institutional Economics began with the work of University of Chicago professor Robert Coase, who won the Nobel Prize in economics. He showed that transactional costs and property rights provide the institutional infrastructure that

determines how well an economy performs. Coase was followed in this work by two other Nobel Prize winners, Oliver E. Williamson and Douglass C. North. Since their work the field has grown substantially and has many followers. This is not to say that it has no critics: A prime example is Dierdre McCloskey.³⁴

New Institutional Economics also provides us with some insights into the relationship among religious, political, and economic liberty. According to Douglass C. North,

the expansion of commerce led to the growth of a new interest group, commercial interests, alongside the traditional nobility, Crown and clergy. Towns were able to gain liberties often over the opposition of nobles and clergy. This liberty to come and go, to buy and sell as they saw fit was as essential to economic growth as some security of property. The Protestant Reformation evolving in the context of repression introduced a concern for another liberty—liberty of conscience, religious freedom to worship as one chose; and economic liberty, religious freedom, and representative government became intertwined issues.³⁵

Part 2: Empirical Studies

In this part of the article, we will use empirical studies to examine how religious liberty, political liberty, and economic liberty are related. There are two types of studies that we will use. The first type of study involves those done by Robert Barro. The second type of study that we will employ involves a new field called the “economics of happiness.”

Economics of Religion Studies

Harvard University economics professor Robert Barro has an interest in the relationship among economics, politics, and religion. There are three studies in particular that he did with Rachel McCleary that are of some significance. In each of these papers, they employed econometric methods to analyze religious and economic data.

Paper 1

In 2002, Barro and McCleary investigated the way that economic and political developments affect religiosity and vice versa.³⁶ In this study, they used data gathered over a twenty-year period for fifty-nine different countries. They found that “state religion promotes monopoly and therefore, poor service and low rates of church attendance.”³⁷ Accompanying state religion is a low degree of religious pluralism. Surprisingly, they also found that “an increase in religious beliefs (at

least belief in heaven) or a decrease in church attendance tends to stimulate economic growth.”³⁸ Finally, they found that “although religiosity tends to decline overall with economic development, the pattern of response depends on the specific dimensions of development. For example, the measures of religiosity are positively related to education and negatively to urbanization. Enhanced life expectancy and reduced fertility are inversely related to church attendance but have weak associations with religious beliefs.”³⁹

Paper 2

In 2003, Barro and McCleary focused their attention on only the relationship between religion and economic growth. In their paper, they used data from eighty-seven countries. They sought to “determine how church attendance and beliefs co-vary with per capita gross domestic production (GDP), education, and urbanization, while holding fixed other measures of economic development and the other independent variables.”⁴⁰ Once again, they found that “economic growth responds positively to the extent of religious beliefs, notably those in heaven and hell, but negatively to church attendance.”⁴¹ They also found a weak correlation with economic growth when church attendance and religious beliefs “move together.”⁴² The attendance at Roman Catholic and Islamic religious services was higher than the attendance for other religions.⁴³ The same sort of correlation holds true for belief in heaven and hell. Barro and McCleary surmise that higher religious beliefs stimulate growth because they help to sustain aspects of individual behavior that enhance productivity.⁴⁴ Conversely, higher church attendance is accompanied by lower economic growth because of a larger use of resources by the religion sector.⁴⁵ In other words, the social capital associated with higher church attendance is expensive.

Paper 3

Finally, in November 2003, Barro and McCleary studied the relationship between economic growth and religiosity. They found that increases in gross domestic product (GDP) result in decreased religiosity.⁴⁶ Their analysis showed a causal relationship between GDP and religiosity. In other words, the more the economic growth a country experiences, the less religious the people become. Strangely, the existence of a state religion increases religiosity. They conclude that this is the result of government subsidies to the state religion. At the same time, they found that government regulation of the religious marketplace reduces religiosity. Finally, they also found that “religiosity is positively related to education and the presence of children and negatively related to urbanization.”

Economics of Happiness Studies

The economics of happiness has been applied to many areas of public policy analysis. While not as much work has been done in the study of religion, there is enough data to draw some conclusions. Arthur Brooks has captured a lot of this data in his book *Gross National Happiness*. He notes that “religious people of all faiths are much happier than secularists on average. In 2004, 43 percent of religious folks said they were very happy with their lives, versus 23 percent of secularists.”⁴⁷ He also notes that money, age, education, family status, race, and sex do not affect the happiness of religious or secular people.⁴⁸ Religious people tend to have more children than secular people. In fact, Brooks finds a 41 percent fertility gap.⁴⁹

Part 3: Summary

All of these kinds of studies can be employed in the study of New Institutional Economics. Once this is done, we will gain a much clearer understanding of the way that religion affects economic growth and political freedom. The fact that some of this data is confusing means that more work has to be done.

There is clearly a relationship among religious liberty, economic liberty, and political liberty. Whatever this relationship is, it is loaded with implications for public policy. However, it is also loaded with implications for the church of Jesus Christ. Religious liberty allows for the truth of the gospel to stand out. The salt and light that the church provides in the context of religious liberty contributes to economic growth and political freedom. I think that most of us inherently know this, but now we have ways to empirically verify it. When the economics of religion and the economics of happiness are combined with New Institutional Economics, these relationships become clearer and more understandable.

This article provides a project for some who are technically qualified researchers to carry out. Those who can do the work of regression analysis can show correlation if not causation among religious, political, and economic liberty. Hopefully, more people will join in the work that needs to be done in this area of research.

Notes

1. China has experienced an economic growth rate of 8–10 percent for each year of the last twenty years.
2. Daron Acemoglu, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 9.
3. Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 34.
4. Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 2.
5. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996), 21.
6. Max Weber, “Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus” in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (1904–1905); *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. Randal Collins, trans. Talcott Parsons (Los Angeles: Roxbury Press, 1996).
7. *Ibid.*, 35.
8. Max Weber, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte; General Economic History*, trans. Frank Knight (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1927), 17.
9. Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity*, 143.
10. *Ibid.*, 145.
11. Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason* (New York: Random House, 2005).
12. *Ibid.*, 14.
13. *Ibid.*, 23.
14. Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 15.
15. *Ibid.*, 301.
16. Benjamin M. Friedman, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 67.
17. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 417.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, 422.

20. Kuran, *The Long Divergence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 6. By “Middle East,” Kuran means, “The entire Arab world and Iran, but also Turkey, along with the Balkan peninsula.” He adds, “The term ‘Middle East’ excludes India, Central Asia, East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.”
21. *Ibid.*, 5. After admitting that it is a slippery concept, Kuran explains that an institution is “a system of socially produced regularities that shape, and are in turn shaped by, individual behaviors. This definition encompasses consciously created social regularities, such as state-imposed litigation procedures and tax regulations. It also encompasses patterns that emerge as by-products of other choices, such as procedural expectations based on history, customary contractual practices, and organizational norms.” *Ibid.*, 6–7.
22. *Ibid.*, 7.
23. *Ibid.*, 288–92.
24. Laurence R. Iannaccone, “The Economics of Religion: Invest Now, Repent Later?” *Faith and Economics*, no. 55 (Spring 2010): 7.
25. Bruno S. Frey, *Happiness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), ix–xi.
26. Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 161–99.
27. Daniel M. Hausman, and Michael S. McPherson, *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116.
28. S. T. Lowry, “Ancient and Medieval Economics,” in *A Companion to the History of Economic Thought* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 14–15.
29. Alessandro Roncaglia, *The Wealth of Ideas*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31.
30. Mary Keyes, *Aquinas, Aristotle and the Promise of the Common Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 212.
31. Gerald W. Brock, “New Institutional Economics,” *Faith and Economics* no. 39 (Spring 2002): 2.
32. William Baumol, Robert Litan, and Carl Schramm, *Good Capitalism/Bad Capitalism and the Economics of Growth and Prosperity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 7.
33. *Ibid.*, 40.
34. McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity*, 310–24.

35. Douglass C. North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 139.
36. Robert Barro and Rachel M. McCleary, "Religion and Political Economy in an International Panel," Working Paper (May 2002), http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/barro/workpapers_barro.
37. *Ibid.*, 27.
38. *Ibid.*, 39.
39. *Ibid.*, 40.
40. Robert Barro and Rachel McCleary, "Religion and Economic Growth," Working Paper (April 2003): 9, http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/barro/workpapers_barro.
41. *Ibid.*, 1.
42. *Ibid.*, 34.
43. *Ibid.*, 37.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, 38.
46. Robert Barro, "International Determinants of Religiosity" (November 2003): 1, http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/barro/workpapers_barro.
47. Arthur Brooks, *Gross National Happiness* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 44.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*, 55.

Calling in the Theology of Work

Theology of Work Project, Inc.
*Paper read by William Messenger**

Introduction

When Christians ask about calling, we usually mean: Is God calling me to a particular job, profession or type of work? This is a significant question because the work we do is important to God. If work is important, it makes sense to ask *what* work God wants us to do.

In the Bible, God does indeed call people—some people, at least—to a particular work and gives various kinds of guidance for all people in their work. So, as a preliminary answer, we can say, yes. God does lead people to particular jobs, professions, and types of work. However, in the Bible, the concept of calling goes deeper than any *one* aspect of life, such as work. God calls people to become united with himself in *every* aspect of life. This can only occur as a response to Christ’s call to follow him. The calling to follow Christ lies at the root of every other calling. It is important, however, not to confuse a calling to follow Christ with a calling to become a professional church worker. People in every walk of life are called to follow Christ with equal depth and commitment.

After exploring the call to follow Christ, we will explore the calling to particular work in light of many the biblical passages related to calling. We will show how the cooperative work of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—guide and model our work. We will provide links for further theological exploration of calling. Along the way, we will examine related topics such as how to discern God’s guidance in work, the community nature of calling, the calling to church versus nonchurch work, callings to the creative and redemptive work of God

beyond just the workplace, the importance of *how* you work at whatever job you have, and the ultimate freedom that Christians enjoy in their work.

Types of God's Callings

The Call to Belong to Christ and Participate in His Redemptive Work in the World

In the Bible, the word *call* is used most often to refer to belonging to Christ and participating in his redemptive work in the world. This sense of calling is especially prominent in the letters of Paul.

including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:6)

All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28)

[God] desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:4)

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:17–20)

The calling to belong to Christ goes deeper than the kinds of workplace callings, which is the main focus of this article. For this reason, it is important to start our exploration of calling with the call to follow Jesus. It is a call to a restored relationship with God, with other people, and with the world around us. It encompasses all of a person's being and doing. It reminds us that the call to a *particular* kind of work is secondary to the call to belong to Christ and to participate in his redemption of the world.

In particular, our work must be an integral part of our participation in Christ himself. His work of creation underlies the act of creativity and production in the universe (John 1:1–3). His work of redemption can occur in every workplace through justice, healing, reconciliation, compassion, kindness, humility, and patience (Col. 3:12). Christ's redemptive work is not limited to evangelism but encompasses everything necessary to make the world what God always intended

it to be. This redemptive work occurs in harmony with the work of creation, production, and sustenance that God delegated to humanity in the garden of Eden. The Bible does not indicate that the work of redemption has superseded the work of creation. Both continue, and, in general, Christians are commanded to participate in the work of both creation and redemption.¹

A Direct, Unmistakable Call to Particular Work

With the understanding that the ultimate image of calling in the Bible is the calling to follow Jesus, we are ready to explore callings to particular kinds of work. If by *calling*, we mean a direct, unmistakable command from God to take up a particular task, job, profession, or type of work, then calling is very rare in the Bible. No more than a hundred or so people were called by God in this sense. God called Noah to build the ark. God called Moses and Aaron to their tasks (Ex. 3:4; 28:1). He called prophets such as Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4–5), Amos (Amos 7:15), and others. He called Abram and Sarah and a few others to undertake journeys or to relocate (which might be taken as a kind of workplace calling). He placed people in political leadership, including Joseph, Gideon, Saul, David, and David’s descendents. God chose Bezalel and Oholiab as chief craftsmen for the tabernacle (Ex. 31:1–6). Jesus called the apostles and some other of his disciples (e.g., Mark 3:14–14), and the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to be missionaries (Acts 13:2). The word *call* is not always used, but the unmistakable direction of God for a particular person to do a particular job is clear in these cases.

Aside from these, very few people in the Bible received an individual call from God. This strongly suggests that a direct calling from God to particular work is also very rare today. If God is calling you directly and unmistakably to particular work, you do not need guidance from an article such as this, except perhaps for the affirmation that, yes, this type of calling does occur in the Bible in rare instances. Therefore, we will not discuss direct, unmistakable, personal calling further, but will instead focus on whether God guides or leads people to particular types of work through less dramatic means.

The Universal Call to Work

Before we can discuss the possibility of God’s guidance to a particular kind of work, we must acknowledge God’s *command* that everyone work to the degree they are able. God’s command or call to work comes at the very beginning of the Bible, where God chooses to involve human beings in the work of creation, production, and sustenance. Work continues through to the very end

of the Bible. There is work in the garden of Eden, and there is work in the New Heaven and New Earth.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen. 1:27–28)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. . . . So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. (Gen. 2:15, 19–20)

Six days you shall labor and do all your work. (Ex. 20:9)

For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. (2 Thess. 3:10)

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Rev. 21:24–26)

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. (Isa. 65:21–22)

Based on these passages, we could say that *everyone* is *called* to work, as long as we recognize that in this sense *called* really means “commanded.” God commands you to work, even if he does not mail you a specific job offer. In fact, God’s command to work might be fulfilled in some other way than a paid job. We will discuss God’s guidance to a particular job or kind of work a bit later.

Calling to Life, Not Only to Work

Although we are focusing on God’s call to work, work is only one element of life. God calls us to belong to Christ in every element of our lives: “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17).

Our jobs are not necessarily the most important aspect of our calling or our service in Christ's work of redemption. First, we must remember that work is not limited to paid work. The work God leads us to may be unpaid work, such as raising children or caring for a disabled family member or tutoring students after school. God probably does not call many of us to paid jobs that prevent us from unpaid work entirely.

Even if you have a paid job, the main work God calls you to may be outside the job. The job may meet your need for money—and that in itself does make it part of God's command to work—but it may not fulfill all the other purposes God has for your work. We have seen that caring for children and for aged or incapacitated people is a kind of work, and many people who do it have another paid job. On the other hand, a so-called hobby could be the work God is leading you to instead of your paid job. You might work at writing, painting, music, acting, astronomy, leading a youth group, volunteering at a historical society, maintaining a nature reserve, or a thousand other kinds of work. If something like this is your calling, you will probably engage it in a more serious way than someone else to whom it is a leisure activity. There is a distinction between work and leisure.² However, any given activity could be work—paid or unpaid—for one person, yet be leisure for another.

Second, we must take care not to let work dominate the other elements of life. Even if God leads you to a particular job or profession, you will need to set limits to that work to make room for the other elements of God's call or guidance in your life. If God leads you to be married and to be a small business owner, for example, then you will have to balance the time and responsibilities of both callings. Work should not crowd out leisure, rest, and worship. There is no formula for balancing work and the other elements of life. Thus, take care not to let a sense of calling to a job blind you to God's calling in the other areas of life.

God's Guidance to Particular Work

At this point, we are now able to delve into the possibility of God's guidance to a particular task, job, career, or type of work. We have seen that (1) everyone is called to belong to Christ and to participate in his creative and redemptive work; (2) it is rare for God to call someone directly and unmistakably to particular work; (3) everyone is commanded to work to the degree they are able, but God does not usually provide a particular job offer; and (4) God calls us to a whole life, not just to a job.

Putting these four together leads us to conclude that your profession is not God's highest concern for you. If it were, he would make a direct, unmistakable

call to you. Barring that, God is much more concerned that you engage in work in accordance with his word and that you come under the saving grace of Christ and participate in his work of creation and redemption. Exactly what kind of work you do is a lower-level concern.

Although getting us into the right job or career is not God's highest concern, that does not mean it is of *no* concern. In fact, the distinctive work of the Holy Spirit is to guide and empower people for the life and work to which God leads them. In the Old Testament, God gave people the skills needed for their work on occasion, as we have seen with Bezalel and Oholiab. Now, the Spirit routinely guides believers to particular work and gives them the skills they need (1 Cor. 12:7–10).³ He provides guidance for both *what kind* of work people do and *how* to do that work.

Discerning God's Guidance to a Particular Kind of Work

Guidance to a Job or Profession

Although God does not give most people a direct, individual, unmistakable call to a particular job or profession, God does give guidance to people in less dramatic forms, including Bible study, prayer, Christian community, and individual reflection. Developing a general attentiveness to God's guidance in life is beyond the scope of this article. However, we will look at three major considerations for discerning God's *vocational* guidance.

The Needs of the World

The first consideration is the needs of the world. The single strongest indicator of what God wants you to do is probably your awareness of what needs to be done to make the world more like what God intends. This does not necessarily mean huge, global problems but simply anything in the world that needs to be done. Earning a living to support yourself and your family is one example mentioned in the Bible:

The good leave an inheritance to their children's children. (Prov. 13:22)

The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands. (Prov. 14:1)

Whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim. 5:8)

Let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive. (Titus 3:14)

Another biblical example is working to meet the needs of individuals around you besides your family:

Happy are those who are kind to the poor. (Prov. 14:21)

Aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you. (1 Thess. 4:11)

The crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” (Luke 3:10–11)

A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water. (Prov. 11:25)

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” (Matt. 25:34–36)

Working to serve the good of the larger society is also a biblical imperative:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jer. 29:5–7)

Of course, it is impossible for you to meet every need of the world, so you have to narrow it down a bit. Start with needs for which you are personally responsible, such as raising your children or paying your debts. Beyond that, pay attention to needs that you are in a good position to meet or that few other people are willing to address or that you find especially pressing. You might be in a good position to run for an elected office in your own city or town, for example, compared

to moving away to find work. On the other hand, you might be one of the few people willing to document human rights abuses in a country half way around the world. Or you might become convinced that teaching troubled youth is more pressing than joining a band. Moreover, it might become clear that something in your life other than your job or career is the most important way you are helping to meet the world's needs. It would be pointless to get a job counseling troubled youth, only to neglect your own children.

The point is that God has given everyone the ability to recognize something of what the world needs. He seems to expect us to notice it and get to work, rather than waiting for a special call from him. There is no biblical formula for translating the needs of the world into a precise job calling. That is why you need to seek God's guidance in the various forms of discernment available to you.

Your Skills and Gifts

The second consideration is your skills and gifts. The Bible says that God gives people gifts for accomplishing the work he wants them to do, and it names some of the gifts and skills that God imparts:

Do those who plow for sowing plow continually? Do they continually open and harrow their ground? When they have leveled its surface, do they not scatter dill, sow cummin, and plant wheat in rows and barley in its proper place, and spelt as the border? For they are well instructed; their God teaches them. (Isa. 28:24–26)

We have gifts that differ,⁴ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:6–8)

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Cor. 12:7–10)

As the last two passages show, when Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit, he is usually referring to their use in the church, but if all work done by Christians is done for the Lord (Col. 3:23), then we can infer that the Spirit's gifts are also given for use in the workplace. Gifts and skills therefore provide an element of guidance for discerning God's guidance.

A number of tools have been developed to help people discern their gifts and make use of them in workplace settings. However, it is easy to pay *too* much attention to your skills and gifts. The present generation of Westerners is the most gift-analyzed in human history, yet this penchant for analysis can lead to self-absorption, crowding out attention to the needs of the world. These passages say that God gives gifts for the common good, not personal satisfaction. Besides, in many cases, God gives his gifts only *after* you take the job in which you will need them. Paying too much attention to the gifts you already have can keep you from receiving the gifts God wants to give you.

Nonetheless, the gifts you already have may give you some indication about how to best meet the needs of the world. It would be narcissistic to declare that God has called you to be the world's greatest pianist, and then expect him to download the necessary talent into you after years of mediocre piano playing and lukewarm practicing. Career guidance by way of skills and gifts is a difficult balancing act, which is why it must be sought in the midst of relationship with God and fellow Christians.

Here again, we must not become focused on work to the exclusion of the rest of life. God also gives gifts for our family life, friendships, recreation, volunteering, and the whole breadth of life's activities.

Your Truest Desires

Finally, the Bible says that your truest or deepest desires are also important to God.

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Ps. 37:4)

He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them. (Ps. 145:19)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matt. 5:6)

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete. (John 16:24)

Christians sometimes expect that if God calls them to some job, it will be something they hate. Otherwise, why would God have to call them to it? One morbid Christian fantasy is to think of one country you would hate living in, and then suppose that God is calling you to be a missionary there. However, the best missionaries have a great desire for the place and people they serve. Besides,

who says God wants you to be a missionary? If God is guiding you toward some kind of job or profession, it is more likely that you may find a deep desire for it in your heart.

However, it can be exceedingly difficult to get in touch with your truest or deepest desires. Our motivations become so confused by sin and the brokenness of the world that our apparent desires are often far from the true desires that God has implanted in the depths of our hearts.

But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead.... I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (Rom. 7:8, 15, 21–23)

For this reason, we cannot just say, “Do what makes you happy.” What makes you happy—or seems to make you happy—might be far from meeting the needs of the world, or using your skills and gifts for the common good, or even from fulfilling your true desires. The opposite is often true and the work that would fulfill your true desire appears at first to be undesirable and may require great sacrifice and difficult labor. Your truest desires may be met in many areas of life, not necessarily in work. Knowing what you truly desire requires spiritual maturity, perhaps more than you may have at the moment when you are facing a decision. At least you can get rid of the idea that God only calls you to something you hate. In this light, Frederick Buechner writes: “The place God calls you to is where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”⁵

Freedom in Christ

These three considerations—the needs of the world, your skills and gifts, and your truest desires—are guides, but they are not absolutes. For one thing, in a fallen world, you may have very little ability to choose your job anyway. Throughout history, most people have had the job of slave, farmer, or homemaker, and that is still the case in much of the world. It is hard to imagine that—residents of a few developed countries aside—God wants most people to be slaves, farmers, or homemakers. Rather, it seems that circumstances prevent most people from choosing jobs they truly desire to do. This is not to imply that some people do not or should not enjoy farming, homemaking, or any other kind of legitimate work but rather that the circumstances of the world dictate that many people

work in jobs they do not like. Yet, under God's care, even being a slave can be a blessing (Jer. 37:7–9; 39:18). In no way does this legitimize slavery in today's world. It simply means that God is with you wherever you work. It may be better to learn to like the job you have—and to find ways to participate in Christ's work in it—than to try to find a job you think you will like better.

Even in the developed economies, many people have little choice about the kind of work they do for a living. The Christian community would do well to equip people both to make choices about their profession and to follow God's leading in whatever work we find ourselves doing. Whatever your job, God's gifts enable you to work for the common good, to find more contentment in your work, and to overcome or endure the negative aspects of your situation. Most importantly, God promises eventual liberation from work's toil, sweaty labor, and thistles.

Even if you do have the freedom to choose your job, these three considerations are guides, not dictators. In Christ, believers have perfect freedom:

So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Cor. 3:17)

That means you have the freedom to take risks, to fail, and to make mistakes. God might lead you to a job you know nothing about, have no present knack for, and do not think you would like. Would you be willing to take that job? Conversely, you might discover late in life that you missed God's professional calling for you. Take heart; at the end, you will not be judged on getting the right job or fulfilling your God-given potential. You will be judged on the merits of Jesus Christ, applied to you only by God's grace in giving you faith. The calling to belong to Christ is God's only indispensable calling.

The body of Christ on earth is the community of believers (Rom. 12:5). Therefore, freedom in Christ means that God's calling or leading is best discerned in dialogue with the community, not in isolation. We have already seen that the needs of the world (a form of community) are important as you discern *what* kind of work God is leading you toward. The community is also an important factor in *how* you discern God's leading. What do others perceive as God's leading for you? What do they experience as your gifts and skills, the needs of the world, and the deepest desires they discern in you? Engage in discussions about God's leading with those in your community who know you well. It may be wise to talk with a spiritual companion or advisor, to gather feedback from people you work closely with, or to ask a group of people to meet with you regularly as you discern God's leading.

The community is also an essential element in discerning *who* is led to the different kinds of work needed in the world. Many people may have similar gifts and desires that can help meet the needs of the world, but it may not be that God wants *all* of them to do the same work. You need to discern not only the work God is leading you to but also the work he is leading others to. The community needs a balanced ensemble of workers working in harmony. For example, physicians bring powerful gifts and skills—and frequently a deep desire for healing—into the world’s great needs for physical healing. Yet, in the United States, at least, there may be too many specialists and not enough primary care physicians to meet the community’s needs. One by one, medical students are matching their gifts, desires, and the needs of the world to discern a leading toward medicine. All things considered, the ensemble of physicians is becoming a bit unbalanced. Discerning God’s calling is a community endeavor.

Church Work—A Higher Calling?

Many Christians have the impression that church workers—especially evangelists, missionaries, pastors, priests, ministers and the like—have a higher calling than other workers. While there is little in the Bible to support this impression, by the Middle Ages, religious life—as a monk or nun—was widely considered holier than ordinary life. Regrettably, this distortion remains influential in churches of all traditions, even though the doctrine of virtually every church today affirms the equal value of the work of lay people. In the Bible, God calls individuals both to church-related and nonchurch-related work.

Calls to Church Work

Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. (Ex. 28:1)

And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” (Mark 1:16–17)

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. (Acts 13:2, 5)

Calls to Nonchurch Work

The Lord said to Moses, “Your time to die is near; call Joshua and present yourselves in the tent of meeting, so that I may commission him.” (Deut. 31:14)

Moses and Joshua were both primarily military/political leaders, not cultic/religious leaders. They were both exceptionally close to God, but that does not make them religious leaders. Rather it shows that God calls people in all walks of life.

He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. (1 Sam. 16:12–13)

Therefore, it would be inaccurate to think that God calls church workers but not other types of workers. Some confusion arises because many churches require that their individuals be *called* to be ordained or to serve as pastors, priests, or other ministers. Often the word *call* is used to describe the process of selecting a minister or the decision to enter church work full-time. However, as in the Bible itself, these situations are rarely direct, unmistakable, personal calls from God. Rather, they may describe a strong sense of guidance by God. As we have seen, God’s guidance can occur just as strongly in nonchurch-related jobs and professions. Because the Theology of Work Project does not take church work as one of its subjects, we will not attempt to evaluate whether *callings* to church work are more intense, more direct, more evident, or more necessary than callings to nonchurch work. We *will* affirm that church work is not in general a higher calling than nonchurch work, and that the term *call* applies just as much to nonchurch work as to church work.

We also affirm that nonchurch work is as much “full-time Christian service” as church work. All Christians are called (that is, commanded) to conduct everything they do, round the clock, as full-time service to Christ: “Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters” (Col. 3:23).

Before concluding our discussion on this point, we should note that one stream of thought views 1 Timothy 5:17–18 as contradicting the view we have just laid out. According to this perspective, being a church elder (roughly equivalent to a pastor or priest in modern church usage) is in fact a higher calling.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves to be paid.” (1 Tim. 5:17–18)

Under this view, being a pastor is a “double honor” compared to other professions. However, most Bible commentaries reject this interpretation.⁶ A more accurate reading is that elders who do their work well are worthy of a double honor (or honorarium) compared to elders who do their work merely adequately. Alternately, the contrast may be between elders who volunteer in their spare time and elders who work full time for the church.⁷ The Old Testament quotations about pay further reinforce the sense that this passage is about rewarding high-performing or full-time elders, not about comparing church work to other work. It means that elders who work full-time for the church, and who do it well, deserve to be paid well by the church. The passage’s true comparison is among pastors, not between pastors and lay people.

The only jobs that do not have equal status in God’s eyes are those that require work forbidden by the Bible or those that are incompatible with its values. For example, jobs requiring murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, greed (Ex. 20:13–17), usury (Lev. 25:26), damage to health (Matt. 10:8), or harm to the environment (Gen. 2:15) are illegitimate in God’s sight. This is not to say that *people* who do these jobs have lesser status in God’s eyes. People whose circumstances lead them to illegitimate work are not illegitimate people. Such jobs might be the lesser of two evils in certain situations, but they could never be God’s desired work for someone.

Changing Jobs

If God leads or guides people to their work, could it ever be legitimate to change jobs? Would that be rejecting God’s guidance to the work you already have? Martin Luther, the sixteenth-century Protestant theologian, famously argued against changing jobs. This was based largely on his understanding of this passage: “Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called” (1 Cor. 7:20).

Luther equated *condition* with *profession*, and concluded that it was not legitimate for Christians to change professions. However, Luther’s contemporary, John Calvin, did not accept this interpretation—and most modern theologians do not either. For one thing, it does not seem to take sufficient account of the following verse, which suggests that changing occupations is legitimate, at least in some circumstances: “Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever.”⁸ (1 Cor. 7:21).

Miroslav Volf has written that because the factors by which God guides people to work may change over the course of a working life, God may indeed guide

people to change their work.⁹ Your capabilities should grow with your experience in serving God. He may lead you to bigger tasks that require you to change jobs.

Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” (Matt. 25:21)

Conversely, if you become a Christian later in life, might God *require* you to change jobs? It might seem that finding new life in Christ means getting a new job or career. However, generally, this is not the case. Because there is no hierarchy of professions, it is generally a mistake to think God wants you to find a higher calling on becoming a Christian. Unless your job is of the illegitimate type discussed earlier, or unless the job or colleagues threaten to keep you stuck in un-Christian habits, there may be no need to change jobs. However, whether you change jobs or not, you probably need to do your work *differently* than before, paying attention now to biblical commands, values, and virtues—as happened with Zacchaeus the tax collector:

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.” (Luke 19:5–9)

Discerning God’s Guidance for How You Work

We have hinted several times that how you work is at least as important to God as what job or profession you have. In every job, you have at least some opportunity to meet people’s needs, to employ your gifts and skills, and to express—or discover—your deepest desires. Your decision every day to serve God *today* is more important than positioning yourself for the right job tomorrow. In fact, the little you may be able to do in God’s service today is often the key to being able to do more in the future. “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much,” said Jesus (Luke 16:10). Over a lifetime, you can serve Christ best by making the most of every job for his purposes, whether you feel called to every job or not. The specifics of how to follow Christ in the workplace are covered in a number of Key Topic articles by the Theology of Work Project, including #1 “The Meaning and Value of Work,” #9 “Relationships at Work,” #10 “Adverse

Parties,” #13 “Truth and Deception,” #14 “Ethics,” #14a “Business Ethics,” #16 “Conflict,” #17 “Leadership,” and #19 “Evangelism.”¹⁰

Conclusion

In this article, we have taken seriously God’s calling and guiding of people to various kinds of ordinary work. In doing so, we are trying to correct the long-standing Protestant tendency to regard ordinary work as unimportant to God and unworthy of his calling. Thus, it would be equally wrong to elevate the importance of your job or profession to a position of idolatry. Getting the right job does not bring salvation, or even happiness. Moreover, the true aim of work for the Christian is to serve the common good and not to advance his or her interests. Over a lifetime, serving the common good comes far more from doing each day’s work to the best of your ability in Christ than from finding the best job for yourself.

Notes

1. John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975, 2008), 48–54.
2. See Theology of Work Project Key Topic #4, “Work and Life” and Key Topic #18, “Rest” at www.theologyofwork.org.
3. The Steering Committee of the Theology of Work Project regards all gifts, skills, and talents as coming from God. The gifts of the Spirit discussed in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor. 12–14; Rom. 12; Eph. 4:11–16; and 1 Peter 4:10–12) are not limited to the particular abilities listed in those passages. Nor are they limited only to uses in the church. This article does not attempt to prove this position but merely to acknowledge it. For more, see the discussion of 1 Corinthians chapters 12–14 in “1 & 2 Corinthians and Work” at www.theologyofwork.org.
4. This verse (Rom. 12:6), by the way, was the inspiration for and source of the title under which the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator was published, and there can be no doubt that many in the world at large regard God’s gifts to be an essential element of professional calling. See Isabel Myers, *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* (Palo Alto, Calif.: CPP Books, 1993).
5. Frederick Buechner, “Calling,” in *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1993).

6. I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 610.
7. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 309.
8. “Avail yourself of the opportunity” is the alternative reading given in the NRSV footnote. The main reading is more ambiguous: “Make use of your present condition now more than ever.” The NRSV alternative reading is congruent with most modern translations, including NIV, TNIV, NASB, and NEB, as well as with the King James.
9. Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 109.
10. Available at www.theologyofwork.org.

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