

Sermon notes/follow-up

Rich Lusk

Culture (Work)

8/30/09

Resources on work:

Doug Wilson's Blenheim Lectures

Darrell Cosden's *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*

Armand Larive's *After Sunday: A Theology of Work*

John Murray's *Principles of Conduct* has a very helpful section on callings.

Callings by Paul Helm

Robert Rayburn's sermon series on work, available at Faith Tacoma PCA website

Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice and the Design of Human Work*

Gene Edward Veith's *God at Work*

Gustav Wingren's *Luther on Vocation*

Here Veith commenting on Wingren's book:

Some years ago, a friend gave me a copy of Gustav Wingren's *Luther on Vocation*, saying, "You've got to read this." I put it on my stack of books to read, as others piled up on top of it. I thought I knew what the doctrine of vocation was. You do your work to the glory of God. What else is there to say? But when I finally opened Wingren's book, I found that Luther's doctrine of vocation is completely different than what I thought it was.

Vocation isn't so much about what I do, but about what God does through me. Vocation is nothing less than the theology of the Christian life. God calls us to live out our faith in the world, in the ordinary-seeming realms of the family, the workplace, and the culture. The purpose of every vocation is to love and serve our

neighbors, whom God brings to us in our everyday callings. Wingren shows that vocation is also about God's presence in the world—which He providentially cares for through ordinary people, believers and non-believers alike—and about Christ's presence in our neighbor. Luther's exposition of vocation is imminently practical, offering a framework for how Christians can work out their problems in their various callings. It is the key to successful marriages and effective parenting. It also solves that much-vexed question for evangelicals today of how they are to interact with the culture.

Reading Wingren's book was one of those paradigm-shifting moments for me. It turned my life and how I see my life—its meaning, value, and purpose—upside down. It brought spiritual significance into the realm of the ordinary, where I live most of the time. I am convinced that recovering the Reformation doctrine of vocation—specifically, Luther's version—is a key not only in bringing Christianity back to the culture but bringing Christianity back into the everyday lives of contemporary Christians.

Harold Senkbeil's book *Dying to Live* has a good section on the Lutheran view of vocation

R. Paul Stevens' *The Other Six Days: Vocation Work and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*

Leland Ryken, *Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective*

Gordon Smith's *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential*

Steven Garber's *The Fabric of Faithfulness*

Sherman and Hendricks' *Your Work Matters to God*

Os Guinness' *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*

Douglas Schuurman's *Vocation: Discovering our Callings in Life*

William C. Placher's *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*

Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*

A helpful exercise is to compare Ecclesiastes and Proverbs on labor.

Some helpful links:

<http://www.ttf.org/index/journal/detail/believing-at-work/>

http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/jerram_barrs_2003_work.pdf

http://theresurgence.com/Gospel_and_Community_at_Work

<http://www.redeemer2.com/webuploads/RedeemerNewsletter-2007-01.pdf>

<http://four-and-twenty-something.blogspot.com/2008/10/struggle-of-vocations.html>

<http://www.act3online.com/ArticlesDetail.asp?id=145>

http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2006/07/the_false_gospel_of_work-print.html

<http://www.act3online.com/ArticlesDetail.asp?id=327>

<http://www.act3online.com/ArticlesDetail.asp?id=151>

<http://www.stthomas.edu/CathStudies/cst/publications/businessasacalling/06Chamberlain.pdf>

http://krusekronicle.typepad.com/kruse_kronicle/imago_dei_the_material_world/

<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/why-we-work-42>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2009/marapr/11.30.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/02/magazine/bring-back-the-sabbath.html>

This is a very interesting article of faith/business relationship:

<http://www.tff.org/index/journal/detail/believing-at-work/>

This is best resource I've seen on how business relates to the kingdom of God (quoted in the sermon and below):

<http://byfaithonline.com/page/ordinary-life/the-kingdom-work-of-the-corporate-world>

Lee Hardy's *The Fabric of This World* book is an excellent study of work and vocation. Hardy examines the way the Reformers challenged the "dual layer" view of Christian living popular in the medieval church, and then shows how Luther, Calvin, and the Puritans brought in a revolutionary (but thoroughly biblical) view of work. Hardy also shows that the Roman Catholic Church has shifted its understanding of work in a largely Protestant direction, so that we can truly speak of an ecumenical convergence in this area. Hardy also gives good counsel regarding how to determine your own vocation and shows how secular approaches to work have been deeply dehumanizing.

These are hard times economically. The job market is less secure than it has been in a long time. Many are out of work, or cannot get enough work. Many are having trouble finding work, especially those right out of school. At the same time, there is a greater economic disparity than ever between the executives of big corporations and lower level workers, often creating envy and resentment. There is fear that government involvement and manipulation of the economy will allow the politicians rather than the market to pick the winners and losers.

Our culture also pushes us, at least in certain field, to obsess about our work. Many of us are in grave danger of overworking; we have to practically kill ourselves if we are to stay competitive with others in our field. Our technology allows us to work anywhere, anytime – but the result is that we work everywhere, all the time. The workplace no longer has boundaries.

Of course, while some of us work too hard, others of us do not work hard enough. Many Christians do sloppy, slipshod work. The quality simply isn't there.

The key for the church is learning how to counter laziness without funding workaholism.

Many of us also have an unhealthy tendency to find too much of our identity and significance in what we accomplish in the workplace. How much money do we make? Do we have a corner office with a window? Do we have the right titles and prestige? We put all kinds of pressure on our jobs to give us a deep sense of fulfillment.

In the midst of all of this we need to rest. We need to learn, first and foremost, to rest in Christ (Mt. 11). He is the one who provides for us and promises to take care of our needs. His work on our behalf means we can be secure in the love of God and the new status he gives us as his people. My focus here is not the meaning of Sabbath for the new covenant church, but surely there is much wisdom to be found in the old covenant pattern. It also needs to be said that we will never be able to do our work well, and with the right balance of work and rest, unless we understand what the Bible teaches about vocation and how our various vocations relate to the kingdom of God.

The problem of unemployment reminds us that we need a gospel that speaks to failure as much as success. Here are some helpful thoughts from Dan Edelen:

We hear a lot about the sovereignty of God. How He is in control of all things. When good things come our way, we rejoice, and it's ridiculously easy to feel the favor of God's sovereignty in a moment of joy. His blessings are raining down. His will is at work. And we know it.

I've been in Christian circles all my life, so I've witnessed the myriad ways we respond to God and to other Christians. I've seen that thrill of experiencing God's will.

But I've also seen what happens when His will appears to us to go "awry." I've seen how we Christians respond to failure, and I've concluded that more than just about anything, we need a Gospel that speaks to failure.

You won't hear much about failure in the American Church. In Evangelicalism in particular, failure gets held at arm's length, as if people who fail do so because they've acquired a disease. We've made failure into

some kind of plague. "Don't come too close! I might catch your failure and it will ruin my perfect little world!"

We live in a country where failure isn't an option. Every system we've erected in America extols the self-made man and kicks the failure when he's down. While we venerate the rag-to-riches stories and laud everything that led to those riches, we come up with excuses to explain the mirror opposite, the riches-to-rags story.

The American Church acts more like Americans and less like the Church because we adopt the same belief about failure as the world does. Failure makes us squirm. And though we're all ready to jump on the "God is sovereign" bandwagon when blessings rain down from heaven, failure presents a problem for us.

When blessings come, they come solely by grace. We don't truly merit blessings. God offers them to us out of the grace and riches of His heart. Or so we say. But what happens to our view of God's sovereignty when failure strikes? What becomes of His grace when someone's life winds up in the toilet?

Many American Christians believe failure results from something the failing person DID. Yet if we claim to be people who truly live by grace, acknowledging that we did nothing to deserve the benefits of grace, why then do we approach failure with a morbid works righteousness? The response to failure in people's lives seems to abandon God's sovereignty and grace to become a legalistic list of activities the person who failed must now undertake in order to dig himself out of his hole. The Gospel we're so ready to trumpet in good times suddenly gets turned on its head, and grace goes out the window.

Think about it. Our business failed because we didn't pray hard enough. We need to pray more. We got a chronic illness because we didn't read the Bible enough. We need to read the Bible more. We lost our home because we didn't tithe enough. We need to tithe even more.

Yet blessing was all of grace and not because of anything we've done? Curious dichotomy, isn't it?

Sadly, we only like one side of the coin when it comes to God's sovereignty. We'll take the blessing, and our church will love to gather round us then, but how to explain failure in light of sovereignty? If failure IS a part of God's sovereignty, why do we address failure so differently from how we deal with sovereignty in the midst of plenty?

Remember Job:

But [Job] said to [his wife], "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Why is it then that the American Church talks like a foolish woman when it comes to failure and the sovereignty of God?

Yes, some failure clearly stems from sin and a lack of faith. We all understand this. Our problem becomes one of ALWAYS applying that standard to every case of failure we encounter. Case in point: what was Job's sin?

We see our faulty mentality at work in the following Scripture:

As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

That's God's sovereignty at work.

The problem goes beyond merely accepting God's sovereignty even in the midst of failure. Our response to failure either takes the form of piling on a list of things for the failure to do in order to fight against the sovereignty we supposedly uphold, or we act in another faulty way.

Consider this famous person of faith:

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For

they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

We tend to comfort ourselves by believing that people who have failed in the world's eyes will somehow rise up out of their failure so long as they have faith and persevere. Yet I'm not certain it works that way. The poor widow who faithfully gave all she had may have been putting in all she had for a long time. We probably weren't seeing a one-time event; she faithfully contributed not once, but every time she visited the temple. Faithfulness tends to be a pattern of life, not an isolated incident.

Yet by all standards of Jesus' day (and ours), that woman was a failure. No husband. No money. Failure. And we're not given any assurances from the Luke passage that her condition changed immediately after her contribution. (We can only hope that she became a believer and was cared for by the early Church.)

The poor wise man in Ecclesiastes 9 falls back into obscurity after rendering his faithful deed. He got his pat on the back and that was it. One day lauded by the city, and the next forgotten by everyone. Success for a moment, but a failure otherwise.

Notice that many of my failure examples so far in this post have dealt with money. In America, success equates to money. Sadly, the American Church has bought this lie. As a result, our standard for spiritual success and maturity automatically means passing the wealth test.

Too accusatory? Well, consider this. Your church is looking for new elders. Which of these two 40-year old men has a better chance of becoming an elder, the self-made man who runs his own company OR the fellow who works the night shift as a convenience store clerk? In the split second (Blink!) you thought about that pair, did class distinction enter into your assessment? Has anything been said about the spiritual maturity of those men? Don't we assume that one is more spiritually mature simply because he runs a successful business, while the other only makes \$8/hr.?

Did Jesus ever think that way? He summons the less esteemed to the head of the table, while one who believes he belongs in the place of honor is sent down. The beggar Lazarus, whose sores were licked by dogs, winds up in heaven, while the rich man suffers in torment. Jesus said nothing

about Lazarus' spiritual maturity, did He? But Lazarus is the one in Abraham's bosom. Obviously, failure and poverty have nothing to do with one's eternal destiny and spiritual depth.

Why then do we place such an emphasis on success and pour so much contempt on failure?

We need a Gospel that speaks to failure. I don't believe that most churches and the Christian people who comprise them deal with failure biblically. Instead, our models for responding to failure are psychobabble self-help tomes, blithering business books, and positive confession self-talk. We talk, talk, talk about grace and sovereignty, but find them in short supply when confronted both with people who did dumb things and failed and the innocent bystanders pumped full of rounds by the world's drive-by shooting.

So we must ask, What does a truly biblical Gospel that addresses failure look like?

And this:

Another friend lost his job last week. He spent the last nine years in the housing biz, and we all know where that has gone. These are tough times, aren't they?

When I think of the difficult lessons I have learned in life, whether through my own experiences or those of people I know, many of them revolve around our work lives:

The business world never forgives mistakes—ever.

It's always about the bottom line, and almost never about the employees. (The sign of a soulless company? Its leaders refer to employees as "human capital.")

If a man makes a bad career decision at age 18, it will more than likely haunt him for the rest of his life.

In the same way, if a man feels a call to ministry in his young adulthood, he will be hard pressed later in life if he fails in that ministry and must find his way in the regular work world.

If a man is trying to transition out of one field into another, more than ever he will find it impossible because employers can't seem to break out of the niche mindset. In other words, once a bricklayer, always a bricklayer, and never a computer technician.

Men who lose their jobs at the most vulnerable point in their peak earning years are more likely than ever before to find themselves unable to return to the same level of pay.

Reaching for the brass ring may instead find one falling off the carousel.

This is not to say that God can't do miracles. But the simple fact is that you don't go to bed a video store clerk and wake up the next day as the lead on the Large Hadron Collider. And the even simpler fact is sometimes all the hard work in the world will not get you there, either.

And that's why, especially at this time, we need a Gospel that speaks to failure....

You would think that we would have such a Gospel, but somehow we've missed it. To me, one of the oddest things about living in a world that has seen its Savior come is that the one thing the Savior came to deliver is in such radically short supply: grace.

Recently, I said that I thought the largest unreached people group in the United States right now are those who have lost their homes to foreclosure. Here in America, what greater failure can exist than to kiss the American Dream home goodbye? Yet where is the Church on this?

Worse, where are the former homeowners? Are they in our pews or not? My guess is on the "not" side. I'm thinking that nothing hurts worse than to go down in flames in your church while everyone around looks the other way or quotes you Romans 8:28 off the motivational plaque they bought from the local Christian bookstore. Why stick around listening to sermons on Christian leadership when you were desperate for a servant in your time of need and one never showed up.

It really galled me that one of the largest sources of the pile-on afflicting those first homeowners who lost their homes at the beginning of all this was Christians. In our self-righteous ire, we blamed people for being stupid. And perhaps they were. But when is grace only for the smart people of the world?

One of the things about this financial implosion are the bystanders. Now, even people who did everything right are being wiped out. That may even be some of us. Does that make us stupid? Is the same measure of gracelessness that we doled out coming back to haunt us?

God, we need a Gospel that speaks to failure preached in our churches more than ever. Please, someone, anyone, preach it!

The value of our work is determined by whether or not it pleases God. It's worth is determined by its quality, not the paycheck it commands.

Your work is a ministry, you work for Jesus. Rayburn explains:

It is not only that a carpenter must be honest and fair, must give value for money and treat his customers with respect. That is, it is not only that one's work must be done in a Christian manner. It is much more than that. The Bible's view is that God loves carpentry and that he is served and honored by good carpentry. God loves sheep " he made them after all " and he is served when shepherds care for sheep wisely and well. God loves children and they are all his and he cares how they are educated. God loves software " he is a creator and loves creative effort, and is pleased when fine products are created. God loves clothing and is served when someone makes fine clothes that are pleasing to look at. In doing our work, as Milton said, we are to be doing it before "our great taskmaster's eye." But that means not only that we are to be honest, loving, and kind. It also means that we are to do our work " the actual work itself " so as to please God. You remember the line from the film *Chariots of Fire* where Eric Liddell, explaining his compulsion to train for his running career, tells his sister, "God made me fast; and when I run I feel his pleasure." He also says that if he doesn't train

faithfully to do what God has called him to do, "I treat him with contempt."

Well, precisely the same thing can be said by a Christian software engineer: "When I create a good program, I feel his pleasure." Or by a Christian carpenter: "When I leave a wall that I know is not true, when I have not done work that is as fine as it ought to be, I treat *HIM* with contempt." And so for the doctor, the lawyer, the teacher, the real estate agent, the clerk, *and the homemaker*. "When I do my work as it ought to be done I feel his pleasure!" That is the Puritan work ethic and that is, I'm convinced, as I argued last time, the biblical work ethic. It is not at all only that we should not lie, cheat, or steal on the job. It is that to be sure; but it is also that we do our work *for the Lord* and *as unto him*. The work itself is holy and we are ministers of God when we do it. I am a preaching minister; others of you are teaching ministers, carpentry ministers, others homemaking ministers or computer ministers "because we are all serving God directly and doing the work, by his providence, *he has called us to do*. He calls everyone to work for him; he assigns us jobs to perform. He is our boss, as it were, and we work for him!

Doug Wilson:

Dominion is a frame of mind and heart. It is not marked by work only — because slaves also have to work. The difference is this: slaves work at a *job*; Christians are summoned to a *calling*. When jobs diminish, or are taken away, or simply are not present, those with a slave mentality do not know what to do. When the first pioneers arrived here in Idaho (a little over one hundred years ago), *there were no jobs whatsoever*. There was a lot of work to do, but *no jobs*.

Considered at this level, jobs are not there for people who know how to work (although that is fine). Jobs are rather the creation of those who know how to work. In other words, jobs do not create work. Rather, work creates jobs. But try explaining that to some people.

Augustine:

God has promised forgiveness to your repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to your procrastination.

Does work just fill the space between weekends for you? No meaning, purpose, no direction, no plan. No sense of calling or mission.

This is a pagan, hedonistic view of work.

Our work is to be patterned after God's work, which is full of beauty, excellence, design, quality, functionality, sacrifice.

I highly recommend reading everything Dorothy Sayers wrote on work.

Sayers wrote:

In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion.

Again, Sayers:

[The] worker's first duty is to serve the work. The popular catchphrase of today is that it is everybody's duty to serve the community. It is a well-sounding phrase, but there is a catch in it. It is the old catch about the two great commandments. "Love God—and your neighbor; on those two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The catch in it, which nowadays the world has largely forgotten, is that the second commandment depends upon the first, and that without the first, it is a delusion and a snare. Much of our present trouble and disillusionment have come from putting the second commandment before the first.

If we put our neighbor first, we are putting man above God, and that is

what we have been doing ever since we began to worship humanity and make man the measure of all things...."Service" is the motto of the advertiser, of big business, and of fraudulent finance. And of others, too. Listen to this: "I expect the judiciary to understand that the nation does not exist for their convenience, but that justice exists to serve the nation." That was Hitler yesterday—and that is what becomes of "service," when the community, and not the work, becomes the idol. There is, in fact, a paradox about working to serve the community, and it is this: that to aim directly at serving the community is to falsify the work; the only way to serve the community is to forget the community and serve the work....

The only way of serving the community is to be truly in sympathy with the community, to be oneself part of the community, and then to serve the work, without giving the community another thought. Then the work will endure, because it will be true to itself. It is the work that serves the community; the business of the worker is to serve the work.

Sayers says our vocation

is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental, and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.

It is the business of the Church to recognize that the secular vocation, as such, is sacred.

Again, Sayers:

The habit of thinking about work as something one does to make money is so ingrained in us that we can scarcely imagine what a revolutionary change it would be to think about it instead in terms of work done. To do so would mean taking the attitude of mind we reserve for our unpaid work—our hobbies, our leisure interests, the things we make and do for pleasure—and making that the standard of all our judgments about things and people. We should ask of an enterprise, not "will it pay?" but "is it good?"; of a man, not "what does he make?" but "what is his work worth?"; of goods, not "can we induce people to buy them?" but "are they useful things well made?"; of employment, not "how much a week?" but "will it exercise my faculties to the utmost?" And shareholders in—let us

say–brewing companies, would astonish the directorate by arising at shareholders’ meetings and demanding to know, not merely where the profits go or what dividends are to be paid, not even merely whether workers’ wages are sufficient and the conditions of labor satisfactory, but loudly and with a proper sense of personal responsibility” “What goes into the beer?

Sayers’ good friend C. S. Lewis also emphasizes the quality of Christian work:

When our Lord provided a poor wedding party with an extra glass all 'round, he was doing good works. But also good work; it was a wine really worth drinking...Great works (of art) and Good works (of charity) had better also be Good Work. Let choirs sing well or not at all.

Thomas A. Edison:

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.

John M. Frame “A Warning Against Laziness and Shortcuts”

The Burden of Change

Historical change is an important part of our ethical situation. As we apply the law of God, we must understand how it applies to each situation that comes before us. That work never ends. We may not assume that the Reformers or the Puritans, for example, finished the task, no matter how great our respect for these great ministers of the Word. The Puritans did not have to evaluate nuclear warfare, genetic engineering, modern science, or the "new age" from Scripture; but we cannot avoid those tasks in our own time.

I must warn you against taking certain popular shortcuts.

Unhealthy Traditionalism

For example, it is not scriptural to approach ethics with a mere traditionalism, a desire merely to emulate the Christianity of a past age. Whether or not we believe that past ages were "better" than this one, our mandate is not to re-pristiniate or recreate a past situation; it is to apply the scriptures to the situation of today. I fear that some churches seek to be mere museum pieces: historical artifacts where people can go to hear old-fashioned talk and experience older forms of church life; spiritual versions of Colonial Williamsburg. On the contrary, Christian worship is to be contemporary, because it must be intelligible (1 Cor. 14), and the church's preaching must adapt (insofar as Scripture permits) to the language and habits of the target population (1 Cor. 9).

Mistaken View of Divine Sovereignty

People who pit divine sovereignty against human responsibility and therefore refuse to make use of modern technology, demographic studies, etc.

also avoid the task illegitimately. All modern tools must be evaluated by the Scripture as to what we should use and how we should use them. But the fact that God is sovereign in salvation does not invalidate human study, strategy, plans, techniques, or efforts. Otherwise there would be no point in seeking even to communicate effectively; we could walk into a crowd, say any dumb thing we please, and wait for God to act. We all know that is not right. We all see the importance of studying the languages and cultures of our target audiences, and in preaching classes we learn to speak effectively. In doing so we have no thought that such human preparation violates divine sovereignty. Why should we not extend this logic to demographic studies and modern communicative techniques?

The Case for Godly Change

If we avoid these shortcuts, we will have to face the fact that ethics in our time, theology as well, to say nothing of church life and evangelistic strategy, should be different today, in important ways, from all past ages of church history, including the New Testament period. We face situations (both difficulties and opportunities) that were not faced by Machen, Kuyper, Hodge, Edwards, Owen, Calvin, Augustine, and Paul. The Word must be applied to those new situations. Of course, I grant that we are in

the same warfare as the older saints, and that we must use the same spiritual weapons. But in its specifics that war is different now.

The Lazy and the Shortcutters

Those who take the lazy way, the way of shortcuts, will be left behind. They may be instructive historical artifacts, but they will not be powerful instruments to bring people to Christ. God can, of course, use the feeblest instruments; but He typically honors the work of believers who count the costs and seize the opportunities.

Besides laziness, there is a certain selfishness about the shortcut mentality. Shortcutters are those who feel comfortable with certain "tried and true" forms of life and witness, forms that God has used in the past. Then they seek to produce a theological rationale for keeping those forms even when times have changed. They talk as if they are fighting for Biblical principle, though in fact they are merely arguing for a certain application of Scripture that was appropriate to a past situation.

Confusing the Debate

The debate is confused, of course, by words like "conservative," which are applied both to defenders of scriptural principle and to those who merely defend past ways of doing things without scriptural justification. But defending authentic Biblical principle is one thing; defending the continuance of past applications into our own time is something very different. Both shortcutters and critics of shortcutters need to be more aware of this distinction.

Against Selfishness

But what masquerades as a battle for Biblical principle is often at bottom a mere rationalization of selfish impulses, a desire to stay comfortable, to avoid having to change familiar patterns. Often, however, Scripture itself is on the side of change! 1 Corinthians 9 is an important text in this respect. Paul was willing to be a Jew among the Jews, a Gentile among the Gentiles, that some might be saved. He did not seek his own comfort, even his own rights. Indeed, he allowed his body to be buffeted, lest while preaching to others he himself should be a castaway. He tried

"to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, that they might be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33). And note: Immediately after this verse, he urges, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (11:1).

This means that in our evangelistic methodology, indeed in our worship (for that too has an evangelistic element, 14:24f), our goal must not be to please ourselves, but to bend and stretch, to accept discomfort and the trauma of change, in order to speak the Christian Faith into the contemporary world.

Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan has a Center for Faith and Work that aims at bringing together Christians in different vocations so they can encourage one another in practicing their work in faithful, gospel-shaped fashion (<http://www.faithandwork.org/>). I would love to see something like this developed in Birmingham! Here is their vision statement:

Redeemer's Center for Faith & Work (CFW) is the cultural renewal arm of the Redeemer movement, founded to equip, connect, and mobilize our church community in their professional and industry spheres toward gospel-centered transformation for the common good.

Through work, we respond to God's mandate to continue in his creation. Through work we serve God as we serve those he places in our lives. Our work provides a crucible where we more fully recognize our own limitations at the same time that we experience God's majesty and grace.

Our ministry goals are three-fold:

- **Equip** individuals to fully apply the gospel to their lives and develop a Christian worldview of their profession or industry.
- **Connect** professionals within a field in ways that inspire and challenge gospel-centered behavior.
- **Mobilize** our leaders to become agents of change for the common good inside existing institutions and by creating new ones.

Tim Chester addresses busyness
(<http://timchester.wordpress.com/2008/02/01/259/>):

1. Have you ever been irritated because there was a queue at the supermarket till?
2. Do you regularly work thirty minutes a day longer than your contracted hours?
3. Do you check work emails and phone messages at home?
4. Has anyone ever said to you: 'I didn't want to trouble you because I know how busy you are'?
5. Do your family or friends complain about not getting time with you?
6. If tomorrow evening was unexpectedly freed up, would you use it to work or do a household chore?
7. Do you often feel tired during the day or do you find your neck and shoulders aching?
8. Do you often exceed the speed limit while driving?
If you mainly answered 'yes' then maybe you have a busyness problem.

- Over a third of people agree that 'in the evenings I am so tired I just fall asleep on the sofa' (Jones, 2003).
- One in five men has visited the doctor with work-related stress.
- Sixty percent of us feel our workloads are sometimes out of control. One in five feel this way most of the time.

Once upon a time people 'convalesced' after illness. 'Time will heal,' we said. Not any more. Adverts for cold remedies used to portray a patient tucked up in bed sipping a hot drink. Now they show people turning up unexpectedly at work, high on medicine to beat off the competition.

With so much going on in your lives, where can we steal some extra time from? These days eight or nine hours sleep seems positively feckless. And so on average we sleep one hour less than we need each night. Although the need for sleep can vary from six to ten hours between different individuals, s require on average eight hours. In fact the average night's sleep is 7.04 hours. That's down two hours from the 1910 average! No wonder we're all so tired.

Previous generations measured their lives with diaries. Today we apportion our lives with minutes. Letters were dated, now emails are clocked to the second. In our mobile phone culture people expect to be able

to talk to us at anytime anywhere. The number of people who 'always feel rushed' jumped 50% between the 1960s and 1990s (Putnam, 2000).

In 2004 artist Michael Gough created an exhibition entitled 'Iconography'. An actor dressed as an archetypal Jesus posed around London, blessing passers-by while Gough discretely photographed the results. 'No-one engages him in conversation,' Gough comments. 'People in the City have appointments to honour, meetings to attend, deals to make, lunch to buy.' We are too busy for Jesus.

I used to think my busyness problem was temporary. I was busy just at that moment, but it wouldn't last. Somewhere over the rainbow life would slow down. This month was busy, but next month looked better and my diary for the month after was almost empty. But of course a couple of months down the line my diary had filled up like every other month. Things don't change of their own accord. Working a bit harder to get ahead doesn't work either. There are other pressures going on that fill time as soon as we create it – like dry sand falling back into a hole while we frantically dig faster. The fact is, if you want to tackle your busyness, you will need to make deliberate choices.

Why are we busy?

For most us, our busyness is self-induced.

I think parents of young children are just going to be tired. That's life! (I remember when my youngest daughter was about five thinking that I felt kind of strange. At first I couldn't work out why and then I realised it was because I *didn't* feel tired!)

But for most us our busyness is self-induced.

I don't mean we decide in the morning: 'Today, I'm going to overwork.' But I do think our busyness is the result of the choices we make and the desires we nurture.

We never think of it like that. We blame our bosses. We blame the economy. We blame the government. We blame our wives.

'You don't understand,' you may be thinking. 'I have responsibilities. I have to stay late at the office. I have to do my overtime. I have so much to do. There just aren't enough hours in the day.'

The thing is: God put 24 hours in each day. And God doesn't make mistakes. so the problem is not that there aren't enough hours in the day.

The problem is that you are trying to do too much. You are trying to do more than God expects of you.

Now why is that?

Let me ask you a question: How many of you have done some kind of time management training or read a time management book?

Did it help? Did it solve the problem?

I would expect most people to say that it helped, but that it didn't solve the problem. And that's because our problem is not just that we manage time inefficiently. The problem is we are trying to do too much. There are things going on in our hearts that make us overwork. We are trying to do more than God expects.

There are many reasons why we are busy. They'll be different issues for different people.

Some of us are busy because we think we need the money. But need it for what? Most of us in this room do not need extra money to make ends meet. And we do not need it to be happy – because in fact it is making us stressed. We 'need' it because we think an extra holiday, a flashier car, a bigger house will make us happy. But true joy comes from knowing God. '*A man's life,*' said Jesus, '*does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*' (Luke 12:15) Think about the contented people you know and see whether Jesus isn't right.

Some of us are busy because we need to be in control. We worry about the future. 'We don't need the money now, but who knows what the future may bring,' we say. Or worry about people. We think they need us. But we are not in control of the world. We cannot solve every problem. We are not saviours and we are not God. But the good news is that God is God! We have a Father in heaven who controls the world and cares for his people.

Some of us are busy because we can't say 'No'. We crave people's approval or we fear people's rejection. The Bible calls this 'the fear of man'. And the good news is that God is bigger. And living for him sets us free from being controlled by other people's approval or disapproval.

I'm busy because I need to prove myself

I want to focus on one particular issue. Many of us are busy because we feel the need to prove ourselves.

But first a bit of history.

In the medieval worldview a person was justified proved themselves right before God through religious works. And the best way to do that, people thought, was to become a monk. So you left behind the real world and went off to prayer.

Now the great driving force behind the Protestant Reformation was a rediscovery of what the Bible actually says about being right with God. The Bible says that we become right with God through what God has done – and not through what we do at all. Let me show you:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

[God our Saviour] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy ... so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5,7)

And that meant you didn't have to go off into a monastery to become right with God. Instead, God made you right with him as a gift. And then you lived out your new identity in everyday life. You got stuck in, serving God in the real world. People often talk about the 'Protestant work ethic'. The Protestant work ethic is the commitment to ordinary life and ordinary work that arose because of the value given to all of life by the Reformation. Being Christian was not going off away from life. It was serving God in the real world.

Today the Protestant work ethic is often said to be the underlying cause of the stress-filled world of modern work. As we become a culture of workaholics, Christianity is blamed. But the problem is not the Protestant work ethic. The problem is what happened next in the story.

In the Protestant vision work was one way you served God. Rest was another way. What mattered was serving God. What mattered was what God has done for us, making us right with him through the of Jesus.

But along came secularisation and God was taken out of the picture.

Now we find meaning through work itself. Our sense of being a person of worth is found not through our relationship to God but through work itself. People started to justify themselves through their secular jobs or roles. We answer the question, 'What do you do?' with a job title. We

answer the question, 'What are you worth?' with a salary figure. This creates the drive to work and work and work. Your identity depends on it. And so we work on, even though it is harming our health, our families and our relationships. 'We don't want to rest because we want to be indispensable. We don't want to stop being productive because our identities are rooted in activity and accomplishment' (Baab, 2005).

And there's one important sense in which the information revolution makes this even worse. Work for most of us is much more interesting. We're not just on a factory production line doing the same thing over and over again. But it has created even greater expectation. We want work to be fulfilling. The value of work is measured by the sense of self-fulfilment it brings. Work is judged not by the service it renders to others, but by the service it renders to me, the worker. We look for salvation (meaning, fulfilment and honour) through 'rewarding' jobs.

Meaning-through-work is well suited to the goals of business. Management gurus like Tom Peters and Charles Handy have argued (2004) that 'a huge reserve of energy and commitment could be tapped by a corporation which offers its management a chance to make ... not just money, but *meaning* for people'. As Peter's puts in his book *In Search of Excellence*: 'We desperately need meaning in our lives and will sacrifice a great deal to institutions that will provide meaning for us' (Bunting, 2004). Management gurus and management books no longer tell us how to chair a good meeting or make a good product. Now they promise to release your inner potential so you can find meaning and fulfilment. They offer salvation from within. Companies speak in religious language of identity, meaning, mission and values.

Madeline Bunting in her book on overwork, *Willing Slaves*, says:

A work ethic has evolved that promotes a particular sense of self and identity which meshes neatly with the needs of market capitalism, through consumption and through work. Put at its simplest, narcissism and capitalism are mutually reinforcing. What is pushed to the margin are the time-consuming, labour-intensive human relationships, and doing nothing – simply being. Clever organizations exploit this cultural context, this craving for control, self-assertion and self-affirmation, and design corporate cultures which meet the emotional needs of their employees ... The cleverness of the fit between the project of the self and this work ethic is that it is self-reinforcing. There is no resting point: the project of the self is never complete, and is always riddled with anxiety and insecurities.

‘There is no resting point.’ That’s because what she calls ‘the project of the self’ is an idolatrous project and idols never satisfy. The secret is to call time on the ‘project of the self’ and turn back to God. This is what the Bible calls repentance. ‘There is no resting point’ for those seeking salvation through work. But Jesus says: ‘Come to me and I will give you rest.’

One senior pastor described to me how people say to him: ‘We didn’t trouble you because we know how busy you were.’ He realized they were in effect saying: ‘You’re important so you must be busy.’ Busyness is a sign of virtue and value. Busyness is next to godliness. A friend in his early forties asked me recently: ‘Why are so many twenty-year-olds tired all the time?’ The answer may be that they live in a culture of tiredness in which people think being tired is inevitable and normal. Our grandparents saw leisure as a sign of status. But now overwork is a sign of status. The constant interruptions of mobile phones, the presence of business papers on the train, the laptop on holiday – all make us feel important and valuable. Young people really do feel tired, but often it’s self-generated, maybe even psychosomatic, because if you’re not tired then you’re not worthwhile.

The truth: justification by grace

There’s nothing wrong with being busy. Most of us enjoy being busy. What creates stress is the feeling that we cannot meet the expectations of others or of God. But Jesus offers rest from the burden of self-justification. We are accepted by God. This is how we find meaning and value. At the most fundamental level, Tim Chester is a justified sinner. I’m not fundamentally a writer, or preacher, or even a husband and father. I am a sinner saved by grace and all I contribute to that identity is the sin bit. I don’t need to prove myself as a sinner saved by grace. Instead I praise the gracious embrace of the Father, the complete atonement of the Son and the Spirit’s enabling presence. This is who I am. And it’s a gift. I don’t need to earn it.

A church member once said to his pastor: ‘I phoned you on Monday, but there was no reply.’ ‘Yes,’ replied the pastor, ‘Monday is my day off.’ ‘A day off!’ replied the church member with self-righteous indignation. ‘The devil doesn’t take a day off.’ ‘That’s right,’ said the pastor, ‘and if I didn’t take any time off, I’d be just like him.’ The devil cannot rest. Only those justified by grace can truly rest.

A youth worker was complaining to me of being tired. It turned out he was getting up at six each morning because it made him feel more holy. 'Isn't the of Christ enough?' I asked. 'Do you really have to finish off what Christ left undone by getting up early?' In the temple the work of atonement was never done. '*Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.*' But Jesus '*offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God*' (Hebrews 10:11-12). Jesus has sat down. He has done all that is required. So we can sit down as well. We don't have to be up and about trying to make atonement.

'So what can I do about my busyness?' Perhaps that's what you hoped I would tell you. But the question itself is flawed. What if I told you five things you could do about your busyness. Where would that leave you? With five extra things to fit into your schedule, you'd be busier than ever! Busyness is one problem we can't solve by doing more! But the situation is not hopeless. We're not doomed to be busy. Someone *has* done something about our busyness – the Lord Jesus Christ. You don't need to 'do' more to overcome busyness because Jesus has already done all that is required. 'It is finished' he cried. 'The job is done. The work is complete.'

Luther's work on vocation is absolutely brilliant and deserves much greater consideration than I was able to give it in the sermon. Many Lutheran scholars (Veith, Wingren, Senkbeil, Althaus, etc.) have summarized and extended Luther's basic insights. Calvin held to a very similar doctrine of vocation, and actually allowed one's giftedness to play a much larger role in seeking out an daily vocation. But Calvin's discussion of callings is not nearly as pithy as Luther's.

Leslie Newbigin, from *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, on the function of the pastor to equip the saints to serve the kingdom in their daily work – this is a description of the missional pastor:

The task of ministry is to lead the congregation as a whole in a mission to the community as a whole, to claim its whole public life, as well as the personal lives of all its people, for God's rule. It means equipping all the

members of the congregation to understand and fulfill their several roles in this mission through their faithfulness in their daily work. It means training and equipping them to be active followers of Jesus in his assault on the principalities and powers which he disarmed on the cross. And it means sustaining them in bearing the cost of that warfare . . .

[The minister] is not like a general who sits at headquarters and sends his troops into battle. He goes at their head and takes the brunt of the enemy attack. He enables and encourages them by leading them, not just by telling them. In this picture, the words of Jesus have quite a different force. They all find their meaning in the central keyword, 'follow me.'

At the end of the sermon I was talking about how God holds the world together and matures civilization through our various vocations (what economists call the division of labor). Take an example:

Could you make a pencil from scratch? Probably not. Even if you had the know-how, gathering and assembling the materials would be very difficult. The project would take hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars. And yet we can get them at the store for the bargain price of just a few pennies!! The point? We are utterly dependent on others. God has not designed us for self-sufficient, but for mutual service. The people who make pencils are providing you with a service – but in turn you are providing them with a service.

In the beginning Adam was alone and God said it was not good, so he made a woman for the man. But after a while it would have become evident that it was not good for Adam and Eve to be alone. They needed others – yes children, but ultimately other families. God designed us to live in society, to work for and provide for one another.

This contrary to Adam Smith's insistence that the economy is driven by self-interest; see Volf, 53.

William Willmon on the downside of the Protestant work ethic – this is a helpful balance to some of the things I said in the sermon:

George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community of Scotland, said that he took the job of cleaning the community's toilets so, "I will not be tempted to preach irrelevant sermons on 'the dignity of all labor.'"

I haven't preached many sermons on the subject of work.

When I do preach on work, I will tell them that I believe that the fabled "Protestant work ethic" is a decidedly mixed inheritance for the church. Martin Luther attacked medieval monasticism by dignifying all work as divinely ordained. You don't have to become a nun to serve God. Even the lowest servant cleaning floors in the rich man's house mops to the glory of God. God did not simply create the world and quit. God keeps creating and invites us, in even the humblest work, to join in God's continuing creativity.

Luther's thought on work is not so much a glorification of our human work, but rather a celebration of the work of God. When Luther uses "vocation" he uses it more to refer to tasks like marriage and family than to jobs. Our vocation is not work but **worship**.

Sometime ago, I saw a book for Christian students. It began, "How can you serve Christ on campus?" Answer. "First by studying hard. You are called to be a student. You have gifts and graces from God for study. You are not studying just for yourself, but for what you can eventually give to others through your study. Now, study!"

That sounds like "vocation."

Unfortunately, the "Protestant work ethic" tended to elevate even the meanest job to the status of divinely ordained, so that today, when we say "vocation," we mostly mean "job."

Sometimes the "Protestant work ethic" defended the indefensible. If you're in a demeaning, degrading job, it is because God put you there, therefore, don't strive to better your condition. Such thought was a powerful hindrance to revolutionary thought and action.

Today, most people can expect **seven** job-changes in their lifetime. Many of these will be forced upon them by external economic factors. How can these multiple changes, forced upon the worker from the outside, be

called aspects of divine vocation?

While Protestantism, in its attempt to honor all work as a vocation from God, may have contributed to some of the abuses of capitalism, the Christian and the Jewish faiths also bear within a prophetic critique of work. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, humanity is graciously invited by God to work. God creates a garden, then invites the woman and the man to tend the garden. Yet Genesis also admits that work, gracious gift of God, can also be a curse, when abused and used in sinful ways. Adam and Eve are cursed by hard work when they're kicked out of God's garden.

We have no record that Jesus ever worked or urged anyone else to do so. The "call" of Jesus appears to be a call to ordinary people like fishermen and tax collectors to leave their careers and to follow him on his travels about Galilee.

Thus, while work may be a good gift of God, our present structures of work are not divinely ordained. Work, like any human endeavor -- sex, money, art -- may be tainted with human sin. For some, that sin will take the form of **idolatry**, in which we give honor and energy to our jobs which should be reserved for God.

I think that we pastors ought to be cautious about claiming too much for work. Most of work's rewards are most mundane. For one thing, most of our friends are somehow related with our work. One of the most dehumanizing aspects of unemployment is the loneliness of the unemployed.

Also, from a Christian perspective, your work has value because it contributes, not to your well being, but to someone else's. As a mechanic said to me recently, "People need me more than they need a brain surgeon. When I put somebody's car back on the road, they're grateful and I'm happy." Work is a major way we discover our dependency on one another, our connectedness in a wide web of other persons' work.

For another thing, most of us work for the mundane, but utterly necessary need to earn a living. Our work puts bread on the table. Rather than debate which forms of work contribute to our personhood and which do not, we ought to focus on which work fairly compensates a worker and

which work doesn't. We ought to admit that most of us work for pay. While we are working for pay, we can achieve many other noble human values. But none of those noble values should deter us from the most basic value that all ought to have work and that all ought to be justly compensated for their work. A fair, living wage is more to the point than our high-sounding theological platitudes.

We are right to seek meaningful work, since work is a major task given by God to humanity. We are right to criticize our present structures of work, expecting them to be sinful and in need of reform in various ways. Our work, suggests our faith, is source of great joy, also of much pain. Making a life is more significant than making a living.

Sayers again:

How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church *should* be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly – but what use it all that if in the very centre of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made Heaven and earth.....

Yet in Her own buildings, in Her own ecclesiastical art and music, in Her hymns and prayers, in Her sermons and in Her little books of devotion, the Church will tolerate, or permit a pious intention to excuse work so ugly, so pretentious, so tawdry and twaddling, so insincere and insipid, so *bad* as to shock and horrify any decent craftsman....

God is not served by technical incompetence; and incompetence and untruth always result when the secular vocation is treated as a thing alien to religion.

George Grant on “No Lowly Callings”:

The pioneering African American scientist, George Washington Carver, developed a keen interest in plants at an early age. Growing up in post-emancipation Missouri under the care of his parents' former owners, Carver collected a variety of wild plants and flowers, which he planted in a garden. At the age of ten, he left home of his own volition to attend a school for freed slaves in the nearby community of Neosho, where he did chores for an African American family in exchange for food and a place to sleep. He maintained his interest in plants while putting himself through high school in Minneapolis, Kansas, and during his first and only year at Simpson College in Iowa. During this period, he made many sketches of plants and flowers. He made the study of plants his focus in 1891, the year he enrolled at Iowa State College.

After graduating in 1894 with an degree in botany and agriculture, he spent two additional years at Iowa State to complete a master's degree in the same fields. During this time, he taught botany to undergraduate students and conducted extensive experiments on plants while managing the university's greenhouse. These experiences served him well during the first few years after he joined the faculty of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute.

Carver used scientific means to tackle the widespread poverty and malnutrition among the local African American farmers in south Alabama. Year after year, farmers had planted cotton on the same plots of land and thereby exhausted the topsoil's nutrients. By testing the soil, he discovered that a lack of nitrogen in particular accounted for consistently low harvests.

While at Iowa State, Carver had learned that certain plants in the pea family extracted nitrogen from the air and deposited it in the soil. To maintain the topsoil's balance of nutrients, Carver advised farmers to alternate planting cotton and peanuts. This farming method proved effective and within a few years, farmers saw a dramatic increase in their crop production. Carver then created an outreach program in which he would travel once a month to rural parts of Alabama to give hands-on instruction to farmers in this and other innovative farming techniques.

Because of Carver's emphasis on the cultivation of the peanut, peanuts flooded the market and their prices dropped. This predicament presented

Carver with yet another challenge--how to prevent farmers from resorting to the exclusive cultivation of cotton, which had a higher market value. Carver began to explore alternative uses for the peanut that would increase its market value. He developed over three hundred peanut products that included peanut butter, cheeses, flours, ice creams, and stains. Then, on this day in 1921, he helped the United Peanuts Growers Association persuade Congress to pass a bill calling for a protective tariff on imported peanuts.

The development of the peanut also helped Carver resolve the problem of malnutrition in the rural south. He stressed that the peanut was a valuable source of protein that could enrich farmers' diets and improve their health.

As part of his extension program, Carver taught farmers' wives how to preserve food and prepare tasty, well-balanced meals. For many African American southerners who had never given thought to eating a tomato, which were once widely believed to be poisonous, Carver explained its nutritional value and demonstrated several recipes in which it could be used. Carver was also innovative with the sweet potato and the pecan, introducing approximately 100 uses for each of those two foods.

Carver translated his life-long love of plants into a powerful tool for economic, social, and cultural transformation. As he often told his Tuskegee students, "Every calling is a means for good. There are therefore no lowly callings."

I wrote this about Sayers and work one year around Christmastide:

Sayers shows that the gospel story, from the Incarnation to the Resurrection, from Christmas to Easter, is the best story ever told. There is nothing dull or boring about it:

The central dogma of the Incarnation is that by which its [that is, Christianity's] relevance stands or falls. If Christ were only man, then he is irrelevant to any thought about God; if he is only God, then he is entirely irrelevant to any experience of human life.

...the outline of the official story—the tale of the time when God was the

underdog and got beaten, when he submitted to the conditions he had laid down and became a man like the men he had made, and the men he had made broke him and killed him. This is the dogma we find so dull—this terrifying drama of which God is the victim and the hero.

If this is dull, then what, in Heaven's name, is worthy to be called exciting? The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore; on the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild,' and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies....

Sayers then shows us how understanding the gospel (again, the story told by Christmas and Easter) can help us cope with suffering and disappointment in our lives. When God's people suffer, it does not mean God is absent, nor does it necessarily mean God is punishing us. The incarnation shows that suffering is ultimately part of God's good plan for us:

For what it [that is, the Incarnation] means is this, among other things: that for whatever reason God chose to make man as he is—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—he had the honesty and the courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game He is playing with His creation, He has kept His own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself. He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When He was a man, He played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile....

And here Christianity has its enormous advantage over every other religion in the world. It is the only religion that gives value to evil and suffering.

What do we find God 'doing about' this business of sin and evil?...God did not abolish the fact of evil; He transformed it. He did not stop the Crucifixion; He rose from the dead...

The Incarnation is utterly unique. Only the Christian gospel makes the claim that the Absolute God became a man (a baby, no less!) in order to suffer and die for his people. No other religion has a God who "plays fair" or who has "taken his own medicine."

If we believe in the miracle of Christmas, the miracle of the Virgin Birth and God-made-man, it will completely reshape our lives. The incarnation means that *God has a body*. And if we really believe that, it means we can't just be concerned with people's souls. We have to be concerned with their bodies as well. Jesus sanctified life in the body, including work, suffering, and everything else.

Certainly, the church should always be concerned with sin, guilt, and forgiveness. We have to teach others the way of salvation. We have to communicate these concepts to people. But we must *also* be concerned with safe streets and justice for the oppressed. We have to be concerned with poverty and education, with music and art, with work and recreation, with building friendships and helping the sick, elderly, and weak. In short, we have to be concerned with *cultural transformation*, not just *individual salvation*. Why? Because bodily life matters to God!

This does not mean we look for "political" solutions to our social ailments (that's important to remember with an election year almost upon us!). Indeed, usually our way of doing "politics" creates more problems than it solves. But my point is this: The incarnation shows us that God is not only concerned with the soul; he is determined to redeem the body (and indeed, the whole physical creation) as well. And if that is so, we need to have a passion for justice and peace and beauty (as the Bible defines them) in the world. We cannot content ourselves with the realm of ideas. We have to engage the whole arena of culture. We have to embody God's vision for human life, as revealed in the life of Jesus. We have to "incarnate" the gospel story in our community and in our families. *Nothing less will do.*

We live in a world of false dichotomies. There are many today who care only for people's bodies. They want to minister to physical needs, but they can never deal with systemic disease that caused the poverty or oppression in the first place. Others just want to minister to the soul. They want to communicate truth, but it stops there. The story of Christmas --

the *historical fact* of the incarnation of the Son of God in a human flesh -- shows us that we must always minister in both word and deed.

Sayers:

How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays.

What the Church *should* be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly – but what use it all that if in the very centre of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made Heaven and earth.

Yet in Her own buildings, in Her own ecclesiastical art and music, in Her hymns and prayers, in Her sermons and in Her little books of devotion, the Church will tolerate, or permit a pious intention to excuse work so ugly, so pretentious, so tawdry and twaddling, so insincere and insipid, so *bad* as to shock and horrify any decent craftsman. God is not served by technical incompetence; and incompetence and untruth always result when the secular vocation is treated as a thing alien to religion.

Benjamin Myers on work and play in a culture of boredom:

The cultural critic Neil Postman has famously remarked that we are "amusing ourselves to death."™ Our every waking moment is filled with pleasure and entertainment, and yet, paradoxically, our lives are coloured by a strange malaise, by the dull weariness of boredom. Never have we been more entertained; never have we been more bored.

What might Christians have to say about this strange phenomenon of cultural boredom? On the whole, Christian theologians have harboured dark thoughts about boredom, and have tended to regard it as a sin. In the nineteenth century, the Danish philosopher-theologian Søren Kierkegaard remarked that "boredom is the root of all evil," and in the twentieth century, the French theologian Jacques Ellul identified boredom "so gloomy, dull, and joyless" as a defining perversion of modern social life. Ellul's view here was close to that of the Protestant theologian Karl Barth, who similarly described "the signature of modern man" as neither serenity nor rebellion, but simply an "utter weariness and boredom." In Barth's view, "man is bored with himself," and as a result "everything has become a burden to him.

But perhaps we can find a more constructive way to reflect on this peculiar "and peculiarly modern" state of mind. It seems to me that the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has pointed the way forwards here. Human beings, he says, "cannot be defined by any proper operation," and so our humanness can never be exhausted by any particular task or identity; we thus have a "creative semi-indifference to any task." Agamben points to an essential theological truth about human beings: we are not reducible to our work; we always exceed any given task. Or as Agamben puts it elsewhere, boredom discloses the essence of a "simply living being." Between our work and our being there lies a gap "and boredom names this gap.

This theme of a gap between being and work has never been more beautifully articulated than in Andrew Marvell's 1653 poem, "Bermudas." The poem depicts an unfallen Paradise, and it ends with the lines:

Thus sang they, in the English boat,
An holy and a cheerful note,
And all the way, to guide their chime,
With falling oars they kept the time.

The image here of prelapsarian labour is simple, but astonishingly powerful. They are not singing to keep time in their rowing "they are rowing to keep time in their song! They are really working, but they exceed their work, and the labour itself is simply a needless

embellishment, a fitting but absolutely non-necessary improvisation of their existence. Or to put it more simply, their work is pure praise: the rowing of the oars simply forms the background rhythm of their song. In Agamben's terminology, the rower in this poem could be described as a "being-without-work" – he really works, but his work is superfluous, since he utterly exceeds it.

But if Agamben rightly insists that human beings are irreducible to their work, he fails to note the (today more important) point that humans also exceed their leisure and enjoyment. If boredom names the gap between our being and our work, it also names the gap between being and enjoyment. At least in the affluent West, most of us would accept that life cannot finally be boiled down to work; the more sinister and more beguiling threat today is the reduction of life to enjoyment.

As the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has frequently observed, late-capitalist existence is structured by an obscene and threatening superego imperative: Enjoy! In its own way, this capitalist law of enjoyment also seeks to close the gap between our being and our works, except that here, our true and proper "work" – the work which the law demands of us – is enjoyment itself. The true horror of the Wachowski brothers' great film *The Matrix* (1999) of course lies precisely here: when Neo swallows the red pill, he discovers that all human existence has been secretly transformed into a monstrous technological production of enjoyment; it is "pure," immediate experience, no longer mediated even by life – or rather, it is human enjoyment at the expense of humanity itself.

In our late capitalist setting, under the law of enjoyment, the only absolute prohibition is the indifference of boredom – or rather, the ideology of consumerism generates boredom precisely in order to forbid it and alleviate it. The machinery of late capitalism thus functions like the strange poison mentioned by Hegel: it is a medicine which paradoxically "gives the wound and heals it." We are always bored, and we are always (forcibly) being rescued from our boredom. As Aldous Huxley predicted in his great novel *Brave New World* (1932), our society has thus become one in which there is "no leisure from pleasure."

So just as a society which reduces life to social utility will prohibit boredom vis-à-vis work, in the same way a society which reduces life to

enjoyment will prohibit boredom vis-À-vis leisure. But if, at times, a truly radical resistance must take the form of passive non-participation, is it possible that boredom itself might today be a significant site of resistance? As human beings, we are always in excess: we exceed our tasks and our enjoyment alike. There is always a gap between my "works" and "what I do, what I enjoy, which market niche I identify with" and my humanity. To be bored "without immediately seeking to transform that boredom into either productivity on the one hand or enjoyment on the other" is to hold open this gap, and to resist participating in its insidious closure.

To face both work and enjoyment with what Agamben calls a "creative semi-indifference" is, today, the gesture of the human being who stands before God and is recognised by God "the human being who is no longer under law (neither the law of works nor the law of enjoyment), but under grace.

This human being "the human being under grace" is the one whose work and play can never be taken too seriously, since they are merely creative embellishments, superfluous improvisations, which contribute to the harmony and peace of a life of praise. Like Marvell's rowers, both our work and our play can thus find their true meaning only as they serve the modest role of "keeping the time" in our song:

And all the way, to guide their chime,
With falling oars they kept the time.

Luther said all kinds of great things about work – far too many quotations to include in these notes. Here are his famous remarks on changing diapers:

Now observe that when that clever harlot, our natural reason (which the pagans followed in trying to be most clever), takes a look at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labour at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such

a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life; I will become a priest or a nun and compel my children to do likewise."

What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, "O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised.

Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labour, will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in thy sight."

A wife too should regard her duties in the same light, as she suckles the child, rocks and bathes it, and cares for it in other ways; and as she busies herself with other duties and renders help and obedience to her husband. These are truly golden and noble works. . . .

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools.

Note Luther assumes the father will change the diaper. I did not like to use this quotation when we had little ones in diapers.

Rob Rayburn points out a number of reasons Christians should give attention to the subject of work:

There are many reasons why Christians ought to think hard about their work.

1. As we just read, the Bible begins with God giving man a command to *work*. Work is God's order for human life. The Bible has a great deal to say about work and so it is obviously a matter of importance to God and so it must be a matter of importance to his people.
2. Almost all of us except the very young are involved in work in some way. We have many young people who are students, but for them study is their work. Paul says that whatever we do, in word or in deed, we are to do it to the glory of God. That means, for most of us, that if our lives must be sanctified our work must be as well because work is a large part of our lives. We spend many more hours at work than we do at church or even than we do at home with our families.
3. It is sad, but true that many Christians practice a dichotomy between faith and work, leaving their faith behind when they go to their jobs. I have known such people. They have one reputation at church and an entirely different one at work. The Bible teaches us to think seamlessly about our lives and to practice our faith in Christ in the one place as in the other.
4. Work poses many temptations to the Christian and these should be recognized and Christians taught how to resist them.
5. Our work provides many of us with some of our best opportunities to serve the Lord and to bear witness to his law and grace. Christian workers are the vanguard of the kingdom of God in an unbelieving society.
6. As our society and our economic life move farther and farther away from the ways of God, new issues and new questions are being posed for Christians and their loyalty to Christ is being tested in new ways. Christians should have a thoughtful understanding of what following Christ may mean for them in the working world. Serious Christians are wrestling with this very sort of issues all the time.
 - a. Can a Christian work on Madison Ave. where the corruption of truth is a way of life and where pandering to the worst in men and women is a method of choice for advertisers?
 - b. What about working in a banking business in which credit is thrown at people in defiance of their best interest?
 - c. What are the duties of an employee in a working environment where employee pilfering is rife, or where supervisors are cruel and unfair, or where customers are receiving increasingly shoddy merchandise or service?
 - d. Is the modern customer always right?

- e. What about work on the Sabbath Day? At what point must a Christian draw the line in a society that is fast erasing any distinction between Sunday and the other days of the week? And the questions go on and on.

Mark Horne on the economics of the Trinity

(<http://www.hornes.org/mark/2009/08/26/trade-is-embedded-in-god/>):

Trade is embedded in God

The fundamental fact of reality is God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God could have decided not to make the world. He could have chosen to simply remain “alone.” But there is no possible world in which God does not exist as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are a community of love. They are always such a community. They always will be.

So, even though they could have created the world in many different ways, they would never consider creating a world that didn’t reflect that fundamental reality—their social nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the human race is created in God’s image, the Bible makes it clear that the Divine image is related not only to each individual man or woman, but also to a human family or community:

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

This would lead us to expect that Trinitarian relationships are the model for social relationships. We can hardly avoid this conclusion for parents and children when we worship and read about Father and Son. But also we find it for wives and husbands: “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (First Corinthians 11.3).

One way the Apostle Paul exhorts Christians in marriage is to recognize a mutual dependence or interdependence. He tells the husband, “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church...” (Ephesians 5.28, 29). That “body” solidarity is also invoked by Paul to describe relationships in the Church (First Corinthians 12). The church is one body so that all the members of the Church, like the organs or parts of a living body, all contribute to the good of the rest.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (First Corinthians 12.14-26).

But what about relationships that are less intimate? What about the insurance salesman or the cashier at your local grocery store? How do those relationships model on the Trinity? Even though the word "relationship" can seem stretched by applying it to strangers whom you only know through transactions, there still seems a way in which the word applies and the Trinity applies as a model. Jesus pointed to a fundamental way in which the persons of the Trinity relate to one another: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (John 17.1). This passage appears related to many others about mutual glorification that takes place in the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in a mutual interchange. It seems to work very much in the same way the Church functions as a body with diverse members according to First Corinthians 12.14-26). Indeed, Augustine of Hippo saw this in the Holy Spirit, of which he wrote:

But the relation is not itself apparent in that name, but it is apparent when He is called the gift of God; for He is the gift of the Father and of the Son, because "He proceeds from the Father," as the Lord says; and because that which the apostle says, "Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His," he says certainly of the Holy Spirit Himself. When we say, therefore, the gift of the giver, and the giver of the gift, we speak in both cases relatively in reciprocal reference. Therefore the Holy Spirit is a

certain unutterable communion of the Father and the Son; and on that account, perhaps, He is so called, because the same name is suitable to both the Father and the Son. For He Himself is called specially that which they are called in common; because both the Father is a spirit and the Son a spirit, both the Father is holy and the Son holy. In order, therefore, that the communion of both may be signified from a name which is suitable to both, the Holy Spirit is called the gift of both (The Trinity, Book 5, Chapter 11).

Augustine correctly sees that the “gift of the Spirit” given from God to the Church is a reflection of the eternal reality that the Spirit is given by the Son to the Father and vice versa. They are in an eternal interchange of love. Humanity, made in God’s image, is created and then redeemed to reflect this in human relationships.

What is an intimate and relatively unquantifiable interchange in intimate human relationships (husband and wife) translates to exchange among those relationships that are not so intimate. None of us are independent. We need one another and we help sustain each other through mutual cooperation in trading or exchanging goods. God made us to be this way.

More Luther:

Here is another excellent and helpful lesson, namely, that after the shepherds have been enlightened and have come to a true knowledge of Christ, they do not run out into the desert-which is what the crazy monks and nuns in the cloisters did! No the shepherds continue in their vocation, and in the process they also serve their fellow men. For true faith does not create people who abandon their secular vocation and begin a totally different kind of living, a way of life which the totally irrational monks considered essential to being saved, even though it was only an externally different way of existence. [Klug, Luther’s House Postils, Vol. 1:48]

We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in Himself, but in Christ and in the neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.” “On the Freedom of a Christian,” (LW 31:371)

These are the two things in which a Christian is to exercise himself, the one that he draws Christ into himself, and that by faith he makes him his own, appropriates to himself the treasures of Christ and confidently builds upon them; the other that he condescends to his neighbor and lets him share in that which he has received, even as he shares in the treasures of Christ." 1521 Christmas sermon.

Andi Ashworth on the work of caregiving:

As the custodian of a *theology of work*, the Church has often missed its opportunity to encourage caregiving as a legitimate vocation, one that has an essential place in God's kingdom. God calls his people to labor in a great variety of settings. A view of work that only values what is paid or visible to the public reflects a small and incomplete understanding of all that God has given us to do. When even the Church fails to make the connection that caring for people takes thought, creativity, time, effort, and hard work, it becomes obvious how much society's ways of thinking have seeped into our own. We are embracing a diminished meaning of work and vocation rather than the biblical meaning God offers us

Patrick Deneen

Our current crisis is due to the fact that we have, as a civilization, refused to live within our means - and the means afforded us by the natural world - over roughly the past 50 years. Mistaking a temporary glut of post-war wealth and resource plenty as a permanent condition, we are told by our leaders - indeed, we demand of them that they tell us - that we can continue to have it all, costless plenitude. Yet these past thirty-odd years of our "economy" have been one in which we have maintained our wealth simultaneously by transferring the accumulated national wealth abroad, importing oil and debt, while refusing to face the mounting costs of this exercise...Meanwhile we continue to dismantle those cultural institutions that once taught restraint and limits - many of them religious, since they are an offense, above all, to our sense of sexual entitlement - in an effort to achieve ever more perfect individual autonomy....Yesterday the President

told us that we were going to have to become again a nation that worked - and my ears perked up - until he described precisely what he meant. By work, more of us are to become scientists and engineers. That is, more of us are to become the kinds of workers who make it possible for the rest of us not to work, to engage in the sort of work that lies at the heart of the modern project, namely of extracting from a recalcitrant nature its secrets so that we can enjoy the "relief of the human estate." More of us are to engage in that project that is being taken up readily by our Chinese and Indian competitors, to transform our world ever more into a useful commodity for our pleasure and enjoyment. Americans must cease trying to make easy money at the casinos of Wall Street and instead seek to extend the mastery and dominion of nature so that the rest of us will not have to work or think too hard about what makes living possible or even worthwhile. Fewer traders, more lab coats. Above all, no jobs that actually demand work. Top scientists are working to eliminate any possible drudgery from our lives, especially the need to do things with our hands, make or repair our own stuff, understand for ourselves how the world works and how we can best live in it.

William H. Willimon:

George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community of Scotland, said that he took the job of cleaning the community's toilets so, "I will not be tempted to preach irrelevant sermons on 'the dignity of all labor.'"

I haven't preached many sermons on the subject of work.

When I do preach on work, I will tell them that I believe that the fabled "Protestant work ethic" is a decidedly mixed inheritance for the church. Martin Luther attacked medieval monasticism by dignifying all work as divinely ordained. You don't have to become a nun to serve God. Even the lowest servant cleaning floors in the rich man's house mops to the glory of God. God did not simply create the world and quit. God keeps creating and invites us, in even the humblest work, to join in God's continuing creativity.

Luther's thought on work is not so much a glorification of our human work, but rather a celebration of the work of God. When Luther uses

"vocation" he uses it more to refer to tasks like marriage and family than to jobs. Our vocation is not work but **worship**.

Sometime ago, I saw a book for Christian students. It began, "How can you serve Christ on campus?" Answer. "First by studying hard. You are called to be a student. You have gifts and graces from God for study. You are not studying just for yourself, but for what you can eventually give to others through your study. Now, study!"

That sounds like "vocation."

Unfortunately, the "Protestant work ethic" tended to elevate even the meanest job to the status of divinely ordained, so that today, when we say "vocation," we mostly mean "job."

Sometimes the "Protestant work ethic" defended the indefensible. If you're in a demeaning, degrading job, it is because God put you there, therefore, don't strive to better your condition. Such thought was a powerful hindrance to revolutionary thought and action.

Today, most people can expect **seven** job-changes in their lifetime. Many of these will be forced upon them by external economic factors. How can these multiple changes, forced upon the worker from the outside, be called aspects of divine vocation?

While Protestantism, in its attempt to honor all work as a vocation from God, may have contributed to some of the abuses of capitalism, the Christian and the Jewish faiths also bear within a prophetic critique of work. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, humanity is graciously invited by God to work. God creates a garden, then invites the woman and the man to tend the garden. Yet Genesis also admits that work, gracious gift of God, can also be a curse, when abused and used in sinful ways. Adam and Eve are cursed by hard work when they're kicked out of God's garden.

We have no record that Jesus ever worked or urged anyone else to do so. The "call" of Jesus appears to be a call to ordinary people like fishermen and tax collectors to leave their careers and to follow him on his travels about Galilee.

Thus, while work may be a good gift of God, our present structures of work are not divinely ordained. Work, like any human endeavor -- sex, money, art -- may be tainted with human sin. For some, that sin will take the form of **idolatry**, in which we give honor and energy to our jobs which should be reserved for God.

I think that we pastors ought to be cautious about claiming too much for work. Most of work's rewards are most mundane. For one thing, most of our friends are somehow related with our work. One of the most dehumanizing aspects of unemployment is the loneliness of the unemployed.

Also, from a Christian perspective, your work has value because it contributes, not to your well being, but to someone else's. As a mechanic said to me recently, "People need me more than they need a brain surgeon. When I put somebody's car back on the road, they're grateful and I'm happy." Work is a major way we discover our dependency on one another, our connectedness in a wide web of other persons' work.

For another thing, most of us work for the mundane, but utterly necessary need to earn a living. Our work puts bread on the table. Rather than debate which forms of work contribute to our personhood and which do not, we ought to focus on which work fairly compensates a worker and which work doesn't. We ought to admit that most of us work for pay. While we are working for pay, we can achieve many other noble human values. But none of those noble values should deter us from the most basic value that all ought to have work and that all ought to be justly compensated for their work. A fair, living wage is more to the point than our high-sounding theological platitudes.

We are right to seek meaningful work, since work is a major task given by God to humanity. We are right to criticize our present structures of work, expecting them to be sinful and in need of reform in various ways. Our work, suggests our faith, is source of great joy, also of much pain. Making a life is more significant than making a living.

John Calvin on calling:

The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling. For he knows with what great restlessness human nature flames, with what fickleness it is borne hither and thither, how its ambition longs to embrace various things at once. Therefore, lest through our stupidity and rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy, he has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life. And so that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living, 'callings.' Therefore, each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about throughout life.

This interview with Tom Wright is amazing
(http://www.thehighcalling.org/Library/PrintLibrary_PDF.asp?LibraryID=4922
):

What does it look like to be "Simply Christian" outside the professional church from 9 to 5?

It looks like a million different things. Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in eyes and lovely in limbs, not His." In a sense, when you become a Christian, you become your genuine self. You're called into that fresh selfhood. God made each of us to be really quite different and to reflect in a million little glittering diamonds that sense of the differentness of Jesus. Jesus looks like one way in this person and another way in that person. Ordinary people develop skills and talents which are peculiar to them. Then they bring those gifts to the church—gifts of art, gifts of leadership, gifts of craft, gifts of service of all sorts. You will see a rich variety develop.

Just as an interesting aside, our local culture in the north of England is a working-class culture. For generations and generations, everyone has lived in these little row houses like in the mining or steel communities. At the end of the village, there is one big house, which is where the owner lives. He tells everybody what to do, and they do it. He pays them, and they go and have a beer. That's it. They don't have any decisions to make except which pub to visit at the end of the day. That is still how a lot of people approach the church. We don't expect to think. We don't expect to make decisions. That's what the Vicar is for. We expect the clergy to tell us what to do, and we don't want to think for ourselves. I want to say,

"No, you've all got to be individuals and do your own thing." Actually, I think that's part of the Gospel.

How do Christians glorify God in their daily work or does our work have some other, more nuanced, purpose?

There are all sorts of different jobs. George Herbert's famous hymn, "Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws, makes that and the action fine." It's a very important principle of Christian service. Now, it's much easier, no doubt, to think of yourself as doing important Christian work if you're preparing sermons or being chief in a music band in church or whatever. But actually, the guy who sweeps the step is doing just as much good as you are, maybe more. I am delighted when I go to a church and see people doing mundane things with a sense of pride, because they're doing them for the love of God and the body of Christ. I love those people. Nobody knows who they are; nobody knows their names. As a bishop, I try to go around and thank them because I can see they're doing a good job. Of course, we'd all like to be the architect who builds the cathedral or the composer who writes the symphony or whatever. But most of the time, we do what needs to be done. Christ shines out of the way we work, not so much what we do, but how we do it.

How does one's work fit into the overlap of Heaven and earth?

If it is true that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, then each Christian is a place where Heaven and earth overlap. C. S. Lewis said, "Next to the blessed sacrament, your Christian neighbor is the holiest object ever presented to your senses." In Christians, the true Christ should be truly present. From that point of view, what you do as a Christian should embody that overlap of Heaven and earth. But we often think of Heaven in such grandiose terms, often platonic terms, and we just see that Heaven and earth are meant to go together. They were put together in the first place in Genesis 1 in the garden.

The call to a new creation at the intersection of Heaven and earth seems to be a call for action.

Yes, it is. That's the short answer. But let's be absolutely clear what we're talking about here. Salvation and justification are not the same thing.

What you do in the present matters. It's hard for Protestants to hear that without thinking, "Oh, dear, this is good works again." That's a scare tactic. Sometimes, it's a political scare tactic—to stop Christians from

actively working to change the way the world is, confronting justice, and building communities of peace and hope instead of ones of violence and hatred. The verse which says it all for me is the last verse in 1 Corinthians. Okay, you've got this great chapter on resurrection. What is Paul going to say after writing a whole chapter on resurrection? Is he going to say, "Since there is a resurrection, look up and wait for this glorious future?" No, he says, "Therefore my beloved ones be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." Your work is "not in vain." Why not? Because everything you do in the present, in the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ, everything that flows out of love and hope and grace and goodness somehow will be part of God's eventual Kingdom. That is the message of the resurrection. The resurrection is your new body in which you will be gloriously, truly wonderfully you. The resurrection means everything you've done in the present through your body—works of justice and mercy and love and hope—somehow in ways we don't understand will be part of God's new creation. We are not building the Kingdom of God in that old social Gospel sense. We are building for the Kingdom of God.

Does this change how we think about creation as it is? How should Christians respond to issues like pollution?

We are stewards of creation, as I stressed at Laity Lodge. That is our calling as human beings. If we are careless about creation or wantonly destructive of it, we are in radical denial of what it means to be human. God made this world beautiful. He made us stewards of creation under him and over the world. We don't always know how to do this, but we can be prayerful and wise and seeking to be good stewards. Then we will more likely be genuine humans and our world will more likely flourish. We can't just go on treating God's creation as a cross between a gold mine and an ash tray. We can't just get what we want, grab it, and run. We can't just dump our garbage and not worry about it.

What does it look like if the Kingdom of God in the Church tries to put the world to rights?

Salvation is not simply God's gift to the Church. It is God's gift through the Church.

The Church is supposed to be a lighthouse, a beacon of hope and warning and mercy and all the rest of it. The Church is not just supposed to tell

people they are sinners and need Jesus so they can go to Heaven. No, the Kingdom of God is about God's Kingdom coming on earth as in Heaven. The Church is to be the agent in making that happen.

Now, here's the problem. Some churches concentrate on simply bringing people to faith and building them up in faith, with a little bit of missions spilling over if you're lucky. These actually tend to do rather well because they make people feel good. My Church is about me. Churches that are very active in getting out there and making things happen in the world are sometimes, sadly, not as good at attracting members.

You must always come back to prayer, worship, and Bible study. Make sure that Christians are not going hollow in the middle individually or corporately. But, then let it flow out. First, focus on mission. Second, grow leadership. Third, encourage discipleship. Then, act collaboratively. That means the church helps the local education authority, the local housing committee, the police force, whatever it may be. Let's work with everyone who we can.

Sometimes the Church fails to collaborate and compromises itself with the ways of the world. Other times it stands back and critiques, "We're in the right, and you're in the wrong." Here's what the Church partnerships look like when we grow the Kingdom.: Collaborate without compromise; critique without dualism.

George Herbert's famous poem about work:

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see;
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee.
A man may look on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heaven espy.
All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture: For Thy sake,
Will not grow bright and clean.
A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;

Who sweeps a room, as for Thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.
This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold:
For that which God doth touch and own,
Cannot for less be told.

Neil H. Williams:

The kingdom of God is the new and final age that began with the coming of Jesus. His kingdom is not part of the present age — an age where the flesh reigns; where people are divided, relationships are broken, and suspicion and competition dominate; where money, sex, and power are abused; where leaders are first and servants last; where behavior is controlled by laws, and identity is defined by race, gender, or social standing; and where gifts and resources are used for the advancement of oneself.

Rather, the kingdom of God is the new age. It is the age of the Spirit (Matt 12:28). It is the age of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). The Kingdom of God is about the renewal, restoration, and reconciliation of all things, and God has made us a part of this great story of salvation.

This kingdom is about the restoration of relationships, justice, and equality; about freedom from every lord except Jesus; about reconciliation, forgiveness, and the defeat of Satan. It is about compassion for the poor and powerless, about helping those who are marginalized and rejected by society, and about our gifts and resources for the advancement of others. It is about new communities and the transformation of society and culture, so that race, gender, and social class no longer define identity, nor are they used to control and divide. For Paul, to preach the gospel is to preach the kingdom, is to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:24-27).

The gospel sums up the whole message of good news that he brought to the nations — particularly to the downtrodden and powerless. And since it is good news, our response to the message of the kingdom is to be one of repentant faith (Mark 1:15)."

Salt and light in matt. 5 need a lot more unpacking. Very briefly, salt and light connect with earth and heaven, dust and stars. Jesus' disciples are to be a new creation. Furthermore, salt is solid fire (note how its taste burns – it's gives a "hot" flavor; cf. Deut. 29:23; Mk. 9:49). This connects salt with the Spirit. A salty people will be a Spirit-filled people.

Given the way salt was used in the sacrificial system, our job as the salt of the earth is turn the world into a flavorful sacrifice for God (cf. Job 6:6; 2 Ki. 2:21; Col. 4:6, where are words are the salted sacrifice). As light, we are involved in bringing heaven to earth and fulfilling the mission of Israel to the nations (Isa. 42, 49).

The workplace is not merely a missionfield, a place to evangelize the lost. It is PRIMARILY a place where we are called to use our gifts and abilities in creative and gracious service on behalf of others.

If anything, work is not a replacement for witness or place for witness; rather, it is a backdrop for our witness. Our verbal proclamation of the gospel makes sense and has credibility because of the work we do has such high quality.

Rayburn

David Bahnsen:

I have heard it said in my life on more than one occasion that God sent his Son to save souls. Indeed, for evangelicals, that is certainly true. However, for the professing believer who talks of a deep concern for individual souls my question and answer will either be a gigantic disappointment or it may be a true experience of edification. While all Christian men and women ought to be interested in the salvation of individual souls—God is truly in the redemption business—I contend that, as Leslie Newbigin masterfully argues in his gem of a book, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, the souls of individuals have been spiritually ravaged as a result of our complete

surrender of the key institutions and spheres within our society. Newbigin wrote this a generation ago in reference to the inexplicable surrender of modern science and advanced analytical philosophy to secular humanists. His argument actually simple—in a short-term effort to prioritize souls over spheres and people over institutions, we actually lost both. My belief is that where Newbigin was astutely right decades ago, today's sphere of surrender from the covenant community of God has actually taken place in the marketplace of our day....

A society that features Christian people in elite executive positions throughout society will inevitably be one that features Christian influence and dominion from the top-down. A business marketplace that features Christian people in the majority of middle management positions will certainly be one that highlights the virtues that we hold dear. Matthew 5 refers to this as letting our light shine before men. You see, society at large will mostly not see the various private acts of piety that we commit in our personal lives. But what more public declaration of our commitment to excellence is there than that which is held out for an office full of people, or a warehouse full of people, or a community of people to see—namely our successes in the business marketplace? The Christian community has been deceptively told that business successes are not to be aspired toward, despite nearly an entire book of Proverbs which says otherwise. We are asked to prioritize family over work, or our church over our work, when the text of Scripture continually pleads for *a balanced life*, one that does not pit these things against each other. There is guilt manipulation from society (and particularly from Christians in a society) whenever anyone works late to succeed in a project or sacrifices a family obligation to meet a business one. We throw the term "workaholic" around like it is a disease that one can catch in the high winds. But I ask you, if the goal of a Christian life is balance—as Bridges, Grant, Mouw and Edwards have all written (*The Micah Mandate* by George Grant is highly recommended here)—when was the last time you heard a Christian chastised for sacrificing time in the office to be at a soccer game? Of course, I am not advocating the prioritization of the former over the latter, but *I am suggesting that we have become obsessively guilty of the opposite*. Balance is not the theme that the modern church teaches; rather there is a clear pecking order that is taught. This order puts the cultural, financial and meaningful aspirations in the marketplace at the bottom of the barrel. *This ought not to be so*.

The function of work and the marketplace is *not* to replace Eden. We must be diligent to remember this. But the function of work in the world is to

create a life of meaning, beauty, dignity, and fulfillment along the way. The road from Eden to heaven has been, and will continue to be, a tumultuous one. *It ought not to be an ignored one.*

Bonhoeffer:

The labour which is instituted in Paradise is participation by man in the action of creation. By its means there is created a world of things and values which is designed for the glorification and service of Jesus Christ. This is not a creation out of nothing, like God's creation; it is a making of new things on the basis of the creation by God. No man can evade this mandate. From the labour which man performs here in fulfillment of the divinely imposed task there arises that likeness of the celestial world by which the man who recognizes Jesus Christ is reminded of the lost Paradise. The first creation of Cain was the city, the earthly counterpart of the eternal city of God. There follows the invention of fiddles and flutes, which afford to us on earth a foretaste of the music of heaven. Next there is the extraction and processing of the metallic treasures from the mines of the earth, partly for the decoration of earthly houses, just as the heavenly city is resplendent with gold and precious stones, and partly for the manufacture of the swords of avenging justice. Through the divine mandate of labour there is to come into being a world which, knowingly or not, is waiting for Christ, is designed for Christ, is open to Christ, serves him and glorifies him. But it is the race of Cain that is to fulfil this mandate, and that is what casts the darkest shadow over all human labour.

Rayburn on ruling and subduing:

Another way of describing the relation between our work and the service of God is in terms of what is called the *creation mandate* of Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

In the way typical of the statements in the creation narrative, it is cast in terms of the immediate context but applies, obviously, to human life in its development. "Rule the earth," for example, certainly means farming "by which the riches of agricultural production are brought from the ground" but it means as surely all the activities by which man proves both an exploiter and a steward of the earth. The engineer who builds a bridge over a river; the vintner who creates wine from grapes; the scholar who researches human history; the mother who provides another generation to continue mankind's work in the world; the inventor who makes a computer chip out of silicon; the software engineer who harnesses that invention for the use of some group of workers; and the waste management company owner who decides what to do with all the scrap generated by mankind's exploitation of the earth's resources: all of these and so many, many others are ruling and subduing the earth. Like Adam they are all "working the garden and taking care of it." As one scholar summarizes the mandate:

"Man is to subdue the earth and to have dominion over its living creatures and its fruitful production". He was to govern nature in order to develop to the full its potential for reflecting the glory of God and promote the well-being of man. Nature bore by creation and preservation the impress of the Divine Mind. Man was to bring to play upon it the creative effort of a human mind fashioned in the Divine image. [Carl F.H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 243]

Every Christian should see his or her daily work in these terms. We should all see ourselves as answering this summons to use and rule the earth and its resources for the glory of God and the benefit of others. Many people, of course, do their work sinfully, selfishly, and rebelliously. But when a Christian offers his work to God he is serving his Maker and fulfilling an assignment that God has given to him. Listen to this noble passage from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* in which he points out how

the creation or cultural mandate is fulfilled in the following chapters of Genesis. [209]

“The labour which is instituted in Paradise is participation by man in the action of creation. By its means there is created a world of things and values which is designed for the glorification and service of Jesus Christ. This is not a creation out of nothing, like God’s creation; it is a making of new things on the basis of the creation by God. No man can evade this mandate. From the labour which man performs here in fulfillment of the divinely imposed task there arises that likeness of the celestial world by which the man who recognizes Jesus Christ is reminded of the lost Paradise. The first creation of Cain was the city, the earthly counterpart of the eternal city of God. There follows the invention of fiddles and flutes, which afford to us on earth a foretaste of the music of heaven. Next there is the extraction and processing of the metallic treasures from the mines of the earth, partly for the decoration of earthly houses, just as the heavenly city is resplendent with gold and precious stones, and partly for the manufacture of the swords of avenging justice. Through the divine mandate of labour there is to come into being a world which, knowingly or not, is waiting for Christ, is designed for Christ, is open to Christ, serves him and glorifies him. But it is the race of Cain that is to fulfil this mandate, and that is what casts the darkest shadow over all human labour.”

And that last point is why none of this responsibility to work so as to rule the earth, to exploit its treasures, to imitate God as creator, is, in any way, diminished by the second great mandate that we are given: viz. the Great Commission. The Great Commission “to take the Gospel to the world” does not replace the creation mandate. It is rather the means to restore mankind to fellowship with God so that he can finally fulfill the creation mandate. The Great Commission is *re-creative*; that is, the gospel restores man to that spiritual condition that enables him to fulfill his purpose as the servant of God and do God’s pleasure in the world. The two mandates belong together. They are concerned with the same thing: man serving God in the world that God has made for him.

Rayburn on the holiness of work:

1. *First, work is not only our service of God, it is also the instrument of his care and provision for us.*

God supplies our needs. It is to him that we owe our thanks for our daily bread. It is to him that we should pray for it. We know this. But God uses means and chief among those means by which the Lord sustains our lives and blesses them is the work which he has called us to perform.

1. In Deuteronomy 8:18, in preparation for Israel's entry into the Promised Land, the Lord warns his people that the wealth and prosperity of the land the Lord was about to give them would prove a temptation. Their new-found wealth " which they did not earn " could make them proud and complacent. As they plant their crops in fertile fields prepared by others, as they inhabit cities built by others, as they take over the trading relationships of the people they conquer in the power of the Lord, they might forget the Lord and forget that it was he who had given them the ability to produce this wealth. They would be planting and buying and selling but it would be the Lord who was giving them their crops and their profits. Their work should not blind them to the fact that work is only the means by which *God gives his blessing*.
2. Similarly, all the warnings against idleness in Proverbs remind us that the Lord does not intend to bless or provide for a man who will not work hard.
3. And, again, in 2 Thess. 3, when Paul says that a man who will not work should not eat, he is only confirming once more the connection between our work and the Lord's supply of our daily needs.

As Martin Luther put it: *"Work is holy; it is the hidden mask behind which the hidden God gives us what we need."*

Now, it is here that the so-called Puritan work ethic is often seriously misunderstood. Many seem to think that the Puritans " and it is important to understand their teaching correctly because I am arguing that they got the Bible right on this point and *their* doctrine of work should be *our* doctrine of work " taught that the harder you worked the wealthier you would get and, so long as you were a hard-working Christian " it was all to the good that you should get rich for your trouble. That teaching amounts to another form of the prosperity gospel, with hard work substituted for today's "if only you have faith!" If I had to choose between the two I would choose the Puritan

view of hard work being the secret to prosperity, but that, in fact, was not the Puritan doctrine.

In the Puritans'™ view, the main reward of hard and faithful work done in the sight of God was not financial, but spiritual and moral.

Here is William Perkins:

“The main end of our lives is to serve God in serving men in the works of our callings. Some man will say perchance: What, must we not labor in our callings to maintain our families? I answer: this must be done: but this is not the scope and end of our lives. The true end of our lives is to do service to God in serving man.” [*Treatise on the Vocations*, cited in Ryken, 30]

John Preston says similarly: “We must labor not for our own good, but for the good of others.” [*Ibid*] And Richard Baxter lays the ax to the root: “Choose that employment or calling in which you may be most serviceable to God. Choose not that in which you may be most rich or honorable in the world; but that in which you may do most good, and best escape sinning.” [p. 31] Notice the other-centered view of work. The Bible has told us time and time again that our great calling in life is to love God and others. Given the place that work has in our lives, it is inevitable that it too must be done for God and for others. It was impossible that we should ever be able to work just for ourselves or even just for our loved ones. Our neighbor must always be in our view!

In fact, the Puritans were quick to condemn the very thing many today suppose that they thought, viz. the use of one's calling or work to gratify selfish ambitions.

“Take heed,” wrote Baxter, “lest, under the pretense of diligence in your calling, you be drawn to earthly-mindedness, and excessive cares or covetous designs for rising in the world.”

And Perkins is even more stern.

“They profane their lives and callings that employ them to get honors, pleasures, profits, worldly commodities, etc. for thus we live to another end that God hath appointed, and thus we serve ourselves, and consequently neither God nor men.”

The Puritans were biblically blunt and realistic about this. God may or may not bless your labors with prosperity. That is up to him. And if he does, it is his grace and goodness and not your merit or desert. Therefore, in gratitude to him you must prove a good steward of his blessing and employ it toward those ends he approves of. And so, according to their biblical philosophy of life and work, even the wealth you may acquire by God's blessing is more a social good than a personal one. That is, it equips you to show kindness to others. It certainly cannot in itself be taken as any proof of divine approval as most wealthy people are not godly and their wealth is a snare to them.

In 1971, in a Labor Day address, President Richard Nixon gave his summary of the "Puritan work ethic."

"The "work ethic" holds that labor is good in itself; that a man or woman becomes a better person by virtue of the act of working. America's competitive spirit, the "work ethic" of this people, the value of achievement, the morality of self-reliance none of these is going out of style."

It is important that we all see that this is *neither the Puritan's work ethic nor the Bible's*. Labor is *not good in itself*; it is good as the gift and requirement of God and as the instrument by which God bestows his blessing and care upon his creatures and, especially, upon his people. A man or woman *does not necessarily become better by working* the opposite may well result and often does he or she becomes better only if his or her work is done as unto God. And America's competitive spirit strikes at the very root of what makes work good, namely not the service of oneself but of God and others. Self-reliance is not morality, but immorality: a forgetfulness of God. In the Puritan's thought, the virtue of work depended almost entirely on the reason for which it was done and the manner in which it was done. *And one of the first reasons it is to be done is because God has made it the means of his provision and care for us.*

2. *Second, God gifts men and women for the fulfillment of their vocations.*

God both prepares and equips men and women both to work and to do certain kinds of work. This principle, that God's gifts are our duties and our opportunities, that they are a means by which God summons us to particular work, is a principle we encounter elsewhere in the Bible as you know.

With regard to our service in the body of Christ, as Paul puts it, "if a man's gift is serving, let him serve; if it is leadership, let him lead;" With regard to sexual roles and functions, mothers are

especially equipped to nurture children and so have that calling even more than fathers, and so on.

But this is also true of our occupations or vocations.

1. In Exodus 31 we recently read of Bezalel and Oholiab that God had given them wisdom or skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts. In fact, the text goes on to say that the Lord gave skill “to all the craftsmen” who were to construct the tabernacle and manufacture the furniture that went into it. These men, by God’s gift, were good at their callings, able metallurgists, carpenters, weavers, and so on.
2. In 1 Chron. 15:22 Kenaniah was appointed director of the temple choir *because he was skillful in the musical arts*.
3. In 1 Samuel 10:6-7 we read that the Lord equipped Saul to be king.

With these texts to guide us we have no difficulty seeing that the Lord prepared and equipped Moses for his role as the leader of Israel, David for his work as soldier, poet, and king, Paul for his work as the theologian of the New Testament, Mary for her role as a mother, and so on. I don’t say, the Bible does not say, that what you are good at you must, in every case, choose as your occupation. But I do say that all the equipment, gifts, and talents that enable you to do certain kinds of work well are from God and are a stewardship from him. They are to be put to the best possible use in your life. The Bible recognizes no virtue in doing something badly whether digging a ditch, raising a child, or selling a product to a customer!

We spoke last time of the way God, by his providence, settles us in various occupations. Gifts, interests, education, advice, opportunity all conspire to place us where we are as workers. But what is important is that God has equipped us for that work, whatever it is, and so it is incumbent upon us to use our abilities and to exploit our opportunities in a way that pleases him. God is ultimately our employer. We don’t deny that some work requires more skill than other, that some God-given talent and ability may be applied to many different vocations. The point is simply that those skills we have, those abilities to do a particular kind of work are from the Lord and, in that way too, we work for him and to serve him.

With these thoughts in mind, then, let us draw some conclusions.

1. Christians should be intentional about doing their work *for the Lord*. Franz Joseph Haydn, the great composer, had a practice of putting at the top of his manuscripts “whatever they were: a symphony, a string quartet, an oratorio” the words “In nomine Domini” and at the bottom the words “Laus Deo.” At the top “In the name of the Lord” or,

for this is what it means, "for the Lord's sake," and at the bottom "Praise to God." Every Christian should, as it were, begin his or her working day with "In nomine Domini" and should conclude it "Laus Deo." If we did that and meant that and kept that in mind we would work as the ministers of the Lord we are when we are doing our daily work.

2. There should be a thorough mixture of our Christian faith and our working life, as each is to penetrate the other and never to be separated from the other. The old axiom, "Laborare est orare" "to work is to pray" reminds us that we do not serve the Lord in those explicitly religious ways only. As Bonhoeffer reminds us, "Without the burden and labor of the day, prayer is not prayer, and without prayer work is not work." That is the way a Christian should think about his life. He is serving God as much in his work as in his prayer and each requires the other. [Life Together]
3. There should be a universal recognition among all Christians that work, all vocation, all occupations "so long as they are lawful for a Christian" is the service of God. We are the last people who can look down on people because of their jobs. God has given those jobs! They are service to him and, believe me, the Lord is far more pleased with a devout laborer who serves him in his daily work than a proud professor or entrepreneur who does not. I remember the only time I met Ian Hamilton's father. Mr. Hamilton was a typical Glasgow working man, a socialist in his politics, and didn't have much time for aristocratic airs. Ian was the first in his family to go to university. Ian had gone into another room to see his mother who was ill and Mr. Hamilton and I were talking and he looked me in the eye and said, "You know, Ian thinks manual labor is a Spaniard." He was, I'm sure, speaking half in jest, he was proud of his son. Now, Ian didn't then and doesn't now think any such thing, but that remark has always served to remind me of how important it is for Christians to respect the dignity of everyone's work as a divine calling and to make that respect for all workers and all occupations clear.
4. We should all be looking for ways to make our work and our way of doing it more self-consciously the service of the Lord, "In nomine Domini." No doubt many of us are thinking about how to do this. Think hard and find those ways in which doing what you do you will be still more a minister of God.

Do you remember Lee Atwater, campaign manager for the first president George Bush? Mr. Atwater became ill, pretty seriously ill, and during his illness, by his own profession, he became a Christian. At the time, as I

remember, I had much less difficulty believing that his Christian profession was genuine than I do in the case of other such reports that come our way. And the reason was that Atwater began, as soon as he was well enough, to make amends for the sins he now realized he had committed in his work as President Bush's campaign manager. He apparently realized, almost at once and instinctively, that political campaigns are subject to precisely the same divine laws as any other work, that God requires us to love our neighbor even when he is a political opponent, that a scrupulous care for the truth is just as necessary in political speech as in any other human speech, even when half-truths and sinister implications will deliver huge numbers of votes to your side. So he began writing apologies to old political foes, telling them that he wished he had done his work as a Christian would have done it, serving the Lord in it and by it. Of course, it would have been better still, as Mr. Atwater admitted, to have managed that campaign in the first place in the service of God.

Well, as you can, apply that lesson to your own life and your own work and think of ways in which you might be more a minister of God and Christ in the work you do each day.

Remember, work is a large part of the life you live before God. God's law and God's pleasure and God's presence orders your life at work and in your occupation as much as they do any other aspect of your life. The Gospel should be the principle of your working life as surely as it should be the principle of every other aspect of your daily existence. For example, Christians often grumble about their jobs with no conscience about the fact that this is the very same spiritual discontentment that Scripture forbids the people of God. Your aims and intentions should be the same there as they are when you are on your knees or when you are in this house at worship. And the same resources the Lord has promised you " his Spirit, his promises, and the wisdom of his Word " are as much available to you as a worker and in your occupation as they are to you as a husband or wife, parent, friend, bill-payer, home-owner, or evangelist. So let's conclude where we began, with this thought: our work is holy. It is *from* God and it ought to be done *to* God. What that means " the wonderfully encouraging thing that means " is that every day, and all day long, we have before us the means to serve God, to do his will, to fulfill our purpose before him, and to give answer to his summons. It supercharges our daily life with significance, with opportunity, and with high purpose.

In John Keble's cycle of poems entitled the *Christian Year* we have these verses:

We need not bid for cloistered cell,
Our neighbor and our work farewell.
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high
For sinful man beneath the sky;
The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we need to ask, "a
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

It is a wonderful thing to know that God, Almighty God, cares about our work and will take pleasure from our doing it for him!

Rayburn on employers/bosses:

No doubt what a company pays an employer will, in many ways, be determined by its balance sheet, by market forces, by the availability of labor and the like. But Scripture is well aware that market forces can place an employer in a position of advantage over a worker, making it possible for him to pay his workers less than they ought to be paid in accordance with principles of Christian equity, justice, and love.

Consider the following texts.

1. Deuteronomy 24:14-15: 'Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.'
2. James 5:4: 'Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty!'
3. Jeremiah 22:13 (re Jehoiakim): 'Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.'
4. Malachi 3:5: 'I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice but do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty.' (The workers were paid something, of course, but not what was rightly theirs!)

5. Gen 31:41: Laban is an example of a crafty employer who uses all manner of strategies to pay as little as possible to his workers and keep as much as possible for himself! He changed Jacob's wages 10 times in an effort to defraud him of his due!

This is but one illustration of the application of the fundamental biblical principle of working life – *the Lord is watching!* – and the essential implication of that principle that employers, as well as employees, are obliged in their working life to practice the love of their neighbor. Love for God and man will always require of the employer and the employee more regard for the well-being of another than market forces would ever require of him! *The Lord is watching!* Market forces, the profit motive, the reality of the bottom line would never require an employer, boss, or supervisor *to love his workers, to treat them with regard and respect, and to put their interests above his own personal interests.* The fact that he must do his work before the living God, that is what brings those considerations and those obligations to bear.

From R.C. Sproul's *Man of Steel: The Wayne Alderson Story*
(http://www.teambuildinginc.com/article_valuing_people.htm), via Rayburn:

In 1965, Wayne Alderson accepted a job in the financial department of Pittron Steel, a steel foundry in Glassport, Pennsylvania, and by 1969 he had worked himself up to the position of controller and chief financial officer. As controller, Wayne was responsible for the financial management of the company, and Pittron was in financial trouble. The massive foundry, covering seven blocks along the Monongahela River, was typical of the many steel mills of western Pennsylvania. The nerve-wracking noises, noxious odors, and ever-present soot created an oppressiveness that hung in the plant all day and night. Pittron was a filthy place to work, and it did not bring out the best in its people. In 1972, Pittron was on the verge of explosion. There was so much hostility between labor and management that tension was at a peak. On the surface, the issues appeared to be economic---the plant was in trouble financially and the union, the United Steel Workers, had made concessions. But under the surface, workers were feeling animosity over other issues---qualitative issues concerning matters of dignity and personal respect. Despite the company's financial condition, the men went

out on strike in October of 1972. The bitterness, charges, and countercharges resulted in what was called "eighty-four days of hell." Just before the strike, Wayne Alderson had been promoted to the position of Vice President of Operations. Alderson had been critical of the company's policy of "management by confrontation" and intimidation of the workers, arguing that it simply didn't work to improve productivity and quality. Against all industrial relations protocol, Alderson decided to meet secretly with USWA Local 1306 President Sam Piccolo, a tough and skilled representative for the plant's people. He wanted to present a plan called "Operation Turnaround." The difficult meeting broke the ice that had held management and the union in its grasp for years, and began a relationship between Alderson and Piccolo that has continued to this day. Alderson felt that management had to make the first moves to convince the workforce of its sincerity. And so he began by walking into the plant to talk with people.

The first person he visited was a "chipper," who performed one of the hardest and dirtiest jobs in the plant. The chipper chips away defects from large steel castings with a heavy jackhammer. Alderson said, "Let me have a crack at it." And with that, he removed his suit coat and climbed onto the casting. He lasted all of three minutes and conceded that whatever the company paid the man, he earned every cent of it. Within a few minutes, every worker in the plant heard of the incident. By his gesture, Alderson had dignified the least respected task in the plant. As he took more symbolic steps to demonstrate dignity and respect, Alderson began to break down the industrial traditions of the past.

Knowing Alderson was a man of God, one day Sam Piccolo, at a lunchtime gathering, began jokingly needling him. He asked if Alderson was "ready to start teachin' us about the Bible?" Over the next few days the subject came up again, and Alderson began to think they were serious. So informally, the two men began to discuss the Bible, accompanied by a few others from the plant. As time went on, more and more men joined the group. As it grew, they moved the discussion to an abandoned storage room located directly under the open hearth. The dismal room looked like a catacomb. So the men cleaned out the spider webs, brought in stray cats to control the rats, and set up benches.

The men referred to the place as their "chapel-under-the-open-hearth," and one man made a sign that simply said "Chapel." Others began to make their own contributions to the chapel. Wednesday's were set aside for the Bible study meetings. Initial skepticism gave way to belief, as the group grew gradually into hundreds. Workers families were noticing the

changes also as love, dignity, and respect were replacing hostility. The ensuing months brought a dramatic change in the plant and its people. Something powerful was bringing an order to life in the plant.

Wayne Alderson is not a "softy. He is a hard-nosed, practical manager focused on the performance of the organization. The difference is how he goes about getting results. By truly valuing people, which he interprets as demonstrating love, dignity, and respect, a foundation is laid for high-performance. Over the next 21 months, Pittron's turnaround was as dramatic as any in the annals of American industry.

- Sales went up 400%
- Financials went from a deficit of \$6 million to a profit of \$6 million
- The workforce grew from 300 to 1200
- Productivity rose 64%
- Labor grievances went from 12 per week to 1 per year
- Chronic absenteeism running 20% dropped to less than 1%
- Quality of product became the best in the history of the plant
- A poor safety record went to an outstanding one
- Workers became customer oriented and ultimately its best sales people

With profits running high, Pittron was sold by its parent company. Even though Pittron became the shining star in the new organization its management style was just too radical for the new company. Alderson was given the opportunity to remove himself from the Bible study group, but politely refused. His refusal to change his management style at Pittron resulted in his termination from the company. The work world in 1974 was not ready, even when the evidence was overwhelming, for valuing people at work.

Work is the way God meets our needs and the needs of others. And work meets the needs of others not merely through mercy ministry to marginalized, also through business vocations that create jobs and generate new wealth.

John Murray:

It is the consciousness of divine vocation in the particular task assigned to us that will imbue us with the proper sense of responsibility in the

discharge of it. The New Testament lays peculiar stress on the God-oriented motivation and direction of all our toil. This is, of course, the specific application of the governing principle of all of life — “whether therefore you eat or drink of whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). “For none of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself: for if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord” (Rom. 14:7-8). But the specific application to the sphere of labor receives particular emphasis. There is a good reason for this. When labor involves drudgery, when the hardship is oppressive, when the conditions imposed upon us are not those which mercy and justice would dictate, when we are tempted to individual or organized revolt, when we are ready to recompense evil on the part of our master with the evil of careless work on our part, it is just then that we need to be reminded, “whatsoever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive an inheritance as a reward” (Col. 3:23-24).

It is in the context of this exhortation that the apostle lays his finger on the cardinal vice of our labor: we do it to please men. “Servants, obey your earthly masters in everything, and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord” (Col. 3:22). Men-pleasing takes multiple forms, and with these forms is linked as great a variety of vice. Even when the most satisfactory work is performed, and even though great pleasure may be derived from the doing of it out of consideration for man, either as master or simply as appraiser of our handiwork, even then both motivation and performance violate the first principle of labor, “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” (Eph. 6:7), however much higher in the scale of human values such service may be compared with work poorly done. It is this principle that puts all eye-service and men-pleasing in the category of sin.

It is not a well-recognized fact that the bane of much workmanship is that the workman worked well only when he was under the eye of his master or supervisor. It is the same vice that explains the lack of pleasure in work; labor is boredom and about all that is in view is the paycheck. This evil that turns labor into drudgery is but the ultimate logic of eye-service and men-pleasing. Perhaps the most tragic result of all is the way in which eye-service betrays moral judgment. If we seek to please men, then, in the final analysis it is expediency that guides conduct. And when

expediency becomes the rule of life, obedience to God loses both sanction and sanctity and the workman is ready to be the accomplice in furthering ends which desecrate the first principles of right and truth and justice. God-service is the first principle of labor, and it alone is the guardian of virtue in all our economic structure.â€

If you make business your God, you'll find you have a very unforgiving master – and sooner or later you will be crushed.

Cultural renewal will only happen when we, the people of God, apply the gospel to our vocations.

In a post-Marx world, a lot of emphasis is put on worker satisfaction (e.g., the alienation theme). But some degree of frustration in work is inevitable and helps us mature. We have to learn how to bear the cross in our vocation.

Nouwen:

You know, my whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that the interruptions were my work.

Biblically, we are working with and for our neighbors, and our neighbors are working for us. That means neighborly love must govern all our relations, even in the work place. The boss and secretary, the doctor and patient, the teacher and student, are all neighbors to one another.

Vocation is not so much what I do but what God does through me.

Busyness and laziness can co-exist. Think about that.

We worry about finding God's will, but the biblical focus is on doing God's will.

Don't worry about making the wrong choice vocationally, provided you are in line with scripture, seeking to love God and neighbor.

An old proverb: The diligent man has a hard day, but the lazy man has a hard life.

We must rebel against low expectations and mediocrity in school and the workplace.

When you faithfully execute your calling you are serving the wellbeing of others

In the world authority flows down, as those in charge push around those below them on status ladder. The Bible stands that on its head: the higher up you are, the more you should be serving those below you.

TPC has a rather stripped down church life. We're very non-programmatic. But this is by design so that you have time to do your vocation in work and family with excellence

Christ is hidden in our neighbors (cf. Matt. 25). The honest salesman is loving Christ in those he sells to, the hard working student is loving Christ in his teacher, the wife who makes dinner for her family is loving and making dinner for Christ in her family members. When you love and serve your neighbor you are loving and serving Christ.

The dominion mandate not so much a command but a kind of built-in programming. Man doesn't have to be told to build culture – he just does it. This is why refusing to work strikes at the very heart of one's humanity.

Live a seamless life – integrate your faith and work.

Dorothy Sayers:

In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion

Robert Rayburn on retirement:

We can put this case of conscience in various ways.

1. If Christians were created to work, if work is their calling in this world, is it right for them to retire from their jobs?
2. If God has appointed work as the means by which he provides his blessing in our lives, can it be safe to retire? We have all heard of people of otherwise good health who die soon after retirement. Is this God's judgment for disobedience to the command to work?

3. If our work is a divine calling for which the Lord has especially equipped us, is retirement an act of rebellion, a laying down of the charge God has given us?

It is certainly fair to say that it is not obvious in the Bible that it is our Heavenly Father's intention that we should work until we are 62 or 65 years of age and spend the remainder of our years touring the United States in our RV (that is, if we had a defined benefit retirement plan that has not gone bankrupt and we can afford the gasoline!).

Let me begin with some *preliminary observations* which will help us keep our Biblical reflection in context,

First, retirement as we know it is a very recent phenomenon. It is the "achievement" of 20th century industrialized society.

Before our own day workers did not systematically leave the workforce solely because of age. Before our own day "that is, before the lifetime of the older ones in this sanctuary tonight" retirement was effectively simply the diminished level of working activity brought on by infirmities or the declining strength and stamina of old age.

In a major study of retirement as a social phenomenon published in 1979, several reasons for the institutionalization of retirement in our culture were listed. [R.A. Ward cited in *Baker Dictionary of Psychology*, 1012-1013]

1. It is a demographic development: people are living longer and there are more older people in the population. This, together with increased productivity and modernization of machinery has meant that there is greater competition for available jobs, resulting in older workers being enticed from the work force to make room for younger. I remember asking my brother about the wisdom of an Air Force policy in which the most experienced fighter pilots are required to move on to other jobs when, one would think, they would be at the height of their effectiveness at their chosen profession. His reply was, like it or not, there are only so many pilot slots and the Air Force could not afford to let them be held for some years by a select group of experienced pilots. In order to ensure that there will be an adequate supply of pilots, new ones have to be able to enter the pipeline every year. But new ones cannot enter if older ones don't leave. Many of you could very well imagine the havoc that would be caused in your company or industry if you were to be told that there would be no or very few

advancements for the next ten years because all the positions at the top were filled by people who had no intention of moving on.

2. Related to this is a steep decline in the size of the agricultural workforce – a part of the workforce that traditionally did not retire in the modern sense of the term.
3. What is more, in the modern economy there is an increasing need for changing and adapting skills, a transition often much more difficult for older workers, making them expendable and sometimes leading to corporate practices that encourage, if not demand, the retirement of older workers.
4. Social Security and pensions have made retirement a possibility for many. It is worth noting, all the more today as the insecurity of retirement plans has cast doubt upon the plans that many people have had to retire, that even in our day when people are expected to retire, if a person hasn't the income, he or she does not retire!
5. Perhaps it is difficult to know precisely which came first – changes in our view of work and the lack of satisfaction of many in their work or the expectation of retirement – but, in any case, a different view of work in the modern world has certainly made the prospect of retirement more attractive to modern workers.
6. Finally, retirement has virtually completely lost any stigma it may once have had and has, on the contrary, become a positive and desirable goal. At the gym where I exercise I read magazines on the stationary bike – if I don't read I would die of boredom – and among those are *Kiplinger's* and *Forbes* and *Smart Money*. I've noticed that virtually every number of every one of these magazines includes some article about saving for retirement, or how to retire early, or how to build the largest retirement nest egg, or what to do if you are already retired and your income is not keeping pace with your expenses. This past week I read an article – this is how boring the stationary bike really is – recommending that governments adopt tax structures that make it possible for homeowners to defer property tax payments until retirement. Retirement is a fact of life in American society and, therefore, has become a matter of real importance to the American economy.

And the result is that most American adults expect to retire and most eventually do. This has vast social and economic consequences. Our government programs providing for the retired segment of the American population have many trillions of

unfunded liabilities and there is not a politician in Washington who knows what to do about this. One thing they all know is that tampering with Social Security benefits is political suicide. We are, at this moment, observing the European governments who have the same problem in an even more immediate and acute form “having made extravagant promises to fund their population’s retirement years that they cannot afford to keep” and they have no idea what to do. But retirement has changed the face of America and it is hard to imagine going back. It has produced vast population relocations, from the North and East to Florida and the Southwest. Our Florida presbyteries in the Presbyterian Church in America have a sizeable number of our largest churches, but the difference in their attendance from February to July is often extreme: a church that will have a thousand worshippers in February will have 110 in July. The difference is the “snowbirds,” the retirees who live in Florida during the winter and back home in the North during the summer.

One very interesting aspect of the issue is that given the ever lengthening lifespan for men and women, the large numbers of them who now do not begin their working lives in earnest until they have graduated from college and, in many cases, graduate school, and the presence of large numbers of programs enabling early retirement, it is possible for a significant number of American workers to spend thirty years or less at regular employment before retirement and to live a very substantial portion of life as a retiree. One of my very first pastoral calls on coming to the pastorate here in 1978 was on a man who was then one of, if not our eldest member. Some of you will remember Frank Lawrence. He was perhaps 90 years of age when I met him. But what I discovered as we began to talk was that he had lived *my entire life* in retirement. It was 1978 when I met him and he had retired from the Great Northern Railroad in 1950, the year that I was born.

Retirement has been with us long enough now as a social institution to provide social scientists with abundant grist for their research mills. As usually the case with psychological/sociological studies, the results can hardly be considered definitive and usually contradictory studies can be found. For example, in a number of studies of the psychology of retirement, retired individuals in large numbers reported being unable to fill the void created by the absence of the work to which they had given so many of their

years. They felt useless, or, at least, less satisfied with their lives than when they were working. At the same time many others reported that the transition to retirement was not difficult and that their feelings of self-worth and satisfaction had always rested on more than their job and had not departed them upon their retirement from it.

No doubt it is what you would expect. Those with healthy personal lives and solid family relationships as well as adequate income adjust to retirement much better than those who are ill, who haven't enough money to maintain their former lifestyle, are alone, or were forced out of work instead of leaving it voluntarily. Now, as you will not be surprised to learn, the Scripture does not directly address the phenomenon of institutionalized retirement or retirement as a cultural and economic phenomenon such as it has come to be only in our own era. In interrogating Holy Scripture to seek light and direction for ourselves for such an issue as this we are seeking, rather than specific instruction or commandment, principles which bear on the matter and to which we must do justice if we are to answer such a question correctly and have the mind of Christ.

- I. *First, we will and must begin by restating the fundamental principles with which we began our study.*

I mean principles such as these: 1) we were created to be workers and are commanded in God's law to work. "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" 2) Work is holy and a major dimension of our Christian living in the world. It is one of the primary spheres in which we are to love and serve the Lord. So much is this true, that it is entirely natural to find the Scripture explicitly saying that God's blessing of his faithful people will make them fruitful even in their old age. "They will still bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green." [Ps 92:14]

These are principles of overarching importance and obviously must be given their due by anyone contemplating retirement. No believer is free to consider himself or herself somehow exempt from the requirements of obedience to God or somehow detached from the realities of life in God's covenant by which he has determined to bless his people. A Christian, of all people, may well be able to contribute in many ways far into old age. Our calling as Christians most assuredly is not for 30 years of our lives, or 50, or

65. We are to be God's servants, doing his will, all our lives long.

- II. *Second, however, the Bible certainly prepares us to recognize that those principles bear on people in different ways at different times of their lives.* For example, we do not take the biblical statement "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" as applicable to little children or to the infirm or to the aged. We recognize that the commandment assumes that the person is capable of working and ought to be working, all things being equal. We wouldn't apply it either to someone who was without work through no fault of his own. Well, in the same way, we would never apply the general principle of the obligation of work to older folk who cannot work as they once did. We read earlier, for example, in Ecclesiastes 12:1-5 a very poignant and realistic description of the onslaught of old age and its various consequences. In 1 Timothy 5:4 Paul says, "if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God."

There is an assumption here of the reality of the stages of life and the changes that come with those stages. Or think of the various co-regencies of Israelite kings, when a father remained king but rule had effectively passed to his son. It was this practice of co-regency that was one reason why the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah was, for so long, a vexing problem. The numbers did not add up precisely because a king's reign was being computed from the time he began to rule, not from the date his father died. In any case, this is an excellent example of the consequences of advancing years bearing on the working life of a man when he became old. Or think of the stipulation of Numbers 8:25-26 that Levites must retire at 50 years of age. They couldn't begin work at the temple until they were 25 and had to retire at 50. That did not necessarily mean that they stopped all work at 50, surely, but one particular job was denied them after that age. There is the Bible's own testimony that there may be reasons why people must leave certain jobs at certain ages. We have such work laws still today, as, for example, with mandatory retirement ages for airline pilots.

There is something very commonsensical about the admission that older people may very well not have the strength or stamina they once had, that while they may have the accumulated wisdom of

many years, that wisdom may be of much less value to an employer because, at the same time, they don't think on their feet as well as they once did, they don't hear office conversations as well, and they don't see as well. It may be that 65 is only a generalization regarding the age at which the years are beginning to take their toll on one's working performance. It may not, for all I know even be a very accurate generalization. But few will dispute that at some point an employer begins to receive diminishing returns for the wages he is paying a worker.

We can think of unending examples of this from our own experience. There came a time when Harry Marshall, missionary to Peru and Nathaniel Gutierrez's grandfather, couldn't climb Andes peaks with a film projector and generator on his back as he once did! Joe DiMaggio and Lou Gehrig gave up playing baseball because they knew they couldn't play as they had played before for the same paycheck. Steve Carlton, on the other hand, was something of an embarrassment to several teams who didn't want to dump a future hall-of-famer but who couldn't afford his slow fastballs and hanging curves.

I can supply any number of illustrations from my own profession. Alexander Whyte attempted to retire from the pastorate of Free St. George's in Edinburgh because he was concerned that he had grown too old to do well all the congregation needed from its minister. The congregation wouldn't receive his resignation, however. A few years later, however, he resigned again and insisted upon the congregation's acquiescence. He knew he could not meet the demands of ministry to his congregation and that she needed a fresh mind and heart to guide her through the perplexities and challenges of a new day, or, as he put it "I feel it to be my best duty to the congregation to leave the work to a younger and a fitter man." [Barbour, *Alexander Whyte*, 485] His eventual retirement, at 80 years of age and after 45 years in the pastorate of Free St. George's, was made because he felt he could not longer do justice to his work or the needs of his people and that he was standing in the way of his younger colleague! Mr Still, whose first Sunday in Gilcomston South was the Sunday after VE day in 1945 and who has been there ever since, has taken the church through several very different stages. He was vigorous and very much in command of his pulpit well into his eighties, open to new ideas and new plans, able to relate to younger people.

Yet, it must be admitted that there were those who felt he held on a few years longer than was really wise.

On the other hand, I could tell you stories of churches harmed and left weak and splintered because a pastor would not let go and kept on long after the years of his fruitful service were plainly past. If it should be God's will that I be your minister until I am old, I very much hope that the elders will be firm and courageous enough to tell me if my age, the inflexibility of spirit which often goes with old age, and the physical weakness are interfering with the best interests of the congregation's life and ministry. The Bible says they will sooner or later. There is no sin in retiring a man or a woman who can no longer do the work well which he or she once did. Indeed, it is right to do so; there is a certain dishonesty, even cowardice ordinarily in a failure to do so.

So, let me draw from the above a few conclusions by way of application:

1. Retirement to play is, in my thinking, difficult to justify biblically. Our purpose here is not to have a good time; recreation is to be only the spice of life, not the meat!
2. Retirement from one job to do another is a very different thing. Bruce Kennedy, the Christian chairman of Alaska Airlines, retired some years ago to do missionary work in New Guinea, I think it was. My father retired from the presidency of Covenant Seminary, as he felt he should at that age, but kept teaching at the seminary and in overseas schools. His schedule relaxed somewhat but he kept working. Or take, for example, former President Carter's work in his retirement with Habitat for Humanity.
3. Retirement for reasons of the weakness of age seems to me to be not only justifiable, but in many cases demanded by Christian ethics.
4. On the other hand, I don't see why companies should require retirement if workers are still able and willing to perform acceptably in their posts. The Bible generally takes the view that the experience that comes from the accumulation of years is a very valuable commodity. But if retirement is anticipated in an individual Christian's case " he or she works for a company in which retirement is expected or required, at least retirement from one's primary occupation " one should certainly do what one can to prepare himself for it both financially and by

thinking carefully about how he or she can use the time retirement provides to the Lord's full advantage.

Let's remember that until infirmity cripples our usefulness, our lives should be full of purposeful activity. We are the Lord's servants and there is always something valuable to do, some fruitful way to spend our time. Old age is often a great opportunity. Martyn Lloyd Jones published the first of the scores of books he would eventually publish when he was 59 years of age. It was not until her mid-60s that Laura Ingalls Wilder began to write the stories of her childhood. Encouraged by her daughter, Laura began work on her first "Little House" book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, when she was 64. She published *Little House on the Prairie* when she was 68. *Little Town on the Prairie* was published when she was 74 and *Those Happy Golden Years* when she was 76. One of the most important effects of a Christian's thoughtful, intentional approach to his or her working life is the building of momentum by which the greatest use will be made of the last years of our lives, when, God-willing, we should have the most valuable things to contribute to the kingdom of God and to the world.

Rayburn on the Protestant view of work:

Martin Luther began the attack and carried it out with vigor.

"When a maid cooks and cleans and does other housework, because God's command is there, even such a small work must be praised as a service of God far surpassing the holiness and asceticism of all monks and nuns." [Cited in Forester, 148]

Or again:

"The idea that the service to God should have only to do with a church altar, singing, reading, sacrifice, and the like is without doubt but the worst trick of the devil. How could the devil have led us more effectively astray than by the narrow conception that service to God takes place only in church and by works done therein? The whole world could abound with services to the Lord. *Gottesdienste* "not only in churches but also in the home, kitchen, workshop, field." [Cited in R.P. Stevens, *The Other Six Days*, 77]

Here is Calvin.

"It is an ancient error that those who flee worldly affairs and engage in contemplation are leading an angelic life! We know that men were created to busy themselves with labor and that no sacrifice is more

pleasing to God than when each one attends to his calling and studies to live well for the common good.â€” [Com. on Luke, at 10:38; vol. ii, 89]

I should say that scholarship does detect a difference between Luther and Calvin on this point. Here is one description of the difference.

â€œIt must be admitted that Luther did not follow out the implications of his revolutionary view of the common life as a â€˜callingâ€™. It was left to Calvinism to discover the close connexion between the actual callings with the work they entailed, on the one hand, and the love and the wisdom of God on the other. To Lutheranism these vocations were forms, within which a man did his Christian duty. To Calvinism they were the very means through which love and faith could become realized. As Max Weber says, Luther sees the Christian serving God *in vocatione*, not *per vocationem*. [R.N. Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology*, 252]

So, consider this from the Calvinist, William Tyndale.

â€œThere is no work better than another to please God: to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a [cobbler], or an apostle, all are one; to wash dishes and to preach are all one, as touching the deed, to please God.â€” [Parker Society, vol. 42, 102]

This conviction â€˜ the repudiation root and branch of the sacred/secular dichotomy and the positive notion of serving God *through oneâ€™s work* â€˜ was then worked out in greater detail by the English Puritans who brought into English culture the radically Christian idea that work, everyoneâ€™s work, is holy and is to be performed *for the Lord*, according to his laws, and with the expectation of his blessing. Still today people talk about the â€œPuritan work ethic,â€” though few any longer have any idea of what the Puritan ethic of work actually was.

Nowadays one is likely to find the Puritan work ethic to be invoked as the foundation for workaholicism or hyper-competitiveness in modern business or for materialism, none of which the Puritans would have approved. Their position was that work is holy and that in doing work in a distinctively Christian way, one served the Lord in the field or the shop or the home as surely as one served the Lord in the church. For that reason oneâ€™s work had to be done *as unto the Lord*. That is the Puritan work ethic. The Puritan understanding of work was founded on the absolute rejection of the medieval distinction between spiritual and secular work. As William Perkins, who might be called the father of English Puritanism, put it:

“The action of a shepherd in keeping sheep is as good a work before God as is the action of a judge in giving sentence, or a magistrate in ruling, or a minister in preaching.” [Cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 25]

From Gene Veith’s blog:

It’s instructive to contrast the metaphorical underpinnings of “vocation” and “career.” The central metaphor of vocation is, of course, a calling—Latin *vocare*. The person who is called is the receptor of that gift, the respondent to that calling, which originates not in oneself but in the Person who calls. But the word “career” is etymologically associated with roads, courses, chariot-paths, etc. Poets used to speak of the “career” of the sun in its course across the sky. This is how modernity generally conceives of work, as a choice of course, not a calling and a gift. The person who faces a career choice faces a crossroads of choices. A person usually discovers one’s vocations as they naturally unfold through the talents that arise in relation to the people to whom one is called. But the criteria for making the right career choice and taking the right career path are self-originating, they are discovered by being true to oneself and one’s desires (to speak the Hollywood argot). Because that is extremely vague, and because one’s desires are in constant flux and contradiction, there has arisen a whole industry of incantatory-astrological magicians and paperback mountebanks who hawk the right “formula” or series of steps, which, if purchased and followed, will bring happiness and success in one’s career choice.

Universities today are extremely career-oriented, of course. Like all the secular schools the Christian university I attended had a Career Center but no Vocation Center, nor was vocation taught in any substantive way. The phrase “revolutionize” is a lie, but a strong and full articulation of vocation properly understood would truly transform the way we approach education. In the humanities, for instance, an understanding of art, literature, and criticism as vocational means of serving the neighbor would provide a compelling alternative to the dehumanizing, obscurantist tendencies of modern English departments....

One reason I find the distinction between vocation and career useful is that the former category has a teleological orientation which is lacking in the latter. By which I mean: the career culture has no sound way of

differentiating legitimate careers from illegitimate careers. It doesn't really matter WHAT career you choose—the choice is the only important thing. Who are we to judge the choices of others, anyway? There is a built-in aversion to truth in the career mentality. And thus it leaves the neighborhood in the cold and fragmented.

But vocation acknowledges the flourishing—the shalom—of the neighbor as a legitimate check to the authority of choice. Vocations that prove deleterious to the health and well being of the neighbor are no vocations at all. But the same cannot be said of the career mindset, which is inherently choice-oriented. Vocation doesn't deny the role of choice, it just humbles it, redirects it.

Calvin:

Now our blockishness arises from the fact that our minds, stunned by the empty dazzlement of riches, power, and honors, become so deadened that they can see no farther. The heart also, occupied with avarice, ambition, and lust, is so weighed down that it cannot rise up higher. In fine, the whole soul, enmeshed in the allurements of the flesh, seeks its happiness on earth. To counter this evil the Lord instructs his followers in the vanity of the present life by continual proof of its miseries. . . .

Then only do we rightly advance in the discipline of the cross, when we learn that this life, judged by itself, is troubled, turbulent, unhappy in countless ways, and in no respect clearly happy; that all those things which are judged to be its goods are uncertain, fleeting, vain, and vitiated by many intermingled evils. From this, at the same time, we conclude that in this life we are to seek and hope for nothing but struggle; when we think of our crown, we are to raise our eyes to heaven. For this we must believe: that the mind is never seriously aroused to desire and ponder the life to come unless it be previously imbued with contempt for the present life.

Volf:

Given the paramount importance of work in both liberal and socialist economic and social theory, it is remarkable that in our world dominated

by work a serious crisis in work had to strike before church bodies paid much attention to the problem of human work. Theologians are to blame for the former negligence. Amazingly little theological reflection has taken place in the past about an activity that takes up so much of our time. The number of pages theologians have devoted to the question of transubstantiation – which does or does not take place on Sunday – for instance, would, I suspect, far exceed the number of pages devoted to work that fills our lives Monday through Saturday. My point is not to belittle the importance of correct understanding of the real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper but to stress that a proper perspective on human work is at least as important.

One might object that the most basic things in life are not necessarily the most important, and that is hence superfluous to spend much time reflecting on them. Breathing is rather basic to life, but we do it twenty-four hours a day without giving it a second thought – until air pollution forces us to do so. Working, one might say, is much like breathing: its point is to keep us alive, and we need not bother with it until its function is hindered.

The parallel between breathing and working makes sense, however, only in a theology that subordinates the *vita activa* completely to the *vita contemplativa*. As Thomas Aquinas' reflection on work illustrates, in such a theology the only real reason to work is to make the contemplation of God possible, first by providing "for the necessities of the present life" without which contemplation could not take place, and second, by "quieting and directing the internal passions of the soul," without which human beings would not be "apt [enough] for contemplation." But apart from the fact that work is necessary to provide for the necessities of the body and to quiet the passions of the soul, work is *detrimental* to human beings, for "it is impossible for one to be busy with external action and at the same time give oneself to Divine contemplation." When a person inspired by the love of God does the will of God in the world, she *suffers* separation from the sweetness of Divine contemplation. Where the *vita activa* is fully subservient to *vita contemplativa*, there is no need to reflect extensively on human work since, as a mere means to a much higher end, it is in the long run accidental to the real purpose of human life.

The complete subordination of *vita activa* to *vita contemplativa* that has been basic to much of Christian theology throughout the centuries betrays an illegitimate intrusion of Greek anthropology into Christian theology. Faithfulness to our Judeo-Christian biblical roots demands that we abandon it. I am not suggesting that we should follow the modern

inversion of the traditional order between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* and subordinate *vita contemplativa* completely to *vita activa*. I am not even suggesting that we should place them on an equal footing. I do propose, however, that *we treat them as two basic, alternating aspects of the Christian life that may differ in importance but that cannot be reduced one to another, and that form an inseparable unity.*

As soon as we ascribe inherent and not simply instrumental value to the *vita activa* (and thereby also to human work) we have answered the question of whether theological reflection on work is fundamental or marginal to the task of theology. ...

Lee Hardy:

Whereas for Luther our vocation is discerned in the duties of our station in life, for the Calvinists it is derived from our gifts. . . . Therefore we are obliged to find a station in life where our gifts can indeed be employed for the sake of our neighbor's good. The station is no longer itself normative, but must be judged by its suitability as an instrument of social service. **If it is found to be faulty or ill-adapted to its end, it must be either altered or discarded altogether**

Lee Hardy sums up the "remarkable ecumenical convergence in the practical theology of work":

That theology gives to human work a central role in the understanding of human life in its relation both to God and the world. Through work we respond to God's mandate to humanity to continue the work of creation by subduing the earth; through work we participate in God's ongoing creative activity; through work we follow Christ in his example of redemptive suffering for the sake of others.

Hardy notes, the Puritans responded to these two dimensions of God's call by distinguishing between the general and the particular calling:

The general calling is the call to be a Christian, that is, to take on the virtues appropriate to followers of Christ, whatever one's station in life. . .

. The particular calling, on the other hand, is the call to a specific occupation. . . . In the discharge of our various particular callings we together build up the interdependent society of the saints, which finds its unity in Christ. With the distinction between the general and the particular calling in mind, talk about ‘vocational choice’ — in the sense of choosing a particular occupation in which we will exercise our gifts—is both biblically appropriate and religiously important.

Hardy adds:

“As such, a vocation is still not something a person can choose. Strictly speaking, what we choose are occupations, where our vocations can be fulfilled. The locution ‘choosing a vocation’ . . . must be understood as shorthand for ‘choosing an occupation where one can pursue one’s vocation’” (Hardy, 81, n. 1).

Hardy writes:

That theology, both Protestant and Catholic, gives to human work a central role in the understanding of human life in its relation to God and the world. Through work we respond to God’s mandate to humanity to continue the work of creation. . . ; through work we realize ourselves as image-bearers of God; through work we participate in God’s ongoing creative activity.

Hardy’s analysis, his application could well sum up our concerns to examine the basis for naming business as one expression of vocation through work:

work is to be a social place for the responsible exercise of a significant range of human talents and abilities in the service of one’s neighbor. . . . The appropriate design of human work must seek to realize the norm of vocation in a way that addresses each of [the physical, psychological, social, ethical and political] dimensions of human existence as they pertain to the job.”⁸⁰ And while he notes that work at business or any other job should not consume all our attention since we have other callings, nonetheless “jobs ought to be designed so that we can in fact apply ourselves—our whole selves—to our calling.

Hardy:

Simply having the right attitude, the "Christian attitude," toward one's work is not enough. One must also take into consideration the social content of one's work: am I, in my job, making a positive contribution to the human community; am I helping meet legitimate human needs; am I somehow enhancing or promoting what is true, what is noble, and what is worthy in human life?

Hardy, 46f, includes a good discussion of Luther and Calvin on vocation as our total station in life, comprised of roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

Hardy looks at Calvin's defense of Martha in Luke 10, 55ff.

This link was given above; here is the article in full
(<http://byfaithonline.com/page/ordinary-life/the-kingdom-work-of-the-corporate-world>
):

The Kingdom Work of the Corporate World

DICK DOSTER, ISSUE NUMBER 11, OCTOBER 2006

Scanning the church directory you couldn't help but notice: in almost every household, someone was, or had been, involved in business. Which means, if this church is typical, that God has called all but a handful of His people to some form of commercial enterprise. He hasn't called them to missions or the pastorate or to any other "full-time Christian work," but to profit-driven, money making, dog-eat-dog, secular business.

What, we might be tempted to ask, is God thinking? Christians are "not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (Romans 2:2), and yet business is relentless in its temporal demands. It's a zero sum game: When one salesman wins, others lose. For lawyers to succeed, they must cause others to fail. If I work for Chevrolet, it's my duty to steal customers, market share, and profits away from Toyota. Hardly a picture of a caring community.

Christians are commanded to do nothing out of selfish ambition (Philippians 2:3), but business, at its essence, is striving and acquisitive. It

grows or dies. Microsoft, Google, ExxonMobil, and Wal-Mart swallow up weaker competitors. They expand across the globe, their profits unfathomable, as the value of their stock continues to soar — almost always at the expense of weaker, more vulnerable competitors. This is raw, naked, unvarnished ambition, and it makes business, at best, an awkward environment for humble souls who “consider others better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3).

We most easily spot the “pattern of this world” in man’s reverence for wealth. And the singular goal of nearly every business ever mentioned on the pages of Forbes or Fortune is to earn as much profit as humanly possible. When they evaluate corporate performance, Wall Street analysts, the press, and investors all join in Jerry Maguire’s once-famous chorus: “Show me the money!”

And the evidence from the church directory is indisputable: God’s people willingly — and even gladly — join forces with these worldly, ambitious, profit-hungry organizations who, they hope, will share the wealth ... with them. And they do so knowing that it is impossible to love God and money (Matthew 6:24), and knowing, as surely as they know the chief end of man, that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

Donate

Certainly, business is no place for those who have “set their minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2). And yet, that is precisely where God has put them. And that can only mean one of two things: either most Christians need to find new work, or they need a new perspective on the institution of business.

There are, when we look closer, hundreds of biblical and godly reasons for Christians to be in business. And many of them fall into one of these three categories.

Business and Our First Responsibility

In Genesis 1:26, God lays out His plan for the human race: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule" Two verses later,

He commissions Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."

That cultural commission, writer/theologian Paul Marshall argues, is more than a set of commands or instructions. Its emphasis is not on what God tells the man and woman; but on why He created them in the first place. As His consummate act of creation, God forms a creature "to be our image and rule" over the Earth. "Ruling" Marshall says, is "built into our very being If we do not take up our responsibility for God's world, we defy not only His command, but also our very nature and the very purpose for which we have been created."

Stamped with God's image, Adam and Eve were to continue God's creative work in the world. They were to take the raw materials God left behind and continue shaping, molding, and improving His creation. As Michael Wittmer, a professor at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, notes, "God's world was flawless, but it wasn't finished."

He didn't create computers, but they were here waiting for His image bearers — working together and combining their diverse skills and talents — to put the pieces together. He didn't create phonograph records, 8-tracks, audiocassettes, CDs, or iPods, but the raw materials existed from the beginning, waiting for man to make one discovery, then another, each generation building and improving on the work that had come before. God didn't create television, telephones, or microwave ovens, but the elements were all here, awaiting the creative prowess of His image bearers — engineers, scientists, and industrial designers, working in concert with one another — to call them into existence.

Man invents, produces, and improves products, writer Nathan Bierma says, "because we're following our mission. ... We do this out of instinct, obeying God's command to fill the Earth and subdue it."

In the August 2006 issue of *byFaith*, readers discussed the importance of the arts. As God's image-bearers, many said, we are meant to create, and the arts are the vehicle for our imaginative expression. But have you ever thought about the creative power of business?

Consider the things that make your life richer, more comfortable, more convenient, and more productive. Think about all the things that make

you safer, healthier, and wiser. They are all products of business innovation. There is no more creative force in the world than business, and God has placed most of His people there, not to pursue money or power, nor to satisfy their selfish ambition — but to create, rule, fill, and subdue the Earth. Christians go to work each day to transform God's world, to make it better than it was the day before. And they do it in obedience to God's first command — as an act of worship, and for the sake of His glory.

Business Is How We Love Our Neighbors

The Pharisees wanted to test Jesus, and so they asked Him for the single greatest commandment. He replied with two. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... And 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 27: 37-40). Here, essentially, is every believer's duty: love God, love others, and love yourself. The rest takes care of itself.

God has placed most of His people in business because it is there, working with others in a common purpose, that is how we fulfill these duties. In *The Fabric of this World*, Lee Hardy discusses Luther's concept of vocation. Hardy summarizes Luther, saying, "Vocation is the specific call to love one's neighbor, which comes to us through the duties which attach to our social place or 'station.'" (Calvin, in response to a freer labor market, would emphasize "gifts" rather than "station.")

"The call to love one's neighbor goes out to all," Luther believed, "but what this call requires of me in particular is discovered in those vocations which I presently occupy." In the 21st century, as much as when Luther said it, "It is 'through the human pursuit of vocation ... that the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the sick are healed, the ignorant are enlightened, and the weak are protected.'"

Luther saw the connection between the cultural commission and the great commandments. He understood that God continues his creative work in this world through those who bear His image, explaining that: "God even milks the cows through those called to that work." In the 21st century it is business, blending the skills of diverse people, that brings the human race under God's providential care.

In *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, Gene Edward Veith also cites Luther: "When we pray the Lord's Prayer we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And He ... does it by means of the farmer [think Cargill, Inc. or Archer Daniels Midland] who planted and harvested the grain, the baker [who, while working for Sara Lee, Pepperidge Farm, or Flowers Bakeries] made the flour into bread, we might today add the truck drivers who hauled the produce, the factory workers in the food processing plant, the warehouse men, the wholesale distributors, the stock boys, the lady at the checkout counter. Also playing their part are the bankers, futures investors, advertisers, lawyers All of these were instrumental in enabling you to eat your morning bread."

Calvin affirmed much of Luther's thinking. In his *Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels*, he criticized the common interpretation of the Mary / Martha conflict found in Luke 10 ("Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?") He refused a dualistic understanding of that passage, writing: "We know that men were created for the express purpose of being employed in labor of various kinds, and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when every man applies diligently to his own calling, and endeavors to contribute to the general advantage."

Zwingli also concurred. In *Of the Education of the Youth*, he added: "...[it is] those who exercise themselves in righteousness that they may serve the Christian community, the common good, the state, and individuals that are 'the most like to God.'"

Business Is How We Care for the Poor

Business is the means by which we rule and subdue the Earth. It is an instrument through which we love our neighbors. And it is, in an ultimate sense, the only solution to poverty.

At the most fundamental level, business provides wealth to share. Psalm 37: 25, 26 says, "I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread. All day long he is gracious and lends; and his descendants are a blessing." When God's people prosper, they're generous and take care of the poor. There's a related idea in Ephesians 4:28: "Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in

order that he may have something to share with him who has need." Paul seeks more than a transformed heart (let him steal no longer); he understands that for-profit work in the secular world is how we care for those in need.

But there's far more to business, as an institution, than that. In his book, *Business as a Calling*, Catholic theologian Michael Novak argues that "capitalism makes it possible for the vast majority of the poor to break out of the prison of poverty — to find opportunity — to discover full scope for their own personal economic initiative; and to rise into the middle class and higher." Those who live in democratic, capitalistic societies, Novak says, "walk the walk of the free — erect and purposeful and quick."

The Scriptures remind us often of God's concern for the poor. They command us to respect them, to have compassion for them, and to seek justice on their behalf. And that is surely one reason God has called His people to business, the only institution that can have a permanent effect on their poverty.

Some might argue that it is technology and science — and not business — that have improved life for the poor and made living conditions more bearable. But, Novak rhetorically asks, "Whence came the drive to advance technology — and not only through gaining knowledge about it, but by bringing it to markets that carry it to billions of individuals — if not from an enterprising, dynamic market system?" He pushes the rhetorical argument further, asking, "How many pharmaceuticals do you have in your home that were developed in communist countries or for that matter, in Third World countries?"

The former Soviet Union, Novak points out, trained more scientist and technical experts than any country in the history of the world. Yet they accomplished little for the greater good of mankind. Why? They had no moral or economic incentive. And even if one had existed, there was no market system — no vehicle — for moving knowledge out of the lab and into people's lives.

Management guru Peter Drucker once said, "The greatest need in underdeveloped countries is people who build ... an effective organization of skilled and trained people exercising judgment and

making responsible decisions.” The poor, Drucker was saying, need business if they’re to have a chance of changing their circumstances.

As we think about “kingdom work” and jobs that have value, it’s helpful to remember that only business — not the Church, not government, not ministry, nor non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—creates new wealth. And wealth is the only cure for poverty. We must, therefore, encourage believers to go into business, to create new products and wider distribution (in obedience to the cultural commission) in order to create new wealth (good stewardship), which creates more jobs (loving our neighbor, caring for the poor). Adam Smith, the 18th century economist and philosopher, once said that new wealth is the road to “universal opulence,” which he defined as “the condition in which the real wages of workers keep growing over time, until the poor live at a level that in 1776 even kings and dukes did not enjoy.”

A realistic hope for a better (economic) future, Michael Novak says, “is essential to the poor” And that is why God’s people must build profitable businesses.

Transforming Business for the Kingdom

Suzy Schultz and Mako Fujimura are talented artists. Their Christian worldview informs and inspires their work, and both are critically acclaimed by Christians and non-Christians alike. Novelists Marilynne Robinson and Bret Lott are believers who sculpt words into beautiful stories that enrich millions of lives. Musicians from Bach to U2 have, in response to God’s call, created the world’s best music.

Christian artists add beauty and complexity to God’s creation, transforming the raw materials of paint, language, and sound into finished products that proclaim God’s glory.

Where are their business counterparts — the entrepreneurs and corporate executives who, with the same passion, reshape the world through business? And who, intentionally and for the sake of God’s glory, manage the power of free markets to make the world more productive? Where are the Christians who are propelling the world’s best corporations?

God's people can, as agents of His redemptive plan, transform business, stripping it of selfish ambition and pursuing instead what's best for their neighbors. Through business, God's people can harness mankind's creativity, and with it nurture His creation, developing products that make the world more satisfying. Through the economic power of commerce, Christians can make the world safer and healthier. The members of Christ's Church, distributed in offices around the world, can transform greed into good stewardship, showing the world that business has a biblical responsibility to create new wealth and provide a fair return to investors (Matthew 25:14-28). But, with an eye toward the consummation of Christ's kingdom, we also create wealth in order to create new and satisfying jobs, which offer the hope (and perhaps a glimpse) of a coming world where there is no poverty.

God has placed His people in business so that they can — in humility, and making full use of the talents and resources He's given — serve customers, employees, suppliers, and the world at large, looking out for the interests of others and providing for their needs.

On their deathbeds, many Christians will regret that they didn't love their neighbors, care for the poor, or advance Christ's kingdom as they should have. They might therefore, with their final breath, gasp: "I wish I'd spent more time at the office."

Lee Hardy on finding God's will:

Discovering God's will for one's life includes being attentive to whom and where we are. It is not as if our abilities, concerns, and interests are just there, as an accident of nature, and then God has to intervene in some special way in order to make His will known to us in a completely unrelated manner. Rather, in making a career choice, we ought to take seriously the doctrine of divine providence: God Himself gives us whatever legitimate abilities, concerns, and interests we in fact possess. These are His gifts, and for that very reason they can serve as indicators of His will for our lives.

There is a lot more to be said about Bezalel in the book of Exodus. I cannot go into here – just a few rough thoughts to point you in the right direction.

There are several indicators the tabernacle is a new creation (including a sevenfold structure that culminates with God coming to indwell the tabernacle as his resting place – compare to Gen. 1). There is a lot of language that echoes Gen. 1-2, e.g., the way the Spirit's role is described. Exodus presents Bezalel's craftsmanship as the work of the Spirit, in continuity with the original creation, but transcending it. At the end of building project, the language of "finished work" again echoes the Genesis creation account. Quite obviously, then, man's "new creation" work is to be patterned after God's. God initiated creation. At the end of the creation week, the creation is flawless, but not finished. Now, man is to carry the project of creation forward, in the Spirit, transforming creation into something new and better and more glorious. Bezalel made a new world in the Spirit, as he transformed wood and jewels and stones, and the tabernacle became a new heaven and earth. In the same way, all our work is to be "new creation" work, performed in the power of the Spirit. We are to make new worlds as the Spirit guides us.

On an eschatology of work, see Volf and Cosden – these works are excellent.

Work cannot be a curse in itself. After all, God is the original worker. Jesus is a worker as well. John's gospel speaks of Jesus doing work 27 times. He says his food is to do the work the Father assigned him. At the cross he says his work is finished – just before the Sabbath (or the new Sabbath of resurrection Sunday).

Is self-esteem the key to productive work? Suzanne Hadley answers (http://www.boundlessline.org/2007/04/praised_generat.html):

The Daily Transcript reports that as the most praised generation heads into the workforce, bosses are scrambling to compliment twentysomethings enough to keep them motivated.

Employers are dishing out kudos to workers for little more than showing up. Corporations including Lands' End and Bank of America (NYSE: BAC) are hiring consultants to teach managers how to compliment

employees using e-mail, prize packages and public displays of appreciation. The 1,000-employee Scooter Store Inc., a power-wheelchair and scooter firm in New Braunfels, Texas, has a staff "celebrations assistant" whose job it is to throw confetti -- 25 pounds a week -- at employees. She also passes out 100 to 500 celebratory helium balloons a week. The Container Store Inc. estimates that one of its 4,000 employees receives praise every 20 seconds, through such efforts as its "Celebration Voice Mailboxes."

While these measures seem ridiculous, the article reports that today's young adults feel insecure if they're not praised. This insecurity can greatly reduce their success in the workplace. On the downside, undeserved kudos have created "narcissistic praise-junkies" who are hooked on inflated language.

People's positive traits can be exaggerated until the words feel meaningless. "There's a runaway inflation of everyday speech," warns Linda Sapadin, a psychologist in Valley Stream, N.Y. These days, she says, it's an insult unless you describe a pretty girl as "drop-dead gorgeous" or a smart person as "a genius." "And no one wants to be told they live in a nice house," says Dr. Sapadin. "'Nice' was once sufficient. That was a good word. Now it's a put-down."

The recent *Boundless* article "[Ordinary People](#)" touches on this same idea when it discusses our disenchantment with being ordinary.

Turning "ordinary" into an epithet requires forgetting (or denying) that "ordinary" is the stuff that real life is made of. "Ordinary" comes from the Latin *ordinarius* meaning "customary, regular, usual, orderly." How we handle the ordinary -- and not how many people know who we are -- is the standard against which we should measure our lives. It, and not some fleeting (or even not-so-fleeting) attention, is what gives our lives significance. (For the Christian, it's what Jesus meant when He said, "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.")

And that is the heart of the matter. Addressing the issue of praise addiction at its core would be more effective (and less expensive) than providing vats of confetti.

There is a wealth of great material in Volf, Veith, Hardy, Cosden, and others that I have not even touched on here, in the sermon or in the notes. I hope this is a topic we can return to sometime soon.

Think about where your work fits into God's plan in light of this Abraham Kuyper quotation:

The object of the work of redemption is not limited to the salvation of individual sinners, but extends itself to the redemption of the world, and to the organic reunion of all things in heaven and on earth under Christ as their original head.

The final outcome of the future, foreshadowed in the Holy Scriptures, is not the merely spiritual existence of saved souls, but the restoration of the entire cosmos, when God will be all in all under the renewed heaven on the renewed earth.

Tom Wright on how we can get the world's attention and change the culture:

When the church is seen to move straight from worship of the God we see in Jesus to making a difference and effecting much-needed change in the real world; when it becomes clear that the people who feast at Jesus' table are the ones in the forefront of work to eliminate hunger and famine; when people realize that those who pray for the Spirit to work in and through them are the people who seem to have extra resources of love and patience in caring for those whose lives are damaged, bruised, and shamed; then it is not only natural to speak of Jesus himself and to encourage others to worship him for themselves and find out what belonging to his family is all about but it is also natural for people, however irreligious they may think of themselves as being, to recognize that something is going on that they want to be part of. In terms that the author of Acts might have used, when the church is living out the kingdom of God, the word of God will spread powerfully and do its own work.