2024 IFWC COLLOQUIUM

Studies in Faith, Work, and Culture

“As the triune God exercises sovereignty over all spheres of life, he calls his people to serve him in all spheres of labor. Understanding how to serve God well in our work requires a vision that connects our vocation with God’s sovereign design. Good work—work that glorifies God and serves the common good—acknowledges our dependence on God’s provision, follows the wisdom of his guidance, and stewards his common grace.” Schitter, p.5

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Introduction

DAMEIN SCHITTER

One of the most significant developments in evangelical Christianity over the past several decades is the "faith and work" (FAW) movement. This movement seeks to help Christians cultivate an integrated approach to their faith and work. Convinced that a Christian's work should be neither a mere instrument for personal gain nor an idol that defines their identity, the FAW movement emphasizes the God-given nature of work, calling for it to be ordered toward God's glory and human flourishing.

Initially, the FAW movement was predominantly lay-led, with churches and Christian institutions slow to join the conversation. In its early phase, the movement focused on persuading Christians that integrating faith and work matters. Many participants came to the profound realization: "My work matters to God." Now, the movement is maturing, shifting to address the more complex question: "How does my particular work reflect God's purpose?" This deepening inquiry represents the next step in the development of the FAW conversation.

As the triune God exercises sovereignty over all spheres of life, he calls his people to serve him in all spheres of labor. Understanding how to serve God well in our work requires a vision that connects our vocation with God's sovereign design. Good work—work that glorifies God and serves the common good—acknowledges our dependence on God's provision, follows the wisdom of his guidance, and stewards his common grace.

The Institute for Faith, Work, and Culture (IFWC) at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando seeks to equip pastors and leaders with a God-centered vision of work. It provides formal and nonformal training in biblical, theological, and applied foundations essential to cultivating a Reformed vision of faith, work, and culture. IFWC aims to bring the resources of Reformed theology to the faith and work conversation, offering students and leaders opportunities to learn from FAW experts and apply these principles to diverse communities.

A key initiative in IFWC's vision is a series of colloquia designed to foster research and discussion that culminate in specialized issues of *Reformed Faith & Practice*. These issues will feature high-quality scholarship, furthering the theological depth of the faith and work conversation. Theology is the focus of the first colloquium. We invited scholars to reflect on themes of God, creation, sin, redemption, and eschatology. By inviting leaders and stakeholders in the FAW movement to join each colloquium, IFWC aims to continue expanding the horizons of the movement, promoting a holistic, God-glorifying approach to work in the modern world.

The FAW movement has often focused especially on certain topics and ignored or underexplored others. We hope these studies not only add new rigor to familiar doctrines but also bring oft-ignored doctrines into play. The movement will only be the stronger for its further consideration of the whole counsel of God.

The Doctrine of God: Divine Fullness and Work

FRED SANDERS

I. *Work and the Doctrine of God*

There are some obvious pitfalls to avoid in relating the doctrine of God to the world of human labor. Certain clichés beckon: a simple schema that correlates an uncreated worker with created workers; collaborative cooperation in a shared task that spans the divine-human distinction; a great chain of working that traverses the great chain of being, and so on. Schemas like this are, if not quite mythological, at least not necessarily or distinctively Christian. It is important not to simply adopt one of them as the fundamental presupposition and then camouflage it with biblical and evangelical terminology (vocation, image of God, blessing, etc.). We know better than to repose in a too-direct or too-smooth linkage between God and human labor, we still need some way to discern and confess a meaningful connection between the two. How worthless would all work be if it were isolated from God, if the doctrine of God did not somehow "establish the work of our hands?" (Psalm 90:17)

Any connection between God and world—and this includes our theme of God's work and human work—must be established from God's side, and by God's own free choice rather than by necessity. Theology comes to the interpretation of the human world not in search of necessary structures generated from the being of God, but rather in search of patterns marked by God's operative wisdom, resulting from God's free action working in ways that manifest not necessity but fittingness. In short, we do not move straight down from God's own being to the world as such, but from God through the medium of the *oikonomia*, the economy of God's ways with the world.

But to say God and human labor are linked by "the economy" is fatally equivocal: It might just be a bad pun.

II. Ephesians and the Language of Economy and Work

Or perhaps it is not so much a bad pun as a very elaborate one. In English, "economy" used to be a word used for the public virtue of "prudent conduct, or discreet and frugal management, whether of a man's own estate or that of another."[1] Since that 1768 definition, the word has expanded into its larger modern sense, indicating the whole field studied by that relentlessly mathematical "dismal science" of goods and resources, supply and demand, and the wealth of nations. But long before it was a broad financial term, it was already a theological word. And that word entered Christian theological usage largely from its significant use in Ephesians 1:10, which describes God's great beneficence in human salvation as "a plan for the fullness of time" (ESV) or "a "dispensation for the fullness of the times" (KJV) [*oikonomian tou pleromatos ton kairon*]. God's wise and orderly arrangement of his great blessing over the course of an unfolding history is an *oikonomia*, an economy—though no responsible translation would risk bringing the cognate "economy" directly into our English Bibles. The expansive explanatory phrase "economy of salvation" has helpfully worked its way down from patristic times into the modern seminary lexicon, and serves pretty well. The extra phrase "of salvation" helpfully reminds us that the Bible has in view not just any sort of wise arrangement, the one wise arrangement by which God saves.

1 From the original *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, under the old spelling "oeconomy" (Edinburgh, Scotland, 1768).

Still, once the modern meaning of economics has been invoked, a quick look around Ephesians reveals an utter riot of related concepts and images. These are worth briefly surveying, not on general purposes but precisely because of how Ephesians models the way that the doctrine of God impresses itself on human affairs.

"Blessed with a blessing" is the early keynote, and even if we are instantly assured that the blessings in view are not physical but spiritual (1:3), the language of overflowing wealth takes hold here. We have "redemption…according to the riches [ploutos] of his grace" (1:7) which he "lavished upon us" (1:8) [*eperisseusen*] in this economy (1:10) [*oikonomian*]. As a result, the Spirit "is the guarantee of our inheritance" until we take "possession" of it (1:14) [*arrabōn*, *klēronomias*, *peripoiēseōs*]. Paul prays that his readers would be spiritually enlightened to know "the riches of his glorious inheritance" (1:18) [*ploutos*, *klēronomias*]. God is praised as "rich" [*plousios*] in mercy (2:4); he is the one who will display the "immeasurable riches" [hyperballon ploutos] of his grace (2:7) toward us. This grace is, in typically Pauline fashion, opposed to "works" [*erga*] (2:9), though in a way characteristic of Ephesians we are immediately told that "good works" [*ergois agathois*] are the active goal for which we were created as God's workmanship (2:10) [*ktisthentes*, *poiēma*]. God's unifying work evokes language of civic participation and even city construction: there is shared citizenship (2:19; 3:6) and the raising of a building (2:20). Paul describes his own part in this work as that of having a stewardship (3:2) [*oikonomion*] and of preaching "the unsearchable riches" (3:8) [*anexichniaston ploutos*] of Christ.[2] The leading idea of Ephesians (introduced in 1:20) is the exaltation of Christ, and in the fourth chapter this exaltation is expressed precisely as the ascended and conquering Lord freely distributing gifts [*domata*].

The ethical or paraenetic section of Ephesians [3] features what scholars call a household code, and since "household code" is practically a synonym for *okonomia* (how things are dispensed within a household), it is no surprise that fiscal, financial, and fiduciary concerns emerge. As Paul describes the ethical transformation of believers, he exhorts the thief to stop stealing, but rather to "labor [kopiatō], doing honest work [*ergazomenos*…to *agathon*] with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need [*metadidonai…chreian*]" (4:28). Destructive vice is replaced with "honorable industry, with a view to generosity," as one commentator says.[4] Finally, Paul evokes the entire sphere of labor in exhorting "bondservants" [*douloi*] to obey their masters [*kyriois*] with a certain quality of work: "not by way of eye-service [*ophthalmodoulian*], as people-pleasers [*anthrōpareskoi*]," but as to the Lord, both "from the heart" and "with a good will [*met' eunoias*]" (6:5-7).[5]

Ephesians thus employs the images and terminology of economics and work in a particularly sprawling or

2 There is also in Ephesians an underlying interest in measurement and proportion. It is subtle but worth noting. The word *metron* occurs three times in the discussion of the ascended Christ's distribution of gifts (4:7, 13, 16), as if to explore the idea that his giving, along with its effectiveness in stimulating growth to maturity, is incommensurable with anything but a standard set by himself. A similar gesture at what we might call a kind of measureless measure is the ecstatic prayer of 3:14-21, in which Paul asks that believers may come to know "the breadth and length and height and depth" [platos kai mēkos kai hyposis kai bathos] of something ineffable, and to be "filled with all the fullness" [plērōthēte eis pan to plērōma] of God. In this charged environment, even the characteristic use of "according to" and "just as" prepositions in Ephesians is probably significant for extending the idea of a divine measure measured only by itself.

3 Paul reminds the Ephesians that they have been called with a calling (4:1) [klēseōs, eklēthēte], but since his point is about their one unified call as a whole community, it would be inappropriate to press this language for a theology of "vocation" in the traditional sense of individual or distinct tasks.

4 John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians* (Glasgow: Richard Griffin, 1853), 351.

5 The context domain is Greco-Roman slavery, so "slaves" might be an appropriate rendering. But there is an underlying principle in this section appl cable also to free, modern people employed within a market system. In some conservative African American churches, passages like this (including the Colossians parallel) are often preached with a main focus on the ethics of employment. Employees working for hire should work "as unto the Lord."

dizzying way, which reaches from the heights of divine glory and fullness down to the details of physical labor. The key to all of this is a preeminent fullness, or a perfect blessedness expressed as richness, flowing over generously as an endless resource for the needy, a rescue for the lost, and an equipping of workers for service.

Ephesians has drawn its share of commentators alert to this tendency. Perhaps the most focused of these "economic" commentators on Ephesians was the Puritan Bartholomew Ashwood (1622-1680). His 1681 treatise on Ephesians 3:8 (the passage on "the unsearchable riches of Christ," KJV) signals its intent in its title, *The Best Treasure*. It goes on to resolve all ambiguity in its elaborate, seventeenth-century-style subtitle: "Or, the way to be truly rich, being a discourse on Ephesians 3.8, wherein is opened and commended to saints and sinners the personal and purchased riches of Christ, as the best treasure, to be pursued and ensured by all that would be happy here and hereafter."[6] Ashwood had already published a book on the same general subject, using the same economic plays on similar biblical language. That 1679 book had been entitled *The Heavenly Trade*.[7] But this second book, focused on Ephesians, earned a foreword from the celebrated John Owen. Owen announced the main idea: "The wisdom of God and Grace of God in Christ Jesus, are frequently in the Scripture expressed by the name of Riches and Treasures. These it is the duty of believers in all ages, diligently to search after, to enquire into and possess for themselves."[8] Ashwood admits that "to cast up the total value of these Treasures, is beyond the arithmetic of saints themselves,"[9] but this admission does not stop him from trying: *Best Treasure* runs to thirty chapters in 437 pages. Its structure sprawls somewhat, but the overall trajectory is clear. Ashwood begins with a very high doctrine of God, showing how that perfect divine fullness is communicated from the Father to the Son in the eternity of the divine being. Next, he moves to the incarnation, tracing how the riches of divinity are communicated to humanity in the person of Christ, not by some sort of direct union with human nature, but by the incarnational hypostatic union in Jesus himself. Rehearsals of Christ's deity "abundantly prove the Lord Jesus to be perfect God: and so of infinite Perfection and Blessedness, to enrich all that come unto him; which will evidently appear, if we do but a little consider those Perfections of the Divine Nature, as opened in the Scriptures, all which are in Jesus Christ." [10]

It is worth noting that Ashwood makes use of not just a high Christology, but first of all a high Theology, or a classical doctrine of God, into which he then elevates Christ. Cascading down from Father to Son to mediator to the redeemed, *The Best Treasure* emphasizes the sharing out of the riches, and guides readers to grasp and value what has been given to them. Ashwood lays special emphasis on the cross of Christ, displaying it as the event in which "Christ is become a Purchaser in the behalf of Believers, how he hath made this purchase, and what he hath purchased."[11] The fruit of this purchase is "adoption-grace," the excellency of which Ashwood opens "in several particulars."[12] It must be said that Ashwood never quite descends to the

6 Bartholomew Ashwood, *The Best Treasure* (London: Printed for William Marshall, 1681). I have normalized the archaic spelling, capitalization, and punctuation to avoid distraction.

7 Bartholomew Ashwood, *The Heavenly Trade, or the Best Merchandizing: The Only Way to Live Well in Impoverishing Times* (London: Samuel Lee, 1679).

8 John Owen, "To the Reader" in Ashwood, *Best Treasure*, first (un-numbered) page.

9 Ashwood, *Best Treasure*, 7.

10 Ashwood, *Best Treasure*, 13.

11 Ashwood, *Best Treasure*, 225.

12 Ashwood, *Best Treasure*, 258.

home-economic realities to which Ephesians itself takes us, nor to actual money and wealth in the world of daily work, except to warn readers of "the Folly of such as pursue earthly things, with neglect of Christ," and some advice about "the nature of those things; the terms on which they are to be enjoyed, the casualty that attends them, the guilt such contract."[13] We might say Ashwood has a good instinct for the surpassing value of the spiritual realities signified by the economic language of Ephesians, but not as good a grasp, or as focused an interest, in the positive difference those spiritual realities might make in the midst of actual financial wealth and poverty. Ashwood, and similar homiletical commentators, remain excellent witnesses to the overall vector of the Ephesians way of talking about riches: beginning at the top and then dropping down from an infinite height, moving out from the fullness (*pleroma*, Eph 1:23; 3:19) so that it funds the economy without emptying out into it.

III. Divine Fullness

Pleroma is the Greek word for fullness, a concept so seductive that Gnostics latched onto it and made it all but unusable, by crowding it with fanciful content. Irenaeus remains a reliable guide to how much nonsense Gnostic teachers could stuff into the skin of that great word from Ephesians.[14] But alert theological readers can retrieve the doctrine of divine fullness simply by returning to the source, taking their bearings from Ephesians itself, and attending to the ways in which the Bible gives content to the confession that God has fullness, or riches. One spirited attempt at such a retrieval has been made in recent years by Michael Allen. Allen describes it this way:

> *Divine fullness is first and foremost a reality within the divine life. God is rich and full with life, light, and all bounty. He possesses these realities in and of himself as the triune God, such that his fullness is that of the eternal triune relations and of the distinctly Trinitarian unity. His riches are owned by he [sic] who is without beginning or end and thus who is characterized by aseity. Yet his bounteous bliss goes beyond mere self-existence or self-sufficiency to also require that we attest his excess, wealth, and fullness. All that he has, he is, and he has all and more.*[15]

In Allen's elaboration of the theme, we can see how it includes more traditionally well-worn doctrines like divine aseity and self-existence. Fullness is the more comprehensive category, and is more positive. As such, the category of fullness has the advantage (which aseity does not) of suggesting the way God freely moves out from his own perfection to become the saving and perfecting power of what he creates. Allen goes on to describe how this divine fullness is not just in God, but also lives from God, by God, and has its effects out before (that is, in the presence of) God.

Jeremy Begbie has undertaken a similar retrieval in his most recent foray into theology through the arts. In *Abundantly More: The Theological Promise of the Arts in a Reductionist World*[16], Begbie casts about for language to describe how God transcends the limitations we habitually impose on him, and settles on the category of "uncontainability." The notion is theologically helpful for Begbie in exactly the way fullness is helpful for Allen: it is unconventional terminology, sufficiently broad to cover a number of more familiar terms. Begbie elaborates uncontainability as

13 Ashwood, *Best Treasure*, 370ff.

14 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*.

15 Michael Allen, "Divine Fullness," Chapter 4 in *The Knowledge of God: Essays on God, Christ, and Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 51-62; at 53.

16 Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023.

a term that includes within itself divine simplicity, ineffability and sovereignty, and suggests that it could cover even more territory (perhaps abundantly more). Also parallel to Allen's use of fullness, Begbie leverages uncontainability to account for God's free and uncompelled movement to create and redeem; God's "uncontainable pressure" that is vitally generative of "ex-pressure" toward others. In a running polemic against reductionism, Begbie appeals to this pressure as a "mode of power... that has the capacity to set in motion a form of life that spirals outward, not downward, as we discover 'abundantly more [*hyperekperisou*] than all we can ask or imagine' (Eph 3:20)."[17]

IV. Between Contemplation and Action

There is a classic polarity in the theology of the Christian life between action and contemplation.[18] Of these two ends, which is the highest, how are they related, and which one serves the interests of the other? While the conversation is rich and many-sided, and both sides have strong advocates, there is considerable wisdom in seeking an actual way of life in the world that combines the two. No less a monastic figurehead than Bernard of Clairvaux indicated the way toward this goal when one of his students was elevated to the office of Bishop of Rome (Eugene III). Bernard wrote a work called *On Consideration* to Eugene, explaining how to manage such great obligations without losing his soul. *On Consideration* is divided into five books; the early books feature meditations on virtue, practical advice on schedule management and delegation, an apology for the results of the second crusade, and plenty of pointed directions for how to reform the church's own government. But the final book turns the reader's attention to the things above, and especially to the triune God. It's a deeply intelligent and beautifully written section. Bernard has been called "the last of the fathers," and while that's a dubious enough title for a theologian as late as the twelfth century, this section does serve as something of a capstone of early Christian doctrine, especially of the doctrine of God. The jump between the early books and this final book seems to be by design. Bernard refuses to let go of contemplation as the goal, but he freely admits that Popes are too busy and under too many obligations to contemplate deeply and uninterruptedly. So he offers consideration as a kind of mixed form, combining action and contemplation.[19]

A modern Trappist monk who carried out this Bernardine vision of active work and expounded it with special clarity is abbot Jean-Baptiste Chautard (1858-1935). His book *The Soul of the Apostolate*[20] is ostentatiously Roman Catholic, but useful for Protestants also because it articulates principles of broad application for the theology of work, and makes a special connection to the common doctrine of God and of contemplation. "Apostolate" is already a bit of jargon drawn from the cultural world of French Catholics. It means an organization for spreading the gospel and Christian influence in the world, especially an organization by laypeople. Chautard would probably call the work of priests and religious their actual "ministry," reserving that word for the ordained in a way that evangelicals would not. But then he makes use of the broader term "apostolate" which refers to the extended work of all believers intentionally carrying out the work of propagating Christian truth and influence in the world. We are all sent, apostled, into the world to work for Christ. The most important document on the subject is probably Vatican II's *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. Chautard, recall, is writing decades before that 1965 decree, but popes as early as Pius X have commended his book, and popes as recent as Benedict XVI).

The idea of the apostolate is that Jesus sent out the original apostles, and their work is continued through the ages: "In the front rank of this apostolate stands the clergy, with its hierarchy forming the main body of the army of Christ," says Chautard. Around them are "the volunteers," especially the contemplative and preaching orders of monastics, and then a variety of teaching institutes, missionary societies, and so on ("sodalities and confraternities"). "Then, too, at every stage of her history, the Church has received valuable help from the whole body of the faithful."

The vision here is of a great sending-out that starts with Jesus and involves every believer down through the ages. It involves plenty of activity, multiple projects, plans, organizations, and active work in all parts of the world: that's the apostolate.

But Chautard's book is not about the apostolate; it's about the *soul* of the apostolate. It's about the inner life of this outer work. The point is that Christians who are busy in the outer world need a rich, inner spiritual life to sustain them. Chautard is arguing for a particular kind of spiritual formation that prizes the inner life precisely as the foundation of an active outer life. In the ancient contest between the contemplative life and the active life, he takes the side of the contemplatives, or those pursuing the interior life. But he always has in mind the interior life of busy people with a great extension of exterior life and work:

> *May these humble pages go out to the soldiers of Christ, who, consumed as they are with zeal and ardor for their noble mission, might be exposed, because of the very activity they display, to the danger of not being, above all, men of interior life! …The thoughts developed in this book have helped us ourselves, to fight against an excessive exteriorization through good works... May they show that we must never leave the God of works, for the works of God.*

Here Chautard warms to his subject. Busy workers for Jesus need to remember that in their work they hope to transmit supernatural life, and this cannot be done by merely natural means. The work of the apostolate is not mechanical, but spiritual, and behaving as if this weren't true is tantamount to denying its truth:

For a man, in his practical conduct, to go about his active works as if Jesus were not his one and only life-principle is what Cardinal Mermillod has called the "Heresy of Good Works." …Is this not, in practice, a denial of a great part of the Tract on Grace?

The "heresy of Good Works" is the idea of "a feverish activity taking the place of God; grace ignored; human pride trying to thrust Jesus from His throne; supernatural life, the power of prayer, the economy of our redemption relegated, at least in practice, to the realm of pure theory." This is not just an imaginary possibility, but something busy Christians fall into regularly "in this age of naturalism, when men judge, above all, by appearances, and act as though success were primarily a matter of skillful organization." The very principle of life has vanished from this hyperactive busy-ness. To hear such people talk and scheme and plan, "one might imagine that God Almighty… cannot get along without their co-operation." Chautard calls such workers "activistic heretics" and says, "we can almost hear them say, 'God finds me pretty useful.'"

The solution offered in *Soul of the Apostolate* is cultivation of the interior life. Most of the book is an account of how busy people can take proper care of their spiritual lives by devoting their mental lives to Jesus, practicing the

17 Begbie, *Abundantly More*, 181.

18 For a recent attempt to broaden the theme to the whole field of education and culture, see Jennifer Summit and Blakey Vermeule, *Action versus Contemplation: Why an Ancient Debate Still Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

19 The full arrangement is a bit more complicated. Bernard offers one of his beloved ladder schemas, dividing the affairs of life into things beneath your station, things at your own level, and things above. See *Five Books on Consideration: Advice to a Pope* (Athens, Ohio: Cistercian Publications by the Liturgical Press, 1976). This is volume 13 in the Works of Bernard of Clairvaux series, and the translators are John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan.

20 Original title *Apostolat des catéchisme et vie intérieure devenu L'âme de tout apostolat.*

presence of God, guarding their hearts, shepherding their thoughts, relying on the leadership of the church, and participating in its liturgical life. Translating this kind of wisdom into an evangelical Protestant idiom requires some skill. Evangelicals would probably reach for conventional language like devotions and quiet time, and would be very comfortable with the strongly emotional and interpersonal language of fellowship with Jesus ("All that Jesus wants is our heart," says Chautard). The fundamental soundness of Chautard's counsel is evident, and anybody who's been around very active Christians who have lost touch with their deep reasons for serving Christ will instantly recognize the type, and be grateful for the clear account of the only cure.

The Soul of the Apostolate excels in describing how powerful and attractive the deeply grounded life will be as it expresses itself in the outer world. But it connects more profoundly with our theme of divine fullness because it rests on a trinitarian foundation, and takes its point of departure from certain presuppositions about God's own God-centered spiritual life.

The apostolate referred to in the title is an extended sense of "sentness" that can characterize the lives of all committed Christians, as they pick up the forward momentum of the apostles, who in turn carry on the work of Jesus ("so send I you," John 20:21), who was himself the Sent One ("*As the Father sent me*, so send I you"). Chautard makes the point that the church "carries on, down through the ages, the apostolic work of her Divine Model."[21] The book's theology is, in other words, part of an overall "theology of sending" that begins in the Trinity and ends in the Christian's active life; it bridges from the doctrine of God through Christology to discipleship. Chautard repeatedly goes back behind the sending, to draw attention to the source. The Son, he says, was sent forth from the "sovereign liberality" which is "inseparable from the divine Nature;" the divine nature has sovereign liberality because "God is infinite goodness. Goodness seeks nothing except to give itself and to communicate the riches which it enjoys."[22] What Chautard has to say about these riches is that they are unspeakably great, and that they are in fact the Trinitarian life itself:

> *There is no metaphor capable of giving any idea of the infinite intensity of the activity going on in the bosom of Almighty God. Such is the inner life of the Father, that it engenders a Divine Person. From the interior life of the Father and Son proceeds the Holy Ghost.*[23]

You see what Chautard is indicating here: in a book about how your busy outer life needs a strong inner life (your apostolate needs a soul), he is saying that God's outer works, including the Father's sending of the Son, are anchored in an unimaginably rich interior life. Prior in every way to God's outer works, God has an "infinite intensity of …activity going on" within the divine life; the internal actions of the Trinity transcend the external actions. Most of the book is not about the richness of this inner life of God, but nothing in the book works without it. So at several points, it becomes thematic:

> *In God is life, all life. He is life itself. Yet it is not by exterior works, by the creation, for instance, that the infinite Being manifests this life in its most intense form, but rather by what theology calls operationes ad intra, by that ineffable activity of which the term is the perpetual generation of the Son and the unceasing procession of the Holy Spirit. Here, pre-eminently, is His eternal, His essential work.*[24]

Once Chautard gets to the superiority of the contemplative life, or even of the contemplative side of a life that is mostly active, he gladly spends several pages expounding it. He makes use of Bonaventure's list ("Bonaventure accumulates comparatives") of the ways the inner life excels the outer life: It is "more sublime, more secure, richer, pleasanter, and more stable."[25] His powerful exposition gains more force from its increasingly explicit trinitarian background. He asks us to consider the ways in which the interior life of God excels all creation: it excels in sublimity, security, wealth, pleasure, and stability. In all these, ways, how good it must be to be God! But the apostolate is all about God moving toward us from within that fullness, on the trinitarian mission of intervening in our self-inflicted misery.

Here Chautard returns to the key words, soul and apostolate, from his title: "By contemplation the soul is fed; by the apostolate, it gives itself away. *Sicut majus est illuminare quam lucere solum, ita majus est contemplata aliis tradere quam solum contemplare.* ("For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate.")[26]

And then Chautard, on purpose, bumps into the paradox that the Son is sent to us without leaving the Father, and the Father sends out the Son without losing him:

> *To man, God does more than grant exterior gifts: He sends him also His Word. But here again, in this act of supreme generosity which is nothing else but the gift of Himself, God abandons and can abandon none of the integrity of His nature. In giving us His Son, He keeps Him, nevertheless, even in Himself. 'Take, as an example, the All-highest Father of all, sending us His Word, and at the same time keeping Him for Himself.'*[27]

This was what Chautard was after all along: a self-giving that does not diminish the self, but flows out into active life without emptying itself of life. If you are looking for the ultimate instance of a rich interior life that makes a difference in the world, you can look to God. It's a remarkable claim, and though Chautard only occasionally makes it explicit in the book, he does actually begin with it, in a prologue which is a prayer to God in exactly this respect:

> *O God, infinitely good and great, wonderful indeed are the truths that faith lays open to us, concerning the life which Thou leadest within Thyself: and these truths dazzle us.*
>
> *Father all holy, Thou dost contemplate Thyself forever in the Word, Thy perfect image –Thy Word exults in rapt joy at Thy beauty– and, Father and Son, from your joint ecstasy, leaps forth the strong flame of love, the Holy Spirit.*
>
> *You alone, O adorable Trinity, are the interior life, perfect, superabundant, and infinite.*
>
> *Goodness unlimited, You desire to spread this, Your own inner life, everywhere, outside Yourself. You speak: and Your works spring forth out of nothingness, to declare Your perfections and to sing*

21 Chautard, *Soul*, 26.

22 Chautard, *Soul*, 26.

23 Chautard, *Soul*, 45.

24 Chautard, *Soul*, 60.

25 Vita sublimior, securior, opulentior, suavior, stabilior. Chautard, Soul, 62.

26 Chautard, *Soul*, 78; citing Aquinas, ST 2a 2a4, q. 188, a. 6, respondeo).

27 Chautard, *Soul*, 65; citing Bernard's On Consideration II:3.

Your glory.

Your Word offers Himself for the fulfillment of this work… And yet, O Word, Thou has not left the bosom of Thy Father. It is there that Thy essential life subsists, and it is from this source that the marvels of Thy apostolate are to flow.[28]

Here is the secret of your own interior life: Confessing to God, "you alone, O adorable Trinity, are the interior life."

V. Conclusion

Bernard of Clairvaux once advised that "the man who is wise…will see his life as more like a reservoir than a canal," recognizing his need to be filled from above before he can give to others around and below. "Learn to await this fullness before you pour out your gifts. Do not try to be more generous than God."[29] This is the secret of work. The relation between God and our work is that God's utter fullness and inner plenitude is the fountain of our work. The richness of the divine life is what grounds God's active, outgoing work in the world, as well as the work done in the world by Christians.

This meditation on God and work began with the fullness-theology of Ephesians and some commentary on it by the Puritan Bartholomew Ashwood. As we considered the dynamic of contemplation and action, we understandably drew lessons from certain monastic theologians, Bernard and Chautard. But we can close with a more obviously Protestant author, and one well situated in the modern faith-and-work movement. Tim Keller frequently outlined the Gospel as a drama in multiple acts. In some contexts he would allude to a four-act drama;[30] in other contexts as three.[31] But his point was always to encourage Christians to think bigger: to protest against shrinking the gospel down to just the two acts of sin and forgiveness, and to establish a bigger picture reaching back to the goodness of creation and forward to the purpose of creatures. Where does God fit in a Keller-style schema of the gospel as a multi-act drama? God might be introduced as the ultimate answer to the question "where did we come from?" and be the solid basis of a purposeful creation.[32] In this approach, Keller could teach about the nature of God as part of the first act, creation. Or God might be envisioned as the great goal toward which all things move as in a purposeful, eschatological dance. In this approach, Keller could teach about the nature of God as the content of the final act of the drama. These are all fine ways of orienting the discussion of work toward the reality of God. But we might also consider making the point about divine fullness, riches, and God's own inner life by saying that it simply bursts through the plot outline and explodes the dramatic metaphor. When we turn our thoughts to the God who creates and conducts the acts of the drama, we turn our thoughts to the reality that utterly transcends the story itself, however many acts it has. We lift our minds and hearts to the one who is God "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 90:1); only in this upward glance do we glimpse the reality that can "establish the works of our hands" (Psalm 90:17).

28 Chautard, *Soul*, 23-4.

29 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, volume 1 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1979) , Sermon 18, I:2, 134; followed by II:4, 136.

30 Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, chapter 14, "The Dance of God." The four acts he briefly alludes to here are creation, fall, redemption, and reconciliation.

31 Tim Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*, chapter 9, "A New Story for Work." The world is good, the world is fallen, the world will be redeemed.

32 Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your Church* (Zondervan, 2012), 31ff.

"Here is *the secret* of your own interior life: Confessing to God, 'you alone, O adorable Trinity, are the interior life.'"

Faith and Work… For Others

VINCENT BACOTE

"Everyone is beginning to recognize the faith and work connection." This is what I began to think around 2007. But what I have learned in the last decade or so about the faith and work conversation is that an increased mention of the topic does not mean widespread attention to and embrace of the efforts of those who have written books, curated conferences, created podcasts, etc. As I was once told by Bob Doll in phone conversation, it is "the tip of the iceberg." Recently I learned something even more sobering: the embrace of some aspects of the faith and work movement may truly reveal more attention to the connection of vocation and work, but not always with the best effects. This was conveyed in a prominent observation in a recent article:

> *"Those who are religious or spiritual often want to connect their faith to their work through a sense of calling. But there can be unexpected downsides for those who do so. People who say they feel "called" report better work and life satisfaction, but they may also be less likely to address workplace problems or unfair treatment when it arises."*[1]

Here are some of the important statements from this recent study:

> *"For example, people who feel that God intended them to be in their current workplace or industry might be more disposed to stay in their current role regardless of unfair treatment or working conditions that take advantage of them, such as being underpaid or overworked. Specifically, in previous work we found that people who do feel called to their work report higher job satisfaction – even when they are experiencing discrimination – than people who do not feel called to their work."*

> *"Experiencing work as a calling can be a double-edged sword. Because those who feel called to their work have a high level of commitment to their jobs, they tend to be more likely to tolerate, endure or ignore work situations that are unreasonable, inequitable or even discriminatory."*

> *"Our research also shows that when workers see their job as a spiritual calling, it can blind them to the difficulties others experience at work. They may be less able to empathize with those who feel stuck in their job because of money concerns, are unhappy or unfulfilled in their work, or are struggling to find a job."*

They conclude:

> *"Based on these findings, we suggest that leaders in organizations can help cultivate a sense of calling in workers by helping them identify their particular gifts and interests and facilitate their development along these pathways. At the same time, they can and should encourage feedback that can lead to a healthier workplace for everyone."*[2]

1 Elaine Howard Ecklund, Brenton Kalinowski and Denise Daniels, "thinking about work as a calling can be meaningful, but there can be unexpected downsides as well," *The Conversaion* January 24, 2024. https://theconversation.com/thinking-about-work-as-a-calling-can-be-meaningful-but-there-can-be-unexpected-downsides-as-well-216970

2 Ibid.

Subsequent conversation with Denise Daniels (one co-author of the study) further revealed that the strong tendency was that those with a sense of calling connected to work mainly thought of it in terms of their personal lives. In addition, she also revealed that some who had initially said there was no sense of call to their work began to have a sense of vocation when asked about the potential impact of their work and not merely about matters of personal satisfaction.[3]

The findings of this study suggest there has been some success with making a connection between faith and work. There can be a sense of calling connected to work and greater confidence and commitment to work. Amid this there are the perhaps unexpected observations about tolerance of difficult workplaces and sometimes blindness to difficulties. There is the further observation that those with a sense of calling may lack of empathy for or awareness of those who have difficulties (including forms of discrimination) or significant dissonance with their work. These unexpected (at least for me) findings raise important questions about how Christians are learning to make the connection between faith and work. When considering the theological dimensions, these are some important questions:

1. Which Christian beliefs have helped people make the connection between faith and work?
2. How do Christian beliefs blend with other existing beliefs about work?
3. What theological deficiencies may have led to views of faith and work that are mainly a matter of individual/personal affirmation of one's work?
4. What theological remedies are necessary for faith and work to not only validate the goodness of one's work but also encourage realistic assessment of one's workplace as well as awareness of problems (and potential solutions) for self and others at places of work?

3 Personal conversation with Dr. Denise Daniels, March 11, 2024.

An initial response to this article could be to wonder "how did the wires get crossed?" but it is more accurate to ask, "what needs to happen to make better connections between faith and work?" Beyond this lies the further question: What can be a way of describing a theological path that leads to not merely connecting faith and work but also to a lived expression of this connection that facilitates wise discernment of working conditions and the pursuit of good for others in the workplace? Here, I will consider how these questions can be answered by considering the doctrine of creation as the primary theological lens.

From the Start

Perhaps the first thing to note regarding creation is that it is important to expand the emphasis on the doctrine beyond the understandable emphasis on questions of origins. While we should not set aside such questions, it is important to emphasize that the doctrine of creation is not primarily a reaction to a post-Darwinian world. The perpetual work of theology entails engagement with the questions that arise across the trajectory of history, yet in some circles it can seem as if the doctrine of creation has been captured and contained within a domain that mainly operates as a conversation about the "how" and "when" or creation. This is important but not the only conversation that ought to occur around the doctrine of creation. When we are considering matters of faith and work, the questions of the beginning of existence lead us to answers about "where" and "what" we are (we are on this planet and we are creatures made by God), but the typical discourse does not move on to consider how we are to think about the "so what" (what do we do as creatures here on this planet and why does that matter?). To begin answering these questions of faith and work, we need to begin by considering what God tells in Genesis 1:26, 28. This will take us into what is familiar: the creation or cultural mandate.

In Genesis 1:26 and 28 we read,

> *"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"*
>
> *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"*

Here we read of humans created in God's image, but there is more than merely stating a fact about a distinctive characteristic of those who are the culmination of God's acts in creating the world. We read that they are given a purpose and task. In verse 26, prior to the creation of humans, God reveals this task to be a form of work. This work is to rule (or in some translations, "have dominion") over everything that has been created. In verse 28, this work also includes the tasks of filling the earth with other humans (reproduction) and "subduing" the earth.

The language of "subdue" and "rule" has made some, perhaps many, a bit nervous because of the specter of domination and destruction of the earth. This perspective regards the tasks given to human from a post-fall perspective with the assumption that language of rule implies selfish, consumptive use of the earth that leaves negative consequences in its wake. How should we regard this language that places humans over the created order? One way to help us get this correct is by remembering that this task, this work given to humans, comes from God. If this work is given by God, then there is also accountability implied; this work of ruling takes place in the larger context of the rule of God over the world He has made. This work is stewardship, a large responsibility given to humans for which they are accountable to God. It is important to add here that the fear of a negative sense of rule is not the only way this text can be misread. There are some Christians who read these verses with enthusiasm and interpret the words to mean that God is giving humans a green light for "domination." This positive engagement is potentially more dangerous than the views that respond negatively to the language of rule. The idea that domination of the creation is in view here also fails to recognize our responsibility before God (almost like a child who is so excited to get what they want that they quickly misuse and tear up a gift given to them). Language of domination contains the hazard of rule that is enthusiastic but neither benevolent nor respectful of the created order. Stewardship language helps us to regard this task as one of great importance requiring wisdom and tremendous care.

This task and purpose for humans is vast in scope. This is good reason to regard this as what some (including me) have called the first Great Commission. While "Great Commission" language is often associated with the mission of the church found in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8, those texts are not the first place where a responsibility is given by God with the entire world in view. In these Genesis texts, we see from the beginning a great task given to human beings. Humans are commissioned by God with the task of stewarding (ruling well) over the created order. It is a commission and it is a big (great) one.

What does this mean for our understanding of work? First, it is clear that there is work given to humans as part of our purpose in God's created order. Second, the scope of the task strongly implies that there are many "jobs" to be done in executing this task, in pursuing the fulfilment of human purpose. Third, in spite of what may surmise from a surface level reading of the text, the jobs are not all reduced to the domains of agriculture and animal husbandry. One way to think about this is by considering the various types of jobs that emerge as humans populate the creation, interact with each, discern how to manage their life together, and "work with and in" the created order. Jobs emerge as people consider where to live, what to build, services to provide, ways to manage trade, etc. The world of work emerges and grows as humans continue to steward life in God's created order.

At the end of Genesis 1, we read that God calls his work of creation "very good." As I write this in an era where there is a culture of superlatives, it is important to clarify that "very good" does not mean "God looked upon his creation and thought it was slightly better than mediocre." The text means that "good" is modified by "very" and indicates that it is better than good, it is excellent. God's pronouncement is the equivalent of whatever superlative we use when we are searching for a word to convey the highest level of excellence. This pronouncement does not only refer to God's assessment of what was made but it also includes the function and purpose of the created order, which includes humans who are put to work as stewards with great responsibility before God.

And Chapter Two

We can continue to get a sense of God's affirmation for work in Genesis 2. This chapter provides a window into the stewardship of God's world. In verse 15 we read,

> *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."*

While Genesis 1 tells us of the creation of humans and the first Great Commission, here we read of God putting the first human in a context of work. God places him in the garden as more than a mere observer or consumer; the man is put in the garden and given the responsibility for working in it and managing it. The fact that we do not see God providing an instruction manual suggests that there is a responsibility for discovery, discernment, experimentation, imagination, and the use of abilities that God has provided within Adam as he is put to work in the garden. The man has responsibility and opportunity as the manager of the garden.

In verses 19 and 20 we read,

> *"Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.*
>
> *So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals."*

In these verses we see that while there was no instruction manual, God is active in providing the specific task for Adam to give names to birds and animals. Though not stated, there is the implication that the naming would extend beyond this to vegetation in the garden (apart from the tree God identifies as forbidden for consumption).

While this activity takes place at the very beginning in a unique setting, it conveys the truth that God wants humans to be active in their work and management of the created order. The context for work is provided and while there is some direct activity by God there is a wide berth for this great stewardship responsibility. Work is more than just doing something; the stage is set for creative activity that imaginatively works with and in the world provided by God.

At this point, the important truth for faith and work is that our life of work comes from God. God does not frown upon the idea of work itself; it is part of God's intent for His creation.

What Happens to Work after Genesis 3?

Genesis 1 and 2 provide us with an affirmation and optimistic view of work. But the Bible continues into Genesis 3, where the story goes awry. How do we navigate Genesis 3, especially when many in our churches may see this as the introduction to futility? Indeed, some might see this chapter as a negation of what occurred in Genesis 1-2,

yielding a view of work as tremendous toil, an anvil upon our heads as we make our way through life.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve yield to the temptation of the serpent, enamored of the prospect of consuming forbidden fruit that will lead to a future greater than that offered by God. Upon eating, shame arises, hiding happens, and blame shifting occurs upon facing God. God then announces a curse. Here is where a great challenge seems to have arisen for many Christians in their understanding of what occurs in creation after the fall: there is the conclusion that a creation under the curse is completely at odds with God and that we are now in a world where little good can emerge from our work. This conclusion is a result of failing to take into account what remains after the announcement of the curse. With the curse addressed to Eve there is distress that will accompany childbirth, but reproduction will continue. In the case of Adam, while it is true that his relationship to the ground has changed (work now includes painful labor) and that unwanted thorns and thistles will now appear as part of the result of labor, work itself goes on and there is fruitfulness that comes from work. The difference is that now there is great complication that becomes part of a life in God's creation. Work now occurs in an abnormal world; the new "normal" is a world where our work will press on and against us as we put forth effort in our stewardship of God's creation. This new heavily complicated reality is difficult but it is not futile. The goodness of work is not destroyed; it is now "good though fallen."

A further misunderstanding that can occur is the idea that God has given up on creation after the Fall and that redemption is a rescue "from" or escape from the world. There are many Christians whose view of creation post-fall is of a "world" that includes work that only will yield results "that will all burn in the end." Below we will see that this view misunderstands how redemption shows God's commitment to the creation rather than hostility.

One doctrine that is important for helping us understand God's ongoing commitment to the world post fall is what some traditions call "common grace." Abraham Kuyper's definition in the Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary is helpful:

> *"…[Calvinism] has not only honored man for the sake of his likeness to the Divine image, but also the world as a Divine creation, and has at once placed to the front the great principle that there is a particular grace which works Salvation, and also a common grace by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammeled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator. Thus, domestic life regained its independence, trade and commerce realized their strength in liberty, art and science were set free from every ecclesiastical bond and restored to their own inspirations, and man began to understand the subjection of all nature with its hidden forces and treasures to himself as a holy duty, imposed upon him by the original ordinances of Paradise: "Have dominion over them." Henceforth the curse should no longer rest upon the world itself, but upon that which is sinful in it, and instead of monastic flight from the world the duty is now emphasized of serving God in the world, in every position in life."*[4]

Kuyper follows his definition by expressing the important truth that the first Great Commission has not been abandoned by God after the Fall. In our post-Fall but common-graced reality those who work and their work environment can be places of great flourishing and great dysfunction, and even the best workplaces will have reminders that we live in a world where all is not as it should be. This is not reason for despair but genuine realism. There is truly complication but it is equally true that the possibility for fruitful work remains.

Common grace indicates God's ongoing commitment to the creation, and we can see in Psalm 8 language of amazement that God has given humans the stewardship opportunity that includes work. We can also see God's ongoing commitment in Genesis 9:12-17 where God makes a covenant to sustain the created order. The large point here is that God's ongoing commitment to the creation means that our work life continues to be important to God even after the tragedy of Genesis 3.

When we look at the results of the study above and consider the effects of the Fall, the abnormal "new normal" of post-Fall creation leads to the kinds of social dissonance that makes it typical for people to enjoy the benefits of work for themselves while ignoring or being apathetic about the difficulties faced by others. There is a further question to consider here for Christians who positively respond to faith and work teaching of some kind while also thinking of redemption as rescue from creation: does the "escape from the world" gospel contribute to an affirmation of work but also the inattention to the challenges of others (and possibly the tendency to put up with poor working conditions themselves)?

The Incarnation's Role

As we consider creation, it is important to reflect on the significance of the incarnation. We can first observe that while it is true that our first parents are sent out of the garden, even in announcement of the curse we read the protoevangelium that tells us the Fall is not the final word. There will be a child born who will crush evil and bring victory. Eventually in salvation history we see that this child is Jesus, God incarnate. This incarnation echoes Genesis 1:31 and helps us to see that God has not abandoned his creation nor has he abandoned our work lives.

The following texts are among those that convey the clear identification of Jesus Christ with humans, the crown of creation:

> *Luke 1:30-31 "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.'"*
>
> *John 1:14 "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us…"*
>
> *1 John 1:1 "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."*

Jesus is born, God takes on flesh, and the eternal Son of God has been touched by the hands of others. He is a genuine human being. Humans are the pinnacle of God's creation, and the Savior of the world completely identifies with the climax of God's creative acts in Genesis. This truth is not merely great for securing reconciliation with God; it makes clear that in redemption God is reclaiming creation rather than providing a means of escape from a hopelessly evil world.

We also can see that the work of Christ is not only for providing forgiveness and a path to heaven in Colossians 1:15-20:

> *"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things,*

4 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 30.

whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Reconciliation is mentioned, but it includes far more than peace between God and humans. We see that the work of Christ includes the purpose of the created order; Christ is involved in creation and his salvific work will bring about the *shalom* of creation.

It is also important to point out that Christ's resurrection in a body that could be touched (John 20:17, 27) and we see that he eats with others (John 21:12-14). The body of the risen Christ has continuity with his body from conception to crucifixion.

The implication of this for faith and work through the lens of creation can be clear to see at this point: Redemption includes *identification* with creation, which implies that the purpose of work in God's creation has not been abandoned. Rather, our work properly understood (whether it is cleaning bathrooms or providing leadership in the C-suite corner office) is honored by God and has the potential to be an expression of our stewardship of creation. This connection of creation and incarnation is far more than a basis for happiness with one's job. It surely entails a pursuit of work that includes attention to others. One way to think of this is by connecting creation and incarnation to sanctification.

Stewardship and Sanctification

Our path forward has to be more than confessional orthodoxy. The stewardship of creation requires a pursuit of sanctification. Sanctification is more than a matter of our internal change; it entails a stewardship of creation in the world of work that seeks the good of others. This includes the cultivation of attention to others even as we gain attention of the goodness of our work.

1 Corinthians 1:2 is a helpful text for understanding how sanctification is both a matter of who we are as well as *what* we should pursue in our life's trajectory. The verse reads:

> *"To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours."*

The Corinthians are identified as people who are sanctified but also to aspire toward being holy people. They (and all Christians) are set apart to (and belong to) God because of their salvation through Christ and they also have a perpetual aspiration to increasingly reflect the truth of their holy identity in the practice of life. Given the reputation of the Corinthian church, it may be surprising that Paul begins the letter by calling them "holy ones" (or "saints") rather than just emphasizing how far this dysfunctional church has to go to catch of whiff of genuine of holiness. Yet this helps us to see how sanctification is both a reminder of our true identity as well as the goal of our path of growth.

What does this mean for participation in work with a sense of calling in light of the concerns above? It can mean this: Christians are holy people in pursuit of practical holiness, characterized by efforts to grow in discernment about conditions for flourishing for self and others. This discernment is not only a matter of a sharper focus about the ways work can be understood through the lens of calling, but also the pursuit of a disposition of awareness about the conditions of flourishing. Holy people who understand work as calling can be people whose sense of calling does more than affirm the goodness of work. This sense of calling can include the growing recognition of what it means to inhabit the workplace as a person growing in Christlikeness; this is Christlikeness that is more than gratitude for work or patience with imperfect environments. This process of holiness moves further, cultivating a view of flourishing where one regards work as part of the terrain of common grace. This brings a stewardship-type lens on the workplace, regardless of one's ability to be an agent of change. At the least it can help facilitate a view on the workplace where one considers the possibilities for flourishing and also has sensitivity about the ways workplaces can be places with difficult conditions. When aware of the latter, the response may at least include consideration of changing jobs or (if one has agency) advocating for a better workplace. In the case of advocacy for others, the important point here is that I am suggesting that a "sensitivity to sanctification" could be one part of the way Christians with a sense of calling might become those who feel drawn to the workplace but also consider how the workplace can be good for others as well. In sum, holy people in pursuit of greater personal holiness can understand work as calling, a calling to work as vocation and a calling to seek flourishing for self and others.

Conclusion

What is the theological remedy when work as a calling seems limited to affirmation of one's job? I have proposed we can help provide a way toward a deeper faith and work connection by a more robust doctrine of creation, supplemented by recognition of and response to the incarnation along with a pursuit of sanctification where what we "work out" is not only our personal passion in the workplace but also the pursuit of possibilities of better experiences of work for others.

> "It is clear that there is work given to humans as *part of our purpose* in God's created order."

Work Under The Fall

N. GRAY SUTANTO

What is common or universal is not identical with what is normative. It is common, and, in fact, east of Eden, universal, that all human beings do err in grievous ways, but the Bible insists that though sin is universal, it is not normative. The universal human condition as we have it today is the result of a contingent change brought about by the first sin. Human nature, and, by implication, human labor, as we see them today disclose a gap between what is and what ought to be. Sin corrupts human nature, and the absence of righteousness leads not to a mere negation of something external or supplemental to human being and action but the privation of something intrinsic to who we are. The absence of sight leads to blindness, of health, to sickness, and of righteousness, to depravity. [1]

To understand the doctrine of sin in relation to human vocation and labor, therefore, one ought to consider human vocation as created first, for sin is a parasite, a privation that leads to a deformity, and thus cannot be discussed without the good on which it depends. This brief sketch then moves in three further steps: a consideration of the possibility of fulfilling human vocation in the post-fall order by virtue of common grace, of sinful labor as characterized by faithlessness and idolatry, on the one hand, and fruitlessness on the other. Idolatry is parasitic on humanity's original representational vocation, and fruitlessness or futility is parasitic on the command to be fruitful and multiply.

Human Vocation

What was humanity called to do? Humanity was made as priest-kings in a temple-garden, bound as well to the word of God with the prophetic responsibility to pass down that word from generation to generation. The sense of "image" in Genesis 1:26-8, connected with the command to lay dominion over the earth connects with the ANE context, in which there was a "common practice for ancient rulers to place statues in conquered lands representing their rule."[2] Kings use these icons or statues to point to their sovereignty, and, in turn, the kings would refer to themselves as representatives of the gods.[3] Genesis 1:26-28, then, when read in this background is a kind of subversion of an ANE polytheistic context – for it asserts all human beings as representatives of the one true God, whose sovereignty knows no bounds (further explicating the second commandment to not make carved images of God). The creation of humanity, therefore, is connected with its dominion in Psalm 8, where the glory of God is proclaimed in all of the earth as humanity fruitfully multiplies, spreading through the globe. This sense of representation is further clarified when Adam's sonship is in view. Adam is made in the likeness of God and is called the son of God (cf. Gen. 5:1-3; Lk. 3:38) – not in the sense of being physically from God the way human progeny stem from their parents, but in the sense of being created to represent and honor God. [4]

1 The material in this essay anticipates two forthcoming works on theological anthropology: N. Gray Sutanto, *God and Humanity: Herman Bavinck and Theological Anthropology*, T&T Clark Explorations in Reformed Theology (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2024), and N. Gray Sutanto, *For Us and For Our Salvation: The Biblical Doctrine of Humanity and Sin* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, forthcoming).

2 Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and its Inversion* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 69.

3 Cf. John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 55-8.

4 Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 72.

Scripture describes the garden as a primordial temple (e.g. Ps. 36:7-9; Ez. 28: 13-18).[5] The two verbs that characterize Adam's task to "work and keep" (דבע and רמש) the garden (Gen. 2:15) is used elsewhere to describe the tasks of the Israelite priests (e.g. Deut. 4:19; Num. 1:53, 18:5-6).[6] Humanity's role as priest over the garden is further confirmed when the divine prohibition against the eating of the tree of knowledge is given in conjunction with the mandate to cultivate the earth in Gen. 2:16-17. As Beale and Kim comments: "Just as the priests were to keep guard over the temple (Num. 18:5) by obeying God's commands, so Adam as a priest guards the Garden-temple of Eden by keeping God's commands. Adam works out God's priestly purposes through obedience to his word."[7] Hence, The work of representing God on earth, obeying God's word, and conveying that word indicates that God created humanity to be a king, priest, and prophet in creation.[8]

Francis Turretin was thus right to describe the purpose of humanity's creation in this way: "[M]an was made by God to acknowledge and worship his Creator and to exercise dominion over the other creatures."[9] This dominion, to be sure, is not identical with the divine dominion, but is a faint imitation and is in submission to it. Klaas Schilder describes this representational vocation as the 'cultural mandate'[10] This work refers not merely, therefore, to pro-creation, but to the work of cultivating nature in imitation of the creator: God creates out of nothing, and we create from the pre-existing materials God has gifted to us.[11] As the Psalmist declares: "You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart." (Ps. 104: 14-15). Image bearers are to work within the world of God in obedience to the word of God, and as they spread, not only will they work in harmony, the glory of God will reflected through their representational labor (Ps. 8).

Ultimately, of course, Jesus is the true image bearer who represents God perfectly, whereas we failed. As the second person of the Trinity, Jesus's person discloses to us God incarnate, and as the true and second Adam, Jesus shows us perfect human obedience. He fulfills the cultural mandate, thus creating many sons as the church produces her children, by the Spirit working with the word and sacrament. Christian labor is now done in imitation of Christ, and in a way that witnesses to human labor as God intended it to be in the created order.

Work in the Post-Fall Order

The work that should be joyous and fruitful, however, was rendered complicated due to the cursed ground after the fall. Confirming that human vocation involves the twin aspects of pro-creation and labor, childbearing and marriage will now involve much pain and sorrow (Gen. 3:16), and

5 For a concise presentation of the Scriptural data on Eden as a temple-garden, see G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: A Biblical Theology of Temple* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021), 5-12. For an expanded account, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004).

6 See also Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 53.

7 Beale and Kim, *God Dwells Among Us*, 13. Cf. Stephen G. Dempster, Dominion and Dynasty: *A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 62-3.

8 Cf. Brandon Crowe, *The Lord Jesus Christ: The Biblical Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2023), 13-14.

9 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1: *First to Tenth Topics* (Philipsburg: P&R, 1992), 468.

10 Klaas Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, trans. Williem Helder and Albert H. Oosterhoff (Hamilton: Lucerna, 2016), 78. For more on the cultural mandate in biblical and systematic perspective, see N. Gray Sutanto, "Cultural Mandate and the Image of God: Human Vocation in Creation, Fall, and Redemption," *Themelios* 48 (2023): 592-604.

11 Luke Bretherton, *A Primer in Christian Ethics: Christ and the Struggle to Live Well* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 278.

work becomes difficult and apparently futile (Gen. 3:18-19). This prompts several questions: how should Christians now labor in this present, fallen order? And how should Christians account for the fact that non-Christians, despite resisting God, continues to make serious advancements in many areas of life and labor? Can, and should, Christians engage, or even partner, with non-believers for the sake of certain common goods?

God remains committed to his original purposes and despite the entrance and spread of sin, the line of Cain produces advancements in technology, agriculture, music, and infrastructure (Gen. 4:17-24). God does not merely give us over to our sinful tendencies (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28), but preserves fallen humanity by common grace gifting it with epistemic, moral, and life-giving goods.[12] Due to common grace, fallen humanity can enjoy penultimate goods despite resisting the ultimate good, living, as it were, under borrowed capital. Common grace explains why it is that, formally speaking, unregenerate cultures can persist in advancements.

Petrus van Mastricht speaks of an "inward grace" that tampers humanity's depravity in both subjective and objective ways. Subjectively, "with regard to both intellect and will, there is, internally, restraining grace, by which sin itself is not removed or diminished, but its action is curbed so that it would not burst its restraint, a grace also by which the more upright at least abhor more atrocious sins", and objectively, these restraining graces form "certain political, ecclesiastical, economic, and academic remedies, by which in some measure the license of sin is restrained, and indeed there is added a stimulus to perform upright deeds."[13] These non-salvific forms of divine graces, therefore, explains why it is that both regenerate and unregenerate communities can co-exist in relative peace and harmony in this present order, and why Christians can learn from, co-labor with, and partner with non-Christians for penultimate ends.

Another way of discussing the gifts of common grace is to take note of the distinction between sins *per se* and sins *per accidens*. The distinction between sins *per se* and sins *per accidens* illumine that actual sins are diverse. We are all corrupted by sin, but we all sin distinctly, and in various ways. Sins *per se* are those sins which are by their very nature "repugnant to the law, such as idolatry, blasphemy, homicide".[14] On the other hand, sins *per accidens* refer to acts which, consider in themselves may not be formally evil, but "through the circumstances, from the efficient cause, the end, the manner, and other things, vice is added from elsewhere to an act that is good *per se*."[15] The Leiden Synopsis argues that this distinction is useful, but should be clarified, for even sins per accidens is judged no less severely than sins per se.[16] Further, to illustrate sins per accidens, the Synopsis points to a few examples. An act might be right but not from the right principle of the heart, as in 1 Tim. 1:5, which commands that acts should be done out of purity of heart. An act might be sinful when it's done for the wrong end, as "the Pharisees fast, pray, and give alms, in order to obtain glory from men (Matthew 6:1)."[17] Finally, an action might be evil because of "sinful circumstances", as seen in the examples of the sons of Aaron offering strange fire (Lev. 10:1), when Uzzah touched the ark to keep it from falling (2 Sam. 6:6), and when believers wrongly exercise Christian liberty and cause stumbling (Rom. 14:20).[18]

This distinction illumines how an unregenerate society can continue with relative peace, and not devolve into utter chaos, and why, again, Christians can often work alongside non-believers. In other words, although total depravity does say that everyone has been corrupted, we do not all exercise sins *per se* (for thus peace would be impossible), but sins *per accidens*. As Paul says, even the Gentiles continue to do the law, despite being in their sin (Rom. 2:14). One way to illumine why sins *per se* and *per accidens* are both punishable sins is to attend to Bavinck's articulation of ego-centricity as the ultimate principle of all actual sins: he argues that the "organizing principle of sin is self-glorification, self-divination; stated more broadly, self-love or ego-centricity."[19] This means that humanity can often do the right things for the wrong reasons, and are motivated to do formally good acts for the ends of self-glorification. Christians and non-Christians might do the same formally good act, therefore, while the principle motivating taking up that act would be radically different.

Common grace allows for Christians to engage in common human labor without sacrificing their Christian identity or to fail to recognize the importance of the regenerating work of the Spirit when one encounters advancements from non-believing communities or cultures. The Spirit that has regenerated believers is the same Spirit that works to gift nonbelievers with these penultimate gifts. Work in the post-fall order remains less than ideal, as one must reckon with unjust social structures and impure motivations. It often leads to futility, marked by idolatry, hubris, and pride. [20]

Idolatry, Hubris, and Cultivation

Common grace is not saving and thus does not redirect the attentions of the human heart toward the God for whom it was created, and thus these formal good acts, being sins *per accidens*, continue to have malforming implications. As Bavinck argues, there is no neutrality in culture. Either true religion or unbelief will "animate" our cultural efforts, and thus line up our cultural mandate under the "heavenly" mandate of obedience to God for the sake of fellowship with him or in rebellion against him. "Religion must be the principle which animates the whole of life and which sanctifies it into a service of God."[21] Thus, the "sins per accidens" might be "splendid vices" insofar as they are formally good works, though not done for the proper end, namely, the glory of God. When those works are set not to God but to an idol, we end up working for a deified object that could not deliver. Or, to echo Augustine, when good ends become ultimate ends, they cannot satisfy the human heart and substitute God with a creature, giver with the gift.

Humanity thus continues to sin because now it labors not for the glory of God but for the glory of another, usually, the glory of itself. The call to dominion, therefore, in light of sin can easily be misunderstood and abused, turned into hubris by pride. Humans are images of God, and so are dependent on God. Humans do not create out of their mere imagination or power, but must recognize reality as God intended it to be. God is the author of nature, and humans must work along its grain. Failure to attend to God's word is a failure to attend to nature as it really is, as God's creation that manifests God's purposes.

12 For more on common grace, see Cory Brock and N. Gray Sutanto, *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2023).

13 Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, vol. 3, *The Works of God and the Fall of Man*, ed. Joel Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023), 528.

14 Van Mastricht, *TPT*, 3: 493.

15 Van Mastricht, *TPT*, 3: 493-4.

16 *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*: Latin Text and English Translation, vol. 1, Disputations 1-23, ed. Dolf te Velde, trans. Riemer A. Faber (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1: 391.

17 *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 1: 391.

18 *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, 1: 391.

19 Herman Bavinck, Reformed Ethics, vol. 1, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, John Bolt, ed. and trans. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 105. Hereafter, RE.

20 Space constraints disallow me to also explore the important vice of sloth. On the importance of sloth for one's account of sin, see Rachel Sophia Baard, *Sexism and Sin-Talk: Feminist Conversations on the Human Condition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2019).

21 Herman Bavinck, *Wonderful Works of God*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Glenside: Westminster Seminary Press), 169.

The purposes of human labor, when divorced from the word of God, will be malformed, tempted toward a redirection that sees not sin but some facet of creation itself as the problem. One might be tempted to see human finitude or the human itself as something to be overcome rather than something that was an intrinsic part of the created order, or misinterpret creation, refusing to see its diversity 'according to its kinds' (Gen. 1: 21, 24-25), flattening it, imposing uniformity, or refuse to accept our responsibilities to steward the earth. One could also see the gain of material rewards as higher than the priority of caring for those in the image of God.

The call to work and keep the ground is a priestly work, after all. This is further signified by the conjunction of this command to work the garden alongside the prohibition from God in Gen. 2:16-17 – God is the one who imbues meaning on the trees. The first humans were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of God and evil, and were thus bound to the word of God for their destinies and as an interpreter of created nature rather than seeking to legislate and author nature by themselves. The first sin was preceded by Eve's desire to interpret the tree for herself, using her eyes and judgment, rendering the word of God as a mere hypothesis to be tested by her own experience and reason, rather than recognizing that God's word and world convey a united meaning (Gen. 3:6). Eve's idolized herself, and thus subjected nature to her own word.

True dominion, therefore, presupposes obedience to God, and hubris is the result of disobedience. Failure to heed the word of God leads humans to re-interpret and instrumentalize nature for unnatural and selfish ends. Hence, the call to *dominion* should be understood as a call to *cultivation*. We must listen to God's intentions and work in accordance with the norms and bounds he has set for us. Adam's naming of the animals in Gen. 2:20 itself presupposes pre-existing "kinds" that God has set before him, and Adam does not name or bless himself.[22] This obedience to God by naming the animals itself is another indicative of Adam's conformity to God – what later theologians, again, would refer to as his original righteousness.

Without the proper orientation toward God, therefore, human individuals will seek to satisfy itself by working for itself, often to the exclusion of others. Fallen humanity finds its identity in its labor, in its achievements, and its culture. Pride and hubris stem from these. Instead of seeing these aspects of human vocation as gifts, we use our labor as a way to justify ourselves, and thus we are not just discouraged when our work is hampered or taken away from us, but fall into despair. Because our identities are found in our labor rather than in God, we use our labor as the yardstick to measure not only ourselves but others, and thus we fail to celebrate the work of others and instead foster envy or vicious competition. Because we take pride in the cultures we foster, we fail to take opportunities to learn from others, but rather use our cultures as the yardstick to measure others, deeming them inferior from ours, and, at worst, seek the domination of others. Only when our vocation is oriented to God can we begin to treat our labors, achievements, and cultures as gifts rather than our identities or idols, tampering our pride and hubris.

Fruitlessness

With the ground resisting our labor, and idolatry marking the direction of our hearts, much of our work is bound up in futility. This can happen in two ways. First, we may fail to realize that the next world is not a mere continuation of this world. The transition to the glorified order is marked by a qualitative, decisive, and apocalyptic change brought about by divine power alone. Work, even work done by Christians, will not produce artifacts or material goods that will survive the coming purifying fire (2 Peter 3), and, as Michael Allen's essay in this journal issue emphasizes, whatever continuity there will be between this world and the new heavens and the new earth must be tempered by the expectation of a genuine 'surprise'. No heart can imagine what is in store for us. This does not mean that human labor here is insignificant or meaningless – the seed, the direction, the talents we have, which are themselves gifts of the Spirit, will be taken up by God as fragmentary signposts, as it were, of the glorious priestly and kingly culture of the next world.

As Richard Bauckham observes on Rev. 21:24, 26-7, the glorified city "comes down from heaven", and yet, there is something that is brought into it that shows its continuity with humanity now.[23] We should be wary here and not overly speculate. As we say elsewhere, "the first word of eschatology is modesty."[24] Kuyper warns, it is not as if the paintings we make or the chairs we build will be transferred over into heaven, though the "germ", or seed, of our labors, or the direction of them, will be consummated (see 2 Peter 3:11).[25] Further, the glorified self will be in continuity with the regenerated self, and the good works that characterize the regenerate will be consummated there (e.g. Phil. 2:13-14; Eph. 2:10).

Jesus therefore warns not to lay up our treasures on earth "where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matt. 6:19-20) One of the features of unbelief is the failure to attend to the penultimate character of this present secular age (Gal. 1:4), and of the enduring character of the next life. This is not to repeat the mistake of dispensationalist eschatologies that suggest that work now is a matter of cleaning a sinking ship (as Allen's essay rightly shows), but it is about recognizing that work done to the glory of God is still a mere witness to the consummated culture of the next life, tempered by the decisive transition of aeonic proportions. As such, to work as if this life is all there is, and to accrue material possessions on earth now, as the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, is to work "under the sun", leading to vanity. Marked by sin, this present order is passing away. Sabbath rest, in this regard, is a reminder to see all things from the perspective of eternity.

The second way our work might become fruitless follows from the first observation: work that prioritizes material gain over *people* is vanity. Work ought to be done to the glory of God and is thus an expression of love of neighbor. When we prioritize material gain for ourselves, we tend to fashion our neighbor as impediments to be removed at worst or tolerated at best. In doing so, we substitute divine priorities with our own, fruitless ends. Work becomes exploitative and leads to futility. Examples of these abound: from the existence of slavery, our debt-fueled economy, unfettered capitalism which leads to radical inequalities and ecological denigration, and socialism that leads to uniformity and totalitarianism. Sin and idolatry are ubiquitous. As Luke Bretherton has argued:

> *Material security, work, and economics are not the sum total of the meaning and purpose of life. And when we make them our ultimate horizon then we have made an idol of them so that instead of imaging God, we refashion ourselves and our world in their image. The consequence of such idolatry is that the fabric of what makes up a human life is quickly shredded. Instead, economic life must be made to serve the meaning and purpose of life, which is to love God and neighbour and bless creation. We get confused about that, but the Bible is not. We do not live by bread alone and the call is to serve God and not mammon. And as a way of pointing to eternal life, the people of God should*

22 Cf. R. R. Reno, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2017), 73.

23 Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 135.

24 Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto, *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2023), 167.

25 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace*, vol. 1: *God's Gifts for a Fallen World*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed. M. van der Maas, ed. Jordan Ballor (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015), 545, 550.

generate forms of life here and now that are in excess of and don't fit well with current economic systems.[26]

Three implications are entailed from this recognition of the priority of neighborly love as an expression of subordinating our work to the purposes of God. First, we ought not labor for the bread that perishes, but recognize that the proclamation of the Gospel – the good news of what Jesus had done so that image bearers can be with him in eternity – is a primary work, this side of the fall, that cannot be diluted, eclipsed, or sidelined by penultimate human work. Second, we should see work as another means of sanctification. Engaging in work forms us with particular habits of discipline, cultivating virtues of patience, consistency, and longsuffering, causes us to take on meaningful responsibility as we take up care of others, and fosters our sense of dependence on neighbor and God. Work forms character, and character, our good works, will be consummated in the last day (Phil. 1:6). Finally, we should subordinate our own ends to God's own summons to prioritize 'the least of these' (Matt. 25:40). True religion is caring for widows and orphans (James 1:27). What we consume, produce, and contribute to are never neutral, and living wisely means recognizing the ambivalence with which we participate inevitably in fallen conditions, and also alleviating such fallen conditions where we can in our own immediate contexts.

26 Bretherton, *Primer in Christian Ethics*, 281.

"The call to work and keep the ground is *a priestly work*, after all."

Paradisial Gin & Tonics: On The Redemption of the Artifacts of Human Cultivation

BRIAN G. MATTSON

"Dad, will we have Chinese food in heaven?" That was the earnest and innocent question I received from my nine-year-old daughter as we were enjoying a culinary delight from the Far East. I quickly replied "Yes." Why would a father go out on a tenuous limb and disappoint a child? But I knew she was not asking an easy question. She had asked a deeply profound and wide-ranging question involving nearly every loci of systematic theology. This can be illustrated by rephrasing it: "Dad, is this human cultural artifact known as 'Chinese' food, crafted with human ingenuity from the raw materials of God's original creation, going to survive the eschatological cataclysm of the Last Day and exist and be enjoyed in the New Heavens and the New Earth?" That way of putting it, as it happens, is far more controversial.

Further considering the question, I recalled a vested interest of my own: a letter in my email inbox from the late Professor John Webster, regarding a conversation we had had about another scholar. He poignantly signed off with this promissory note: "The celestial Bavinck club will include us all, I trust, with me in charge of paradisial gin and tonics (always that first sip, never a hangover)." I confess wishing to share his trust that paradisial gin and tonics are real, and that in eternity none other than John Webster will tend the bar for the Bavinck club.[1]

The faith and work movement has, it seems, more or less successfully recovered a robust doctrine of human vocation—that work and labor is something intrinsic to what it means to be human. As a pre-fall, creational reality, distorted by sin, our work and labor is, in Christ, redeemed. It is "bought back," liberated from the dominion of sins like envy, greed, malice, abuse, and self-seeking, the thorns that "infest the ground" (as Isaac Watts had it) are gradually overcome, and work is reoriented to the glory of God and love of neighbor and made fruitful. However, it is much more controversial to extend Christ's redemption of work to include work *product*—that is, the fruits themselves. That is, are the artifacts of human cultivation (culture) included in Christ's redemption of the cosmos?

It is already evident that this question cannot be answered solely from the theological locus of redemption, narrowly considered. The answer will necessarily require an ontology of creation and culture, an anthropology, a doctrine of sin, and certainly a well-defined eschatology.

I propose to answer the question, as I did to my daughter, in the affirmative, but to ground it in something more robust than my fatherly say-so. I shall argue that certain fundamental biblical concepts about creation and re-creation—particularly as they have been articulated in neo-Calvinism—lead to only one conclusion. That is, *given* a basically neo-Calvinistic orientation to creation and re-creation, and notwithstanding a large measure of ambiguity in the tradition itself on the question, it is inescapable that work *product* should be considered as included in Christ's redemption of the cosmos. One may and many do, of course, reject the neo-Calvinist framework in favor of a more cataclysmic eschatology or radical spirit/matter dualism; but I will at very least suggest that neo-Calvinists themselves should openly embrace (with, we shall see, certain necessary epistemic limitations and caveats) this affirmative answer as the only fully consistent one.

Detractors

One candidate who takes up the offer to simply reject neo-Calvinism in order to answer the question in the negative is David VanDrunen. In his book *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, he adamantly insists that artifacts of human cultural labor are destined for destruction. He does so on the grounds that the new creation is essentially a *totally* new creation. Commenting on Romans 8 and Paul's teaching regarding the liberation of the creation from its bondage to decay, he writes:

> *To understand Paul's point, it is important to remember that this present world was never meant to exist forever. The first Adam was commissioned to finish his task in this world and then to rule in the world-to-come (Heb. 2:5). Thus when creation groans (Rom. 8:22) for something better, for 'the glory' that is coming (8:18), creation is not seeking an improvement of its present existence but the attainment of its original destiny. It longs to give way before the new heaven and new earth spoken of in 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21.*[2]

This is untenable as a purely exegetical matter. Paul's "liberated from its bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (v.21) cannot possibly be glossed as "giving way." Paul is not talking about euthanasia, creation dying a good death to make way for a new and better world. The prepositions are clear: "*From* (*apo*) bondage *into* (*eis*) freedom."[3] It is the same subject, "creation"—the very same *ktisis* Paul speaks of in Romans 1:20—on both sides of the ledger.

It is also untenable as an anthropological matter. If the present creation completely passes away to make way for the new creation, what is one to make of the resurrection of the body? VanDrunen senses the problem and goes on to write, "Our earthly bodies are the only part of the present world that Scripture says will be transformed and taken up into the world-to-come."[4] This is a remarkable claim that cannot be squared with Paul's argument in this very passage. Paul is explicitly drawing a continuity between creation's "groaning" and expectation of liberation (vv.21-22) and our "groaning" and expectation of the "redemption of our bodies" (v.23). Paul's point is not that our resurrection hope and expectation is granted while creation's hope for liberation is denied.

Given these convictions, however, it is understandable why VanDrunen would answer the question in the negative. *Nothing* in the present world is redeemed and destined for glory except our earthly bodies. *Ergo*, there will be neither Chinese takeout nor paradisial gin and tonics in the new heavens and the new earth.

But one need not do such exegetical violence, or hold to such a minimalist doctrine of redemption, or maintain a cataclysmically disjunctive eschatology to answer the question negatively. In an essay for *Christianity Today*, J. Todd Billings pushes back against the fashionable notion

1 I had thought, as did my computer spell-check, that the good Professor had misspelled "paradisal." But the thought occurring that this was Professor John Webster, I did my due diligence and found the word in the Oxford English Dictionary. The learned man had used an irregular but elegant form of the word used by George MacDonald.

2 David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 65.

3 For a rebuttal to his interpretation of 1 Peter 3 and Revelation 21, see Brian G. Mattson, *Cultural Amnesia: Three Essays on Two Kingdoms Theology* (Billings: Swinging Bridge, 2018), 39-41.

4 VanDrunen, LGTK: 66. A latent spirit/matter dualism is evident here. Are not *souls* part of this "present world"? The framing suggests that the soul or spirit has its natural home in the age-to-come, and the body will accompany it somewhat begrudgingly in spite of its "this-worldly" character.

that our cultural work has redemptive significance that will last into eternity.[5] That this is a different sort of critique is evident from the start:

> *I embrace the main features of this counter-narrative to the rapture account. Redemption restores God's good creation. Heavenly hope involves a material, embodied restoration. Heaven and earth will come together as Christ's kingship is recognized by all creation. Moreover, we should embrace 'kingdom work' that calls us […] Yet, I also sense that we impoverish our hope for heaven when we turn it into an expression of our current activist emphasis upon 'kingdom work.'*[6]

In particular, Billings takes exception to N.T. Wright's *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, which argues that

> *What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God's future.*[7]

"While I celebrate Wright's holistic vision in *Surprised By Hope*," Billings writes, "his account here creates more problems than it solves."[8] In particular, Billings asks what it means for our actions to "last" into the new creation? Wright suggests, for example, that Bach's music will be played in the eschaton, but Billings counters: "A friend of mine is facing death; he spent his life as an auto mechanic. Will his repaired cars make their way to the new creation? If not, why does Bach's contribution have kingdom value, while my friend's does not?"

That is an excellent question, but Billings does not suggest any possible answers, as though the answer is obvious. It is not. The rest of his essay is a thoughtful and well-taken exhortation to recover the centrality of worship in our resurrection hope. But arguments about "centrality" and competing "emphases" are notoriously slippery and easily devolve into false dilemmas, pitting harmonious things against one another.[9] Is it true that a focus on kingdom work comes at the zero-sum expense of worship? Is loving your neighbor as yourself somehow in competition with "Love the Lord your God with all your, heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength?" Surely not. The vertical and horizontal dimensions of creaturely life have gone hand-in-hand from the very beginning, and the fault for sinfully neglecting one or the other is not a matter of focus; it is a matter of the one focusing.

Recently, Hans Boersma has leveled a similar criticism of neo-Calvinism, and especially Herman Bavinck. His view is that the notion of believers "carry[ing] our cultural accomplishments over into the hereafter, and also [that] in the eschaton we will be actively engaged in social and cultural endeavors of various kinds" is in contradiction to or rejection of the *visio Dei* or "beatific vision."[10] So "creation-affirming" is Bavinck's theology that Boersma thinks it is actually "glory-negating." The same skepticism of false dilemmas ought to be applied here. In the hereafter we *either* "gaze eternally into the face of God" or we engage in cultural endeavors? But if believers in the here-and-eschatological-now, the "down payment" stage of Spiritual heavenly life, engage in cultural endeavors mindful of being *coram Deo* (Eph. 2:10)—"before the face of God"—I see no reason why that same phenomenon in a perfected and glorified way should be thought impossible or unthinkable in the hereafter.

That is quite enough stage-setting. To the criticisms of Billings and Boersma we shall return. Clearly, at the very least, my daughter was not asking a meaningless or silly question. Let us now explore neo-Calvinism's account of creation and re-creation in order to grasp or at least to approach a satisfactory answer to her question.

Creation & Re-Creation

It has long been accepted that the very beating heart of neo-Calvinism is the conviction that "grace restores and perfects nature." Jan Veenhof called it the "central motif" of Herman Bavinck's theology, and it is not difficult to see why.[11] Over and over again, in relation to nearly every theological loci, Bavinck is at pains to emphasize that grace opposes *sin*, not nature.

For Bavinck, in fact, "grace restores and perfects nature" is something of a shorthand summary of a cluster or complex of ideas. It is a pithy description of a creational eschatology that involves the doctrine of the covenant of works (i.e., eschatology *precedes* soteriology; grace in Christ does not merely restore humanity to the beginning of Adam's journey, but to its *end* in eschatological perfection).[12] But it also involves the Augustinian notion of sin as privation, having no ontological existence of its own and, because of this, that nature or creation is susceptible to redemption. It can be saved because sin can be removed and destroyed without removing or destroying the substance.

Arguably nowhere does Bavinck tie together in one place these various threads more clearly and forcefully than in his 1894 rectorial address at Kampen entitled, "De Gemeene Genade," or "Common Grace."[13] Not only is it a compact and striking example of Bavinck's theological *raison d'ĕtre*, it also directly relates the neo-Calvinist concept of creation and re-creation to human vocation.

> *By means of this organic way of relating nature and grace, the Reformation in principle overcame the mechanical juxtaposition and dualistic worldview of the Catholic Church. And thereby, too, the significance of the cosmos increases greatly. It still represents that primary, original, and natural state that the Christian religion, the foedus gratiae [covenant of grace], leads back to. While it is true that the world has been corrupted by sin, it nevertheless remains the work of the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth. Of his own will he maintains it by his covenant, and by his gratia communis [common grace] he powerfully opposes the destructive might of sin. He fills the hearts of men with nourishment and joy and does not leave himself without a witness among them. He pours out upon them numberless gifts and benefits. Families, races, and peoples he binds together with natural love and affection. He allows societies and states to spring up that the citizens might live in peace and security. Wealth and well-being he grants them that the arts and sciences can prosper. And by his revelation in nature and history he ties their hearts*

5 J. Todd Billings, "The New View of Heaven Is Too Small" *Christianity Today* (February 15, 2018). https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/february-web-only/new-view-of-heaven-too-small-resurrection-hope.html

6 Ibid.

7 N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, cited by Billings.

8 Billings, "The New View of Heaven."

9 C.f., John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), 182-83.

10 Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018): 33. There is no need here to duplicate the outstanding rebuttal to Boersma in Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto, *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction* (Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2022), 168-183.

11 Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968), 345-6.

12 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 2:573. C.f., Brian G. Mattson, *Restored To Our Destiny* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

13 Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 35-65. Surprisingly, "Common Grace" remains somewhat neglected in secondary literature. It deserves more and continued attention.

> *and consciences to the invisible, supra-sensible world and awakens in them a sense of worship and virtue.*[14]

Here we have the beginning of a line of argument: "God so loves the world" and all that is within it, culture and civilization, arts and sciences, and the rest. But why? Why does God do all this, Bavinck asks? "Does he squander his own gifts? Is he acting purposelessly?" By no means!

> *Is it not because natural life, in all its forms has value in his eyes in spite of sin's corruption? The love of family and kin, societal and political life, art and science are all in themselves objects of his divine good pleasure. He delights also in these works of his hands. They all together constitute, not in their mode of being but in their essence, the original order that God called into being at creation and that he still preserves and maintains, sin notwithstanding. Contempt for this divine order of creation is thus illegitimate; it flies in the face of experience and conflicts with Scripture. Here all separatism or asceticism is cut off at the roots. All world-flight is a repudiation of the first article of our Apostolic Creed. Christ indeed came to destroy the works of the devil. But more than that, he came to restore the works of the Father and so to renew man according to the image of him who first created man.*[15]

God so loves the world because he made it, continues to delight in it, and he intends to redeem it. Elsewhere Bavinck puts it this way, with a hint or twist of an Anselmian "honor code" satisfaction view of atonement:

> *God's honor consists precisely in the fact that he redeems and renews the same humanity, the same world, the same heaven, and the same earth that have been corrupted and polluted by sin.*[16]

How is such a cosmic redemption possible, given the corruption of sin? Is this a mild view of sin and depravity? Bavinck explains:

> *Hereby we have not denied the serious character of sin. Sin is certainly not a substance but a quality, not materia [matter] but forma [form]. Sin is not the essence of things but rather cleaves to the essence; it is a privatio [privation], albeit actuosa [active], and to that extent accidental, having penetrated from the outside like death. Hence sin can be separated and removed from reality. The world is and remains susceptible of purification and redemption. Its essence can be rescued, and its original state can return.* [17]

While God's common grace preserves the world by restraining sin's power to dissolve and destroy, it is not enough. "It compels but does not change; it restrains but does not conquer. Unrighteousness breaks through its fences again and again." [18]

> *To save the world, nothing less was needed than the immeasurable greatness of the divine power, the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:19-20). To save the world required nothing less than the fullness of his grace and the omnipotence of his love.*[19]

All of this precedes what appears to be the only quotation people know or remember from the essay: "Christianity does not introduce a single substantial foreign element into the creation. It creates no new cosmos but rather makes the cosmos new."[20] That is a line that is every bit as worthy of quotation and adulation as Kuyper's famous "every square inch," but it only comes into its own in the context of the foundational theology of nature and grace Bavinck has explained and continues to explain at length. In fact, that quote must be continued:

> *It restores what was corrupted by sin. It atones the guilty and cures what is sick; the wounded it heals. Jesus was anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit to bring good tidings to the afflicted, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and to comfort those who mourn (Isa. 61:1,2). He makes the blind to see, the lame to walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor (Matt. 11:5). Jesus was not a new lawgiver; he was not a statesman, poet, or philosopher. He was Jesus—that is, Savior.*[21]

All these powerful images are that of *restoration*, the great reversal of sin and its effects on God's good creation. And, Bavinck insists, this restoration is not narrowly tailored.

> *Christ did not come just to restore the religio-ethical life of man and to leave all the rest of life undisturbed, as if the rest of life had not been corrupted by sin and had no need of restoration. No, the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit extend even as far as sin has corrupted. Everything that is sinful, guilty, unclean, and full of woe is, as such and for that very reason, the object of the evangel of grace that is to be preached to every creature*[22]

And then follows: "*Therefore* Christ has also a message for home and society, for art and science."[23] Liberalism limits the gospel to the inner chamber of the human heart, but this is a woefully inadequate grasp of the kingdom of God:

> *But if the kingdom is not of, it is certainly in this world, and is intended for it. The word of God which comes to us in Christ is a word of liberation and restoration for the whole man, for his understanding and his will, for his body and his soul. Sin entered the world, and for just that reason, 'God so loved the world…'*[24]

It is a powerful and energizing and, well, liberating theological framework, and it is no surprise that neo-Calvinism became the cultural force it did. Notwithstanding a variety of controversies about common grace and diverse emphases or excesses in various geographical quarters, it remains a powerful idea that dignifies human cultivation and labor as something "Holy to the Lord." But to what end?

14 Ibid., 60.

15 Ibid., emphasis added.

16 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:717.

17 Bavinck, "Common Grace," 61.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 62.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

Eschatological Discontinuity is Ethical

Whatever one makes of Bavinck's doctrine of creation and re-creation, even his detractors ought to admire the sheer adamance and consistency with which he carried it through. One might have thought that the impending cataclysm of divine judgment at the Last Day would give some pause to this enthusiastic (some might even say "triumphalist") embrace and endorsement of the whole warp and woof of human culture.

Bavinck never seems to even tap the brakes.

He is well-aware that the New Testament speaks of heaven and earth "passing away" (Matt. 5:18; 24:35; 2 Pet. 3:10; 1 John 2:17; Rev. 21:1) that they will perish and wear out like clothing (Heb. 1:11), dissolve (2 Pet. 3:10), be burned with fire, and be changed (Heb. 1:12). Bavinck views all this as proving rather than undermining his point: "[N]one of these expressions implies a destruction of substance."[25] Peter's burning fires are *purifying* flames. The "passing away" of the world "does not imply a destruction of the substance of the world but a vanishing of the world in its present, sin-damaged form. Paul, accordingly, also states very clearly that the present form (*to schēma*) of this world passes away (1 Cor. 7:31)." [26]

It is, in other words, only sin and its corruption that is destroyed by God's judgment. The point of the fires of judgment is that the "earth and all its works shall be *exposed*" (*hurethēsetai*—2 Peter 3:10). One might well gloss it as "found out" or "brought to the surface." Our works are, in other words, *alloyed*. There is impurity and ungodliness in them, a "falling short of the glory of God" that will be exposed, brought to light, and then destroyed so that, presumably, the substance (*of our works*, note) will remain pure and *unalloyed*. In light of this Peter immediately asks the "how then shall we live?" question: "Since, therefore, everything will be dissolved in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives …" (2 Peter 3:11). Strive, in other words, to be the kinds of people whose works are unalloyed.

This is in such precise conformity with the Apostle Paul's understanding in 1 Corinthians 3:12-14 that one imagines the two might have compared notes:

> *If any man builds on this foundation [i.e., Christ] using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

"All that is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable in the whole of creation, in heaven and on earth," writes Bavinck, is gathered up in the future city of God—renewed, re-created, boosted to its highest glory."[27] For Bavinck, and neo-Calvinism more generally, the discontinuity between this world and the next is never a matter of ontology, but rather of ethics. However transformed, renewed, or re-created, the unalloyed *substance* (the ontology) remains.

So now to the not-so-trivial question: what *is* Chinese food? What *is* a gin and tonic?

Work Product is Ontological

They are ontological substances crafted and cultivated by divine image bearers. Everything in neo-Calvinism presses in the direction of an affirmative answer to our question.

But here some neo-Calvinists somewhat understandably pause in the face of many real and even bewildering complexities. Brock and Sutanto, for example, in the midst of their otherwise superb rebuttal to Hans Boersma, rightly note that Bavinck follows Kuyper in the conviction that "although the accidents of the world will indeed perish, the substance of the world will not."[28] Then follows this sentence: "The individual accomplishments of common grace will fade, but the germ will be re-born."[29] The reader is pointed to Bavinck's discussion in volume four of the *Reformed Dogmatics* (717-20), but nowhere in that discussion does Bavinck say anything about individual accomplishments fading. The "accidents," for Bavinck, are sin and corruption.

It turns out there is some ambiguity or hesitation on this point in neo-Calvinism. For his part, Kuyper appears to be of two minds. On the one hand, he writes that the "honor and glory" mentioned in Revelation 21 is

> *nothing other than the progressive communal development that our entire human life achieved and will achieve in the history of the nations. And we are told that this profit, which of course is nothing else than the fruit of common grace, does not simply perish and is not simply destroyed in the universal cosmic conflagration, but such profit will have an abiding significance for the new Jerusalem, that is, for the new earth, for this honor and glory attained by our human race will be carried into this new Jerusalem.*[30]

But his next sentence seems to pull the punch:

> *Now we understand, as we used the word a moment ago, that carrying in is not meant literally. No book, no work of art, no product as such will be transferred. 'All these things will perish' [see 2 Peter 3:11], just as the corpse is entrusted to the earth, and the entire body becomes the prey of maggots and worms.*[31]

Perhaps this is not a contradiction or being of two minds. The "substance" may remain, but on this account it isn't much. It is a "seed" or "germ" from which something new will grow in the hereafter. This seems a dogmatic and rather speculative assessment of the degree to which cultural artifacts will undergo transformation, and most charitably Kuyper is attempting to take seriously his reading of 2 Peter. But that reading is a misleading one. Understanding *luthēsetai* as "dissolved" (in keeping with the metallurgical analogy) instead of "perish" goes a long way to solving Kuyper's difficulty or hesitation to affirm that any artifact "as such" enters the new creation.

Further ambiguity emerges when Bavinck suggests that the kingdom of God has a "hidden spiritual dimension and an external, visible side."[32] No one would doubt that to be true; problems emerge when he seems to suggest that the former is the "already" and the latter is the "not yet" of the eschatological kingdom. That is, that the benefits of the kingdom in the present age are "all internal and invisible: forgiveness, peace, righteousness, and eternal life [….] Whereas Jesus came the first time to establish that kingdom in a spiritual sense, he returns at the end of history to

25 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:717.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 4:720.

28 Brock and Sutanto, *Neo-Calvinism*, 169.

29 Ibid.

30 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World*, Volume 1, ed. Jordan J. Ballot and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. Van der Maas (Bellingham: Lexham, 2016): 543.

31 Ibid.

32 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:718.

give visible shape to it." [33]

This is probably too neat and tidy a mapping of the already/not-yet, with the "already" grouped with "hidden, spiritual, internal, invisible," and the "not-yet" grouped with "external and visible." It comes uncomfortably close to contrasting "spiritual" with *material*, *visible*, or *physical*. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.'s exhortations in this regard, that we ought to understand Paul's "spiritual" (*pneumatikón*) as referring specifically to the person of the Holy Spirit, ought to be heeded. [34]

The Holy Spirit is and always has been fully capable of empowering and creating and indwelling very much material, physical, and visible things. Bezalel and Oholiab fashioned the tabernacle by the Spirit's power. Under that same power the disciples very publicly and audibly proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit inspired the physical and readable words of Holy Scripture. The Spirit is present in the very public and physical elements of water, bread, and wine. The sinner who publicly repents; the angry husband visibly softened under conviction; the jealous woman turned contented; the believer who visibly pours forth love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; the one who is God's workmanship walking in the good works God has prepared in advance (Eph. 2:10)—are these not tangible, tactile, and visible Spiritual works in the present world?

More complex still is the fact that human cultural work product is a matter of *both* ethics and ontology. Somehow, in some way, the fruit of labor reflects the religious and ethical character and orientation of the cultivator. Something of *ourselves* is embedded in our "work product." Paul says clearly that our works will be purified by fire and the dross burned away: "It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward" (1 Cor. 3:13-14).

Naturally, we wish to know whether our work product—say, a painting, a song or composition, a cocktail, a product or service provided to others—is pure enough to survive the judgment fire. How would one go about even beginning to assess such a thing? Answer: it is *precisely* the wrong question. The extent to which there is a "falling short of God's glory," some residue of sin and corruption tainting our works is something only exposed (*hurethēsetai*) by *fire at the Last Day*. We are here at the outer limits of our epistemic capabilities. We cannot possibly know beforehand. We have simply been given our instructions: seek to live a godly and holy life (Peter) and build on the foundation that is Christ (Paul). [35]

At long last this brings us back to J. Todd Billings's excellent question: "A friend of mine is facing death; he spent his life as an auto mechanic. Will his repaired cars make their way to the new creation? If not, why does Bach's contribution have kingdom value, while my friend's does not?"

Two rejoinders come to mind. First, this is an argument against a seeming inequity that could just as easily be made against the notion of varying degrees of heavenly reward (which, as we have just seen, Paul clearly teaches) or a protest against our Lord's own clear insistence that there will be "greatest" and "least" in the kingdom of heaven.[36]

33 Ibid.

34 C.f., Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., In The Fullness of Time: *An Introduction to the Theology of Acts & Paul* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 321-335.

35 It is regrettably beyond the scope of this paper to consider the works of unbelievers in any detail. For a helpful framing and treatment of the question, see Dennis Greeson, "Beginning at the End of All Things: Abraham Kuyper's and Klaas Schilder's Eschatological Visions of Culture" *Themelios* 46.2 (2021): 366-74.

36 See in this regard the discussion of the judgment according to works in Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 178-81.

Second, and perhaps more comforting, is that the inequity is merely perceived instead of real. Cultural artifacts or human "work product" are not merely physical or material (or, in Bach's case, audible) things. Human *knowledge*—perhaps above all—ought to be considered a cultural artifact or work product. It is perhaps true that moths and rust will destroy that 1976 Ford F-150 the mechanic spent hours repairing and maintaining. But why should we think the mechanic's *knowledge* of the physical and material world, knowledge gained by way of his whole-hearted devotion to his vocation, rusts or is destroyed? The workman knows marvels; he has tapped into secrets of the physical world: how an alternator works (really, it is a marvel) or how an internal combustion engine operates. Bach's manuscripts may all rot away just as much as a Ford; but the music *exists*. The Ford may rot away; but the physical knowledge embedded in that artifact *exists*. Ideas are just as real as an *aria*.

If such knowledge, as a product of human labor and enterprise and cultivation is to be considered as something destined to perish, is not the implication that we arrive in the resurrection *tabula rasa*? Will we even know ourselves? Will we have to re-learn from scratch how to invent fire? Will our auto mechanic friend have forgotten how a wheel works? Will the Chinese Christian have forgotten how to master the wok?

There are no good grounds to pit the cultural labors of Bach against the labor of others. If Bach's music will be remembered, why will not the individual and collective mastery over mechanics or culinary arts or hospitality or service be remembered? And this is a pleasant thought, for a certain someone will also know how to make a glorified, "paradisial" version of a gin and tonic.

Plus Is Not Minus

No one thinks that human cultural artifacts enter the world-to-come unchanged, and perhaps that is what Kuyper sought to indicate with his "as such." Grace restores *and perfects* nature. It does not remove sin to thereby take us back to the Garden; it takes us back *to the future*. It removes sin and restores, but additionally brings us and the whole creation to its intended end in the consummation of all things. On this, nobody has written more compellingly than Bavinck :

> *The state of glory (status gloriae) will be no mere restoration (restauratie) of the state of nature (status naturae), but a re-formation that, thanks to the power of Christ, transforms all matter (ὑλη, hylē) into form (εἰδος, eidos), all potency into actuality (potentia, actus), and presents the entire creation before the face of God, brilliant in unfading splendor and blossoming in a springtime of eternal youth. Substantially nothing is lost. Outside, indeed, are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood (Rev. 22:15). But in the new heaven and new earth, the world as such is restored; in the believing community the human race is saved. In that community, which Christ has purchased and gathered from all nations, languages, and tongues (Rev. 5:9; etc.), all the nations, Israel included, maintain their distinct place and calling (Matt. 8:11; Rom. 11:25; Rev. 21:24; 22:2). And all those nations—each in accordance with its own distinct national character—bring into the new Jerusalem all they have received from God in the way of glory and honor (Rev. 21:24, 26).*[37]

"Substantially," he says, "*nothing is lost*." Redemptive grace in Christ is more than restoration, but it is not less than restoration. And if Bavinck is correct and Revelation 21 means what it appears to mean, that all the nations "each

37 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:720.

in accordance with its own distinct national character" bring their gifts into the new Jerusalem, we have a definitive answer to our opening question: *Yes, Daughter, we will have Chinese food in the new heavens and the new earth. But it will be better than any you've ever tried in this present age. And perhaps the gin and tonics really will always have the character of the "first sip," and "never a hangover."*

Conclusion

Neo-Calvinism's view of creation and re-creation points only one direction, and whatever hesitation there is ought to be overcome. That is not to say we should not exercise great modesty; we do not know what "glorified" and "perfected" cultural artifacts will look like because we do not know in the first place how and how deeply they are embedded with the alloy of sin and corruption. This will all be revealed at the Last Day.

But to the extent one suggests that the eschaton brings about a *subtraction* of some kind, it is in my estimation a contradiction of core principles.37 The continuity between this age and the age to come is *ontological*: the same bodies, the same material reality, the same heaven, the same earth—granted, of course, with the "plus" of perfection and glorification. The discontinuity is *ethical*: it is the purging of sin and corruption. The moment one categorically denies outright a place for human cultural artifacts in the new heavens and the new earth, the discontinuity is suddenly and inescapably *ontological*, thus reversing the whole neo-Calvinist construal of nature and grace.

Jesus Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil, not the works of his brothers and sisters, the adopted sons and daughters of God. Indeed, those works were prepared for us beforehand *in Christ* (Eph.2:10), and from that vantage point one might justly say that all our work and cultural labors are the fulfillment of the *Second Adam's* dominion mandate. Does the Father destroy the works of his own beloved Son? I propose a brief thought experiment: take away any and all dualism or antagonism between spirit and matter; take away a radically cataclysmic eschatology and its notion of a totally new creation, even with the human body as the token exception. Take away false dilemmas that pit worship against cultural life. What would lead one to think that God, who made the world and all that is therein, who preserves it, gave it to the care and cultivation of his image-bearers, loves it so much as to send his Only Begotten Son to die and rise again to redeem it, who is himself "the Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious God," would at the consummation of all things destroy all of the "in Christ" things he prepared for his creatures to produce for the glory of his name? I can think of no rationale. It seems much truer to God's character that he instead lovingly and lavishly perfects and adorns and delights in them and rewards his children.

Maybe—*maybe*—even with paradisial gin and tonics. My daughter will at present choose the paradisial take-out.

> "'All that is *true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable* in the whole of creation, in heaven and on earth,' writes Bavinck, is gathered up in the future city of God—renewed, re-created, boosted to its *highest glory*."

First Principles and Last Things for a Theology of Work

MICHAEL ALLEN

The faith-and-work conversation has turned with some frequency to the topic of last things. Here we do not suffer lack, theologically speaking, and yet we may still suffer. An eschatological shape to the life of work and to culture-making and culture-forming activities is not necessarily the same as a *good* or *sufficient* eschatological shape to those things. The sort of attention paid will prove decisive. Paying productive attention to the end will actually demand that we turn prudently to the beginning, considering first principles of theology if we wish to make headway regarding last things in Christian doctrine.

Protocols for Theology's Work

I suggest that four principles should mark any account to think theologically about reality, whether that's regarding work or rest, our selves or this world, or anything else that might be considered in light of God and his deeds.

First, Christian doctrine inquires as to the wholeness of God's revelation regarding any topic. Like the apostle Paul, we are only free in conscience when we have tended to the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), rather than leaving a congregation or Christian only partially or immaturely developed. Indeed, God's Word means to prepare us for maturity. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The divine aim in instruction is nothing less than total equipping ("for every good work" or "deed"). Unless we tend to "all Scripture," however, we have no confidence that we shall be so equipped. The whole Word forms the whole Christian and whole church. We cannot be content merely to have a prophetic approach to matters. We will not reach maturity if only we tend to the red letters of Jesus's instruction. We must search out these and other elements of God's Word, so that its sum forms us whole and complete.

Second, Christian doctrine searches for God's own priorities, refusing to insist on its own interest or on the urgencies of the day. It is quite possible for the squeaky wheel to demand oil and for the anxious presence to set the tone of theological inquiry. Some big questions seem to loom today. But they may actually be a flash in the pan, a distraction from the center, or only explorable in the wake of more elemental and fundamental concerns. We need to search out God's Word not only for answers to our questions, but even for guidance as to which questions are foundational and central. Think of the host of issues faced in Corinth. Paul contended with schisms and social strife, with a failure to discipline truly egregious sexual misdeeds, with issues of money and of power, of worship wars, and the like. Yet for all his wide-ranging instruction, Paul still could identify that which mattered most: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures…" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). We might think the sex or the issues of social identity are dominant, and we might personally have a hankering for discussions of charismatic gifts. We are called nonetheless to submit our emphases to the education given by Scripture alone.

Third, Christian doctrine tends to language and, in particular, works to distinguish the uniquely Christian usage of especially widespread terminology. The Bible is not penned in Holy Ghost Greek, dropped down singularly for this purpose alone. The Bible conveys eternal truths in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek, languages foreign to most today but quite accessible in their own day. Not just the language itself but the very terms and images employed by the Bible come from a host of ordinary spaces. Even more shocking, ordinary terms convey the most extraordinary and even singular of events. The singularly saving work of Christ will be described using the language of the slave market *redemption* or of the law court *adoption*. These terms may seem spiritual or especially Christian today, but that's hard-won cliché and in no way marks out their actual usage. They were images from various spheres of life put to work in explaining how Christ saves. Other terms are also put to use in Scripture which matter much and which, simultaneously, mean many a thing in their varied usages around our lives. Words such as justice and love, freedom and responsibility, agency and nature do particular work in Christian doctrine, even as they are invoked by a whole litany of thinkers and leaders in the wider cultural marketplace today. Though theology cannot absent itself from ordinary language usage, it must therefore double down on the task of distinguishing its usages and defining its particular inflections.

Fourth, Christian doctrine finally calls its practitioners to integrity and coherence, to seeking out how *this* element here relates to that concern over there. The unity of Scripture relates to its claims about a unity to reality, one not found empirically in its parts so much as in its theological roots. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). All things being united in Christ means that we are duty-bound to ask how this teaching relates to that practice and how this text coheres with scores of other sometimes seemingly divergent texts. It will not do to treat doctrine like a stream of pearls, gathered only by way of aggregation. No, Christian truth involves a deep cohesion and unity that is mutually constitutive of each and every element. Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians: "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3). Just as it would not do then and there to rely on the Spirit for conversion and then to turn to fleshly power for continuance, so every doctrine must be integrated and connected fittingly to others adjacent to it.

These four protocols mark the work of theology. They can be posed in the form of diagnostic questions: what is the full range of scriptural teaching on a subject? what priorities does Scripture itself model for us? how does Scripture use language or concepts in distinctive ways? where are scriptural teachings interconnected? Each question could be inverted as well: which scriptural teachings have we not yet encountered? which priorities need to be crucified and reordered by the Word of God? where do presupposed uses of language need to be baptized more fully? and how have we not yet perceived the interconnections of Christian faith and practice?

These protocols do not simply occur at some inception point. Rather, they are constant disciplines meant to shape the theological project. Each of them plays a role in putting to practice that ultimate theological principle: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10). Each protocol seeks to be mindful of God – to all he has for us, to his own revealed priorities, to his deputized use of language, and to the way all these varied things hold together in him, for they come "from him and through him and to him" (Rom. 11:33).

So far, the method of thinking theologically.[1] While these

1 For further articulation of these protocols in the discipline of theology, see Michael Allen, *The Living and True God: Systematic Theology 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming), ch. 1.

methodological concerns are a needful beginning, we must press on to the end. Now it remains to operationalize these principles in thinking about work and in doing so by means of the doctrine of last things. In what follows, I suggest ways in which imbalance needs to be redressed as part of the goal of fleeing fragmentation and seeking greater wholeness, both in terms of personal and churchly wholeness (that we would act with greater integrity) and of biblical wholeness (that we would increasingly bear the formative influence of the entirety of the Word of God). To that end, I will be analyzing four claims about how eschatology can and should better shape the integration of faith and work. After doing so, I will conclude with thoughts on what has made these principles seem problematic.

Principles for Eschatology

1. Eschatological Wholeness: over against the anti-dispensationalist polemic, a satisfactory eschatology aim must be spiritual and not merely cultural or physical.

Christian hope involves God "making all things new" (Isa. 43:19; Rev. 21:5). In so doing, newness strikes the heavens and the earth and Jerusalem itself within them. People and their bodies, places and their society – these and many other categories are given new promise and renewed hope.

For many recent Christians, the pertinent word has been a world-affirming one. All things made new involves our bodies and this earth being restored and renewed. Given the way that nineteenth and early twentieth century dispensationalism often influenced American Christianity, these emphases seem apposite to many Christians.

Dispensationalism did not, strictly speaking, say that bodies, work, nature, or society matter not at all. Further, dispensationalism did not even suggest that they were of little religious consequence or of precious little significance biblically and theologically. Such descriptions would be strawman characterizations. What dispensationalists did convey in that formative time period was a hermeneutical posture that treated such material concerns as part of the millennium and as terminating in the millennial reign of Israel, over against the eternal dispensation of the church, which finds more spiritual description in classic dispensationalist literature. [2]

The resurrection of the body and the restoration of the new heavens and new earth are both pivotal in more than New Testament eschatology. They are more central to Old Testament teaching than has been appreciated as of late. For as much as N. T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* rightly commends the fundamental nature of bodily resurrection to early Christian teaching and does so over against the backdrop of second temple Jewish expectations, it massively undersells the Old Testament's commendation of a resurrection hope to come.[3] Ironically, the Jewish scholar Jon D. Levenson's *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* more capably takes in the range and repetition of such hopes for life where none could be expected. [4]

For all the importance of commending such bodily or earthy hopes, the Bible also fixes attention upon the promise of life evermore with God. The parables convey a wedding feast (Mt. 22:1-14). While the guest list may be noteworthy, at the root of the teaching is the idea of a union to be celebrated wherein God pledges himself intimately to another. The Apocalypse bestowed by Jesus upon John frames its final vision with the pledge: "Behold, I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:7; 22:12; 22:20). Already God has announced that "the dwelling place of God is with man" (Rev. 21:3) and that he will be with them as Father to Son (21:7).

2. Eschatological Imagination: over against the impulse to project and idealize the known, a serious eschatological must register the imaginative shock of apocalyptic irruption.

The shape and not merely the substance of Scripture instructs us. Kevin Vanhoozer has prompted consideration of the theological value of the Bible's literary forms in their variety in his essay "The Semantics of Biblical Language." [5]

Eschatology comes in a range of forms: promissory declaration, epistolary address, parabolic analogy, and apocalyptic sketch. That last genre has gained a mass interest, even if it has also meant a missed opportunity. Attention has been paid (in dispensationalist circles especially) to apocalyptic texts like Revelation, yet too often the interpretative approach has foisted alien expectations upon that text. Whereas apocalyptic is meant to overwhelm and to convey the excess of a revelatory truth, too many generations have perceived a chronological road map in the images of the Revelation. That Apocalypse ought to convey the invasion of God and, thus, the interruption of our presumed imagination, whether of the good or the true or the beautiful. That vision, then, ought to startle its recipients into awareness of the bounds of our theological awareness.

Biblical episodes of note regularly claim to reveal much, albeit in overwhelming media, so as to convey the dual reality of true divine self-revelation even amid the incomprehensibility of divine being. When Moses had successfully prayed for the survival of the Israelites and their divine preservation on the far side of the golden calf episode, his last prayer request was to be shown the glory of the Lord, his very face. When God revealed himself to Moses atop Sinai, the event had been described visually, though its unpacking was all verbal (Exod. 34:6-7). When Jesus was transfigured atop the mountain, alongside Moses and Elijah and before Peter, James, and John, the vision was conveyed as luminous, yet the event terminated or found fulfillment again in speech: "this is my beloved son – listen to him" (Mt. 17:5). Even more than these episodes, overt eschatological texts (such as the Olivet Discourse of Mt. 24/Mk. 13/Lk. 21) convey that which cannot be contained or uttered whole. Through excess, through pyrotechnic, through paradox, we are meant to be jolted and thus silenced.

This second concern relates to the previous one. While eschatology needs to take in the full range of biblical concerns, it also needs to acknowledge when one runs to the end of biblical instruction. As the late John Webster said, "because Holy Scripture is sufficient, holy reason finds there its limit."[6] Undue speculation occurs when curiosity is not constrained by data and by divine divulgence. We are, indeed, on something of a need-to-know basis, and we do not have a God's-eye-view of all future eventualities.

The bounds of our perception surely come to blunt notice when Jesus tells us that we shall not be married in the heavenly hereafter (Mt. 22:30). Try imagining a society without marriage in some form. While taking varied forms through the centuries and in diverse locations around the globe, marriage persists as a basic building block of human society. Yet the New Jerusalem will apparently not be marked by that sort of social stratification. It will be perfect, fulfilled, satisfying, and yet they "will neither marry nor be given in marriage." I mention this example less because I want to address a theology of marriage, but rather for its epistemological and imaginative connotations. If

2 See Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle Over the End Times Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023).

3 N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 3; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 108-128. On the centrality of bodily resurrection to early Christianity, see not only Wright but also Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), part 1.

4 Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), esp. 198-199. See also Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

5 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Leicester: IVP, 1986), 53-104.

6 John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 20.

the New Testament's eschatological imagery conveys the absence of marriage, which marks out such a fundamental transformation, then we are led to wonder what else might be transfigured as well. And we are reminded how much we might presume to take for granted, imaginatively speaking, and how very much we ought to walk softly and carry a big dose of epistemic humility.

3. Eschatological Hope: over against the hum-drum notion of aiming to progress and seeking to be upwardly mobile, an ethical eschatology will generate a confidence of transformation and completeness given from on high.

Final things will also be finished things. That need not mean that dynamism is gone in every respect, and it does not constitute a static existence (at least as we might imagine such a calm today). It simply means to convey that God himself graces and glorifies so as to give this reality whole and complete. He does not offer or suggest. He does not initiate or provoke. He completes, fulfills, and perfects.

Christian postmillennialism has had theological reasons it offers for the hope of human projects reaching an intended culmination through God's providential action. The value of such frameworks is that it can rightly promise hope to *this* world and, for instance, to *our* species (though not only to our species). In other words, continuity of identity will be honored by such schema. And yet the matter of discontinuity suffers mightily in the postmillennialist vision. Does it allow for intervention? Does it promise apocalypse? Does it cause us not only to run ahead but also to look up?

This third concern also relates to the previous one. That much (though surely not all) eschatological instruction comes through apocalyptic imagery provokes thought regarding its nature and its momentum. The Lutheran theologian Carl E. Braaten says that "apocalyptic is both a genre of literature and an entire worldview."[7] As noted above, apocalyptic speaks of heavenly invasion and makes use of a range of overwhelming aesthetic depictions.

The cosmic and human future is not up in the air. However much scientific and political discourse may sketch our fate as very much contingent, Christian eschatology reminds us that we live in a world marked by promise just as much and more than in a world shaped by the precarious. We don't know all the particulars. Again, we are on a "need to know" basis in many respects. And yet we are given promises that all shall be made new and that this involves the divine provision of a place, a space, a time, and a temple-less presence. The takeaway of the Revelation is meant to be confidence and assurance, a sure and certain sense that Christ will win and God will make all things anew. Our eschatology ought not only to convey the contents of that text, but it also ought to aim at the very effect of that text's rhetoric.

The market, the family, the neighborhood – empirical observation suggests that these realities – these particular and specific examples – all rise and fall. Fate is no longer in our stars, it seems, but very much in the shifts of untold forces (perhaps mostly unknown) swirling around each of us. Like fractal geometry, the contemporary imagination heightens awareness of downstream effects from unseen players and powers. Despair or depression may seem the natural implication. Suicide, as Sartre said, may seem the vital question. Opioids, on the one hand, or consumeristic distraction, on the other hand, may appear the viable way out. And yet Christians have hope and a bold confidence, not because we are any less limited or finite but because we are alert to the power from above, to the intervention yet to come, to the enthronement just around the eschatological corner. Eschatology gives calm and poise, even as it speaks its most intrusive of statements. And that's very good news, precisely because we experience seemingly rampant intrusion and are very much in need of poise and calm.

4. Eschatological Life: over against a worry that one might be too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good, a civic eschatology will suggest how serious Christian service – particularly of the costly sort – has always been and will always be tethered to and energized by a posture of heavenly-mindedness.

Teaching not only conveys content, which cannot be divorced from its form (at least not wholly so), but it also has an intended effect or response. Talk of an ideal audience or reader may be employed in some contexts to name those qualified or capable to understand the meaning of a discourse, as some instructions demand any number of prerequisites or a certain level of rhetorical and linguistic training. But an ideal audience or reader may also be depicting the right posture responding to such message receipt. A posture of remorse or of hope, of lament or of exultation might mark various instructions just as much as it might pair with a range of musical pieces.

The ideal recipient of this eschatological teaching, that which commends the whole hope of Christians and that centers on their eternal life which is nothing other than to know God, will be one who has "living hope." The apostle Peter addressed the recipients of his epistle with that blessed aim: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). Peter goes on throughout his epistle then to call the people of God to that life, an active and engaged life of sacrificial service and abiding mission.

C. S. Lewis long ago addressed the worry that one might be so heavenly-minded as to be of no earthly good. Yet history belies this depiction. Inept persons can exist, but there's no sign that heavenly-mindedness fits one for such a fate. On the contrary, heavenly-mindedness frames one for the vocation of self-sacrificial service, which alone constitutes the habit of love. "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next… It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither."[8] Why? If we need counter-intuitive love, the kind of self-displacing agency that selflessly aims to enhance others by means of one's own diminishment, then a fixation upon that heavenly object of confidence will play a vital role. It will be vital not only because its object is alive but because its perception gives and grows liveliness in its seer. A higher hope will inspire our lowering ourselves through regular, at times painful sacrifices. Only such sacrificial investment will truly build up the downtrodden and lift up the weary.

Persistent Pathways Otherwise: Lessons Learned from Paths Otherwise Taken

These four principles ought to help keep the faith-and-work conversation wrestling with the full register of eschatological teaching. In each case, I have named threats or temptations that seem to befall the conversation. It is perhaps worth reflecting on why that has been the case.

The faith-and-work conversation has been heavily influenced by notions from the Neo-Calvinist movement begun in the late nineteenth century under the leadership of figures such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. It might be better to say that the contemporary faith-and-work conversation has been influenced by more late-stage Neo-Calvinist or Neo-Calvinist influenced figures, such as

7 Carl E. Braaten, "The Recovery of Apocalyptic Imagination," in *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 15. See now Philip G. Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); cf. Michael Allen, "On Apocalyptic Theology," in *The Fear of the Lord: Essays on Theological Method* (London: T & T Clark, 2022), 103-116; and Wesley Hill, "Apocalyptic Theology," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (ed. Michael Allen; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 315-329.

8 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 134.

Albert Wolters, N. T. Wright, and James K. A. Smith, along with a host of other lesser-known figures.

In a real sense, uncertainty has been viewed as hindering investment while a short life span for culture-making has been perceived as potentially stymieing commitment to such endeavors. In other words, work products need to endure into the eschaton for women and men to throw themselves into their production today, at least with any spiritual conviction. Confidence about continuity from this side of the great transformation to the hereafter is viewed as essential to generating conviction regarding the vitality of such vocations now. The yearning for a return on investment (ROI) makes sense in all sorts of ways, but we might need to examine what return Scripture centers and what returns it leaves underdetermined.

What do I mean and why linger at just this point? Richard Mouw influentially directed attentions to the Isaianic promise that the ships of Tarshish will be present in the divine hereafter (Isa. 60:9). That passage speaks of a coming glory for Israel which is the Lord's own glory risen upon her (v. 1).[9] Mouw's exposition is meant to exclude a presumption, namely, that only souls persist. And yet the implications have been taken much more widely (in hints from Mouw but more fully from the next generation of Neo-Calvinist-inspired thinkers), as if we can confidently commit ourselves to the notion that *this* or *that* product will persist. It is one thing to say that something persists, quite another to speak confidently of this or that, much less every thing persisting.

I have elsewhere referred to this tendency as bound up with a general theological approach that might be termed "eschatological naturalism."[10] With that term I do not mean to suggest the notion of a thoroughgoing metaphysical naturalism as if God were absent and all were matter. No, eschatological naturalists tend to be Augustinians and have strong thoughts not only on God's existence but on his sovereignty over history. I invoke the language of eschatological naturalism to convey the imagination of the heavenly hereafter. God sovereignly delivers an earthy and naturalist inheritance, construed largely as humans might do so apart from any Christian baptism.

Will this product perdure? Will that practice continue? Mouw rightly reminds us that continuity and discontinuity mark this great transformation. But I suggest he undersells the nature of discontinuity, precisely in as much as his eye – his very polemical eye – is watchful of the dispensationalist threat of sheer discontinuity. Has he registered the absence of marriage, for Jesus conveys that we shall (in that regard) be like unto the angels (Mt. 22:30)? If the city and people exist minus that seemingly fundamental of society organization, what else will transformation bring? Does that mean that we return simply to the spiritualist approach of some dispensationalists? No. We simply need to start with the center and resist speculation. More may continue than we know, but this we can say: what continues will be God and humanity in an ordered relationship. Humans will endure as resurrected, even glorified beings in trusting relationship with Almighty God revealed in Jesus Christ. I may not be teaching any more (a possible result of Jer. 31:34), but the virtue and character instilled in me through my decades-long vocation as a teacher will in fact endure and even exist in its fullest form. We are God's workmanship, and his labor is not in vain. As for my work product, well, that may be less clear.

Might we think of something rather different than either suggesting we should be identifying the ships of Tarshish or that we shouldn't shine the brass on a sinking ship? We seem to be on a need-to-know basis, eschatologically speaking, but we do know that God will be there at its heart and that we, in our finally Christ-formed glory, shall be with him. So we should invest ourselves fully in loving devotion to God and to the love of neighbor and self. At the end of the day, perhaps eschatological thought ought not lead us anywhere other than where Jesus says the divine law was always meant to lead, to following the great commandment and the second that it is like unto it. Perhaps here – as in theology more broadly – we can seek to honor the breadth of biblical teaching (not least by refusing to run beyond it), to reorder our priorities to match that which scripture centers via repetition and a host of other literary and canonical features, to pause and allow our vocabulary to be baptized by the distinctively Christian use that terms like "treasure" receive (reading Isaiah alongside the warning of Matthew 6 about setting one's heart on earthly treasures), and to unite more and more our basic Christian convictions and our theology of work and investment.

> "Christian *hope* involves God 'making all things new.'"

9 Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

10 See Michael Allen, *Grounded in Heaven: Recentering Christian Life and Hope in God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018). 38.

Damein Schitter, Ph.D.

Damein Schitter is the senior pastor of NewCity Orlando (PCA) and serves as guest faculty instructor at RTS Orlando. He also serves as the Director of the Institute for Faith, Work, and Culture (IFWC) at RTS Orlando. Damein regularly teaches for Redeemer City to City's global faith and work initiative and speaks on the topic of faith, work, and formation in various churches and organizations.

Fred Sanders, Ph.D.

Fred Sanders is a theologian who studies and teaches across the full range of Christian doctrines, but always with a special focus on the doctrine of the Trinity. Since 1999, Fred has taught in the Torrey Honors College, an undergraduate program in the great books, at Biola University.

Fred has written many books and articles; his most important books are *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Crossway, 2010); *The Triune God* (Zondervan, 2016); and *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology* (Eerdmans, 2021).

Vince Bacote, Ph.D.

Vincent Bacote is Professor of Theology and the Director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois.

Vincent is the author of *Reckoning with Race and Performing the Good News: In Search of a Better Evangelical Theology* (Brill, 2020); *The Political Disciple: A Theology of Public Life* (Zondervan, 2015); and *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Baker Academic, 2005). He has contributed to books including On Kuyper (2013), *Aliens in the Promised Land* (2013), *Keep Your Head Up* (2012) and *Prophetic Evangelicals* (2012).

Gray Sutanto, Ph.D.

Dr. N. Gray Sutanto is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington D.C. Ordained in the International Presbyterian Church, he has served as a teaching elder in Covenant City Church, Jakarta, Indonesia, and has received visiting fellowships at the Theological University of Kampen-Utrecht and Princeton Theological Seminary.

Gray has written *God and Knowledge: Herman Bavinck's Theological Epistemology* (T & T Clark, 2020); (with Cory Brock), *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction* (Lexham Press, 2023); and *God and Humanity: Herman Bavinck and Theological Anthropology* (T & T Clark, 2024). With Cory Brock, he's editor of the *T & T Clark Handbook of Neo-Calvinism* (T & T Clark, 2024).

Brian Mattson, Ph.D.

Brian G. Mattson is a theologian, writer, and musician. He serves as Senior Scholar of Public Theology for the Center for Cultural Leadership, and he serves as Visiting Adjunct Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

Brian has published *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Brill, 2011) and a range of shorter contributions to public theology.

Michael Allen, Ph.D.

Dr. Michael Allen serves as John Dyer Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean of the Orlando campus. He has been a Visiting Fellow of the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. He is a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America and serves as Theologian-in-Residence at NewCity Orlando.

Michael has written or edited many books, most recently *The New Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); T*he Fear of the Lord: Essays on Theological Method* (T & T Clark, 2022); and T*he Knowledge of God: Essays on God, Christ, and Church* (T & T Clark, 2022). With Scott Swain, he serves as general editor of Zondervan Academic's New Studies in Dogmatics series and the T & T Clark International Theological Commentary series.

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