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*The Future of Work,
Labour After Laudato Si*

Work as enterprise: recovering a theology of work

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Introduction



Work matters because it is one of the most profound expressions of our humanity. Consequently, since, for the Christian, humanity is created in God's image, work is also a crucial matter of theological concern and investigation.

What, though, is 'work'? The question is not merely one of definition. There are issues of the nature, value, purpose and extent of work. If work is, in Christian theological terms, a reflection of the nature and character of God, then work can neither be restricted to paid employment nor to a particular time span. Christian discipleship extends across the whole of life in both dimensions – latitudinally, there is nothing in life which can be excluded from Christian theology and, longitudinally, Christian spirituality extends from the beginning to the end of life. There are also, further questions, around whether work has intrinsic or merely instrumental value and whether the benefits of work extend further than the individual.

Work is, at the same time, problematic. The absence of work (at least in its remunerated form) may lead to economic and social dislocation. Work itself may be creative and innovative or it may be routine grind and drudgery. The economic trajectory of work has been one of ever-increasing specialisation, with the attendant benefits for productivity and some complex challenges for the quality and nature of work itself. For the Christian theologian, work as toil is a result of the fall. As a result, the complex nature of work and its consequences are proper areas of concern for the theologian.

Work is not a static concept. Not only does the nature of work change over time but so does the ability of human beings to equip themselves with training, skills and knowledge – since humanity is created in God's image this is unsurprising from a theological point of view. There have been two significant periods of history in which the nature of work has changed dramatically and fundamentally. The first of those was in the period from, say, 1760-1840, and is usually termed the Industrial Revolution. This extraordinary time in British history was characterised by the enormous movement of people from country to town and the concentrated deployment of capital in manufacturing and its mechanisation, with the resultant demand for labour, but often in routine and highly pressured environments, with the possibilities of both innovation and alienation. The second period is the contemporary era, with the movement towards digitisation, artificial intelligence and a wide range of new



technologies. This period, too, sometimes portrayed as the Fourth Industrial Revolution¹ has enormous implications for work, employment and leisure, not least with new ways of working in, the so-called, ‘gig economy.’ Although some observers are depressed about the prospects, theologically speaking, and these developments raise significant and important issues for society (and the redeployment of both labour and capital does have consequences), we should be optimistic, for the very reason that work reflects God’s image and purpose for humanity.

Work, argues David Miller, quoting another author, ‘is harder to define than one might think.’² Darrell Cosden says, ‘work is a notoriously difficult concept to define.’³ Certainly, one aspect of work relates to economic productivity, but for theology, this is a necessary, but not sufficient condition. Work may refer to location, activity or instrumental purpose. There is, however, also an end or purpose to work. So, Miller proceeds to define work as ‘human activity that has both intrinsic and extrinsic value’ and is discharged both for reward and as an expression of purpose.⁴ Pope John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens* (1981) refers to work in terms of the activity through which humanity earns their daily bread.⁵ Miroslav Volf describes work as ‘social activity,’ designed to create products or states of affairs which satisfy the needs of the work and others.⁶ The approaches here of the Pope and of Volf, whilst not the sum total of the writers’ observations, are essentially instrumental approaches – we work to provide for our needs.

In his *The Pleasures and the Sorrows of Work*, Alain de Botton describes the story of a group of ship-spotters, observing a ship and its cargo from the end of a pier in enormous detail, but giving them an insight into origins, purposes and destinations in a way in which we are largely ignorant.

¹ Some commentators refer to four industrial revolutions. The first is the initial movement and deployment of capital in the late eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth century. The second is the rapid mechanisation of process, engineering development and expansion of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century. The third is the more recent ‘digital revolution,’ and the fourth is the harnessing of new technologies and artificial intelligence alongside the digital. The characterisations, although artificial, are useful in general terms.

² David W. Miller, *God at Work*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, page 18

³ Darrell Cosden, *Theology of Work*, Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2004, page 9

⁴ Miller, *God at Work*, page 19

⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (1981), paragraph 1.1

⁶ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, pages 10-11



I was inspired by the men at the pier to attempt a hymn to the intelligence, peculiarity, beauty and horror of the modern workplace and, not least, its extraordinary claim to be able to provide us, alongside love, with the principal source of life's meaning.⁷

The meaning of work, its beauty, purpose and destiny are central to theological reflection. The complexity of work, issues of ethics and responsibility, are equally matters of theology. Work is creative, redemptive and transformative. Enterprise is itself an intensely theological concept and directly related to ideas of work. Jeff Van Duzer refers to work as value creation and that we are called to 'participate in innovative and industrious work.'⁸ Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* (1967) refers to humanity as gradually uncovering 'the hidden laws of nature' and that humanity 'is stimulated to undertake new investigations and fresh discoveries, to take prudent risks and launch new ventures.'⁹

So, to define work. Perhaps simply, 'any activity which reflects human enterprise with intrinsic purpose and meaning and to provide for individuals, families and society.' This allows for paid and unpaid work, reflects wealth creation and enterprise and is functional, but not restricted to the individual.

Work is a deeply theological concept.

⁷ Alain de Botton, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*, Penguin, London 2010 (reissued 2015), page 30

⁸ Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2010, page 47

⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), paragraph 25

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Chapter 1: Approaches to a theology of work



There is a long history of approaches to the theology of work across the Christian traditions. In this chapter we will review, in outline terms, the key aspects of method and outlook adopted by the Roman Catholic Church, the historic Protestant tradition and some contemporary approaches.

Roman Catholicism, both in its wider reflections upon Christian social thought and, more formally, in Papal Encyclicals, has developed a significant corpus of teaching in and around the subject of work. Although the publication by Pope Leo XIII of *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 is seen as the beginning of modern Catholic thinking in the area, clearly there is a prior history to the understanding of work.

Rodger Charles, in his two-volume work, *Christian Social Witness and Teaching*¹, reminds us of this history, with consideration of not only the biblical material but also aspects of work in the classical world and through to the medieval period. Some elements of the biblical corpus will emerge in later chapters, not least in relation to creation and covenant. Charles, though, brings out the tension between work as part of God's original creation mandate and the protections provided under the Mosaic law following the fall as work was corrupted. Much practical and theological thinking derives from the exploration of this tension. So, Charles points out how labour was blessed and commended but that cheating and exploitation was regulated.² He adds by way of further example that Jesus and his apostles all worked and that some of his disciples were clearly of some means – the fruits of their labours.³ Paul, likewise, is an example as a tentmaker and indeed, the apostle commands 'useful work' – referring to Ephesians 4:28.⁴ In the classical world work was a complex phenomenon. Cicero regarded wages as slavery⁵, slaves worked, citizens attended to political affairs and free workers were in effect degraded by undertaking the work of a slave. The crucial development in thinking about work in the medieval period is the development of the monastery. The Rule of Benedict commands several hours of manual labour daily as 'idleness is the enemy of the

¹ Rodger Charles, *Christian Social Witness and Teaching*, two volumes, Gracewing, Leominster, 1998 (republished 2006).

² Charles, *Social Witness*, volume 1, page 22.

³ *Ibid.*, page 40

⁴ *Ibid.*, page 42

⁵ *Ibid.*, page 49, note 21 (page 378)



soul.’⁶ The monastery was a community of work, the land was worked both to provide for the monks and indeed to generate income for the house. Francis of Assisi noted his wish that ‘all my brothers and sisters should work at some honourable trade.’⁷

Rerum Novarum, published by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, did not appear in a vacuum. The background was that of industrialisation, the complexities of poverty, the rise of socialism and conflict between employer and employee. Cardinal Manning, the Archbishop of Westminster, had been involved in mediation during the London dock strike of 1889. *Rerum Novarum* rejected socialism and affirmed private property as the basis of dealing with social questions. The encyclical, however, in its reflections upon work and the respective responsibilities of employer and employee marked a turning point in Catholic thought upon which subsequent encyclicals built.

So Roman Catholic teaching came to emphasise something of the dignity of the human person enshrined in work. Consequently, there was also an emphasis on justice for the worker in wages and the rights of association. So, humanity expresses itself in work:

Man has, of his very nature, a need to express himself in his work and thereby to perfect his own being.⁸

This work conveys dignity:

...man's life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity.⁹

This dignity reflects the nature of the creator himself, ‘work is a fundamental dimension of human existence,’¹⁰ and ‘man, created in the image of God, *shares by his work in the activity of the Creator.*’¹¹ Work is, thus, both a divine obligation and a source of rights and leads to the better ordering of human life.¹² This demands justice for those in work, not least in terms of fair wages and the provision of decent, quality work. So, Pope John Paul II refers to ‘inalienable rights’ with the example of ‘just remuneration for work done,’ which, he argues, is essential for access to goods.¹³ In other words, justice requires access and participation, wages are the normal means of achieving this aim and hence they need to be at a sufficient

⁶ Rule of Benedict, chapter 48

⁷ Quoted in Charles, *Social Witness*, volume 1, page 217

⁸ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961, paragraph 82

⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, paragraph 1.2

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.2

¹¹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 25.2

¹² *Ibid.*, paragraph 27.7

¹³ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 19.1 and 19.2



level to ensure such participation. Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* defines decent work as, inter alia, freely chosen, expressing dignity, meeting needs and allowing for human development.¹⁴

Human dignity may indeed convey rights but the powerful image of humanity in the image of God also means that humanity's natural talents and instincts for entrepreneurship and innovation equally reflect the natural order. Catholic teaching recognises this fact. So, Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* refers to humanity being 'stimulated to undertake new investigations and fresh dimensions, to take prudent risks and launch new ventures.'¹⁵ In *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II refers to people becoming 'more knowledgeable of the productive potentialities of the earth'¹⁶ and points out that the wealth of industrialised nations has been built more on the possession of human capital ('*know-how, technology and skill*')¹⁷ than natural resources.

Catholic teaching in its most recent form is perhaps summed up by Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*

Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment.¹⁸

We have taken some time to look at the nature of work within Catholic social thought and teaching. The approach represents an important foundation and draws attention to a number of themes such as dignity and enterprise drawing on both biblical motifs, including creation and covenant, and systematic reflection which will be highly relevant to the development of a theology of work as enterprise. The Catholic teaching, however, for all its many strengths, is only one part of the historic and contemporary approach to work. Methodologically, although the material contains significant insights shared with other Christian traditions, the complexity of the relationship over time of the Encyclicals to each other and indeed the relationship of the Encyclicals to the wider corpus of both Catholic and non-Catholic teaching requires that we gather other approaches and material before proceeding further.

Protestantism represents a significantly more complex phenomenon historically due to the lack of any agreed corpus of teaching. However, that does not mean that the tradition is

¹⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, paragraph 63

¹⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967, paragraph 25

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 1991, paragraph 31

¹⁷ *Ibid*, paragraph 32, emphasis in original

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015, paragraph 128



deficient in systematic insight. There are some considerable differences in approach between historic and contemporary forms of Protestantism.

We will allow the Protestant theologians, Martin Luther and John Calvin, to speak for themselves in the course of this work. However, the way in which subsequent commentators have interpreted Calvin in particular is instructive. Max Weber, in his deeply influential, but ultimately unsatisfactory, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, established a particular form of association between Calvinism and capitalism which has shaped the discussion ever since its publication in 1904. In essence his argument was that Calvinism, with its ideas of election and predestination, emphasised the idea of individual salvation yet, psychologically, this generated an inner loneliness as the believer sought the certainty of call and election. This quest for assurance manifested itself in the struggles of everyday life. The world was to be shunned, no time was to be wasted, patience, dedication and hard work were the order of the day for the Lord's people. The consequence of this was the Protestant work ethic and its attendant commercial success.

The exhortation of the apostle to make fast one's own call is here interpreted as a duty to attain certainty of one's own election and justification in the daily struggle of life. In the place of the humble sinners to whom Luther promises grace if they trust themselves to God in penitent faith are bred those self-confident saints whom we can rediscover in the hard Puritan merchants of the heroic age of capitalism and in isolated instances down to the present.¹⁹

The influence of Weber was that he isolated some important truths; the empirical observation of commercial success, the rugged individualism of the Protestant mind and the paradox of the certainty of salvation resulting in a work ethic in this world. More complex, and with less rigour was the sociologist's causal links of particular doctrines and commercial effect and his failure to properly understand the nature of both Protestantism (which he rather assumed to be monolithic) and indeed the nature of capitalism itself. So, for example, the role of discipleship in the world for the Protestant is an important motif in reflecting upon work; it does not necessarily follow that this particular expression of discipleship in the commercial world is a result of lack of assurance in salvation.

The Weberian thesis, however, has dominated the landscape. This may partially be due to the low ebb of Protestantism at the time of publication; or at least that the dominant form at the time was a rather rationalistic version of the tradition. The impact has been two-fold. First, the

¹⁹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Allen and Unwin, 1930, this edition, Routledge Classics, Abingdon and New York, 2001, page 67



historic Protestant teaching around vocation and call has been rather lost to sight and understood in the light of the Weberian thesis rather than being allowed to speak for itself. Luther cannot be simply set aside and his approach to vocation and calling remains a central motif in any Protestant theology of work. We will consider this in more detail in chapter 3.

Second, the counter-cultural discipleship of the Protestant theology of redemption has shaped other more contemporary approaches to work. In contemporary Protestantism this approach to work is perhaps most clearly seen in aspects of both the *Faith and Work* movement and a pietistic withdrawal in parts of reformed evangelicalism. David Miller in his book, *God at Work*, analyses both the positive and negative aspects of the movement. He points out that the motivations for involvement are varied and include ethics, evangelism, purpose and enrichment.²⁰ He also draws attention to the dual problem of lay ministry being viewed as increased levels of participation in the institutional church and the theological motif of liberation theology leading to a general hostility towards business.²¹ One consequence of this has been that ‘whether conscious or unintended, the pulpit all too frequently sends the signal that work in the church matters, but work in the world does not.’²² A further consequence of this is that work can come to be viewed entirely in instrumental terms – in other words, rather than containing intrinsic meaning and purpose, its true rationale is primarily to provide support for the true spiritual work of the spiritual kingdom. Nothing could be further from the historic Protestant position of vocation and calling, the intrinsic value of work in Calvin, and, of course, the Kuyperian motif of God’s sovereignty and providence covering every single aspect of human life and work. As Darrel Cosden points out, ‘from a Christian point of view, all human work (and not just “religious work”) has eternal meaning and value.’²³

Perhaps in reaction to some of these particular complexities some contemporary Protestants have sought to reshape the theological debate away from creation and vocation towards charisms and eschatology. So, Darrell Cosden’s work seeks to set the debate in terms of an eschatological mandate rather than a creation mandate:

...work is perceived as teleologically directed and orientated forward toward the future new creation rather than backward toward the restoration of the initial creation.²⁴

²⁰ Miller, *God at Work*, pages 76-77

²¹ Miller, *op. cit.*, page 56

²² Miller, *op. cit.*, page 10

²³ Darrell Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2006, page 2

²⁴ Cosden, *Theology of Work*, page 46



The epitome of this approach is perhaps Miroslav Volf's, *Work in the Spirit*. He articulates the position in similar terms to Cosden:

The first and most basic feature of a theology of work based on the concept of new creation is that it is a *Christian* theology of work. It is developed on the basis of a specifically Christian soteriology and eschatology, essential to which is the anticipatory experience of God's new creation and a hope of its future consummation.²⁵

Volf not only seeks to move from creation to new creation but also seeks to place weight upon gifts and charisms rather than vocation. So Volf describes human work 'as an aspect of the charismatic life', and the 'pneumatological understanding of work' as 'an heir to the vocational understanding of work, predominant in the Protestant social ethic of all traditions.'²⁶ He goes on to argue that this charismatic definition means that it is the Spirit which calls, endows and empowers Christians in their vocations, the presence of the Spirit is essential to enable the Christian and when the Christian displays the transformative values of the new creation.²⁷

What conclusions can be drawn from this review of approaches to a theology of work?

First, there are significant resources across the theological traditions to enable us to reflect and develop a meaningful theology of work with contemporary meaning and relevance.

Second, there are important motifs across both Catholic and Protestant traditions which come together to form and shape such a theology.

Third, historic themes and theologians need to be allowed to speak in their own terms.

Fourth, contemporary approaches can add significant insight but should be seen as complementary rather than replacing historical insights.

If work is to be understood from the point of view of enterprise, then both the dynamic transformative wisdom of Volf is needed, recognising skill and innovation as endowed by God, and the historic insights of creation, calling and vocation. Christian values will shape ethics and both covenant and new creation will shape those values. The combination of these themes will enable an affirmation of both wealth creation but also ethical constraint. Catholic and Protestant traditions have much to say in common, including the reclaiming of vocation and

²⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, page 79

²⁶ Volf, op. cit., pages 104-105

²⁷ Volf, op. cit., pages 113-114

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indeed the nature of human flourishing. We have noted pitfalls to avoid, but we now have the building blocks to develop the idea of work as enterprise.



Chapter 2: A biblical theology of work



What is a biblical theology of work?

Any biblical theology faces a number of questions, ranging from the extent to which the text as received is prioritised to matters of development over time, assessment of themes and the use of extra-biblical resources. These are not matters which can simply be chosen between but are rather nuanced methodologies of approach. In this chapter we will review the basic biblical motifs and texts which are concerned with work before proceeding in subsequent chapters to a consideration of the theological themes which shape this material.

The first problem, as we have already hinted more broadly, is that of definition. In particular should we seek to define ‘work’ broadly or narrowly, in respect of all human work or as it relates solely to the Christian? To define work only in respect of what it might mean for a Christian carries significant dangers of prioritising spiritual work to the neglect of the nature of work for all humans, which is also, of course, part of God’s purpose. So, although some elements of understanding work are of especial relevance to Christian discipleship and we will need to make that distinction, if a theology of work is to carry any meaning, then it must engage with all human work. However, that does not mean that every single aspect of work as recorded in the bible can be covered. Alan Richardson, in his *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*, notes three principle usages, the work of creation, human work, and the work of Christ. For our purposes, although we will want to note that human work is derived from the principle of God’s work in creation, we will concentrate on evaluating the nature, purpose and meaning of our human work.

According to Dorothy Sayers, work:

should be looked upon, not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfils itself to the glory of God.¹

And as a warning against too narrow an approach:

The worst religious films I ever saw were produced by a company which chose its staff exclusively for their piety.²

¹ Sayers, *Why Work?* page 1

² *Ibid.*, page 21



The importance of the task cannot be underestimated. Not only are individuals struggling to make sense of daily work in the economy, but too many Christians have come to view work as a distraction from the spiritual life. Work, though, is part of the natural order and part also of the social order. The demise of biblical and Christian influence over society has led to the loss of language capable of conveying deep wisdom and insight around the nature and purpose of work. The development of the language of ‘rights’ has simply exasperated the process. Christian theology provides both a moral and a spiritual language about work, a language which conveys principles of enterprise, beauty and relationships which tells us, at the very least, that any biblical theology of work cannot be merely instrumental – if we believe in the goodness of creation (the work of God) then the work of humanity must also have intrinsic worth and cannot be reduced to merely providing food and shelter.

We noted in the introduction that scholars find work hard to define. We should not let this trouble us. David Miller points out that work is both an activity and an institutional location.³ However, should work be defined in terms of productive activity, economic activity, paid or unpaid or indeed simply any human activity? Jeff Van Duzer refers to work as wealth creation, generating economic capital and providing goods and services.⁴ Paul Stevens refers to both remunerated and unremunerated work.⁵ Both Miller and Cosden end up with rather long-winded definitions. However, one might draw some principles that work involves:

- Human activity
- Activity which carries both intrinsic and extrinsic value
- Physical, emotional and/or intellectual energy
- Results in human development
- Leads to economic exchange
- Provides for human need

Perhaps rather than a formal definition recognising these aspects of work may indeed be sufficient. However, one can see how the idea of enterprise runs through these elements of work.

What does the bible actually *say* about work? What follows is a summary, we will consider the implications in subsequent chapters.

³ Miller, *God at Work*, page 18

⁴ Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, page 47

⁵ R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012, page 2



The starting point lies, unsurprisingly, in the creation narratives. God's command to his new creation of humanity was, in Genesis 1:28, to fill and conquer the earth, and to take dominion over production. This is reinforced in Genesis 2:15 where humanity is commanded to both cultivate the land and exercise stewardship 'The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.' Some versions actually use the word 'work' rather than 'till' but the sense is clear. God, in his providential wisdom had also provided the raw materials of water, gold, resin and other precious stones – see Genesis 2:10-12. These are crucial verses for a theology of enterprise.

There are numerous biblical examples of enterprise and entrepreneurship. The first origins of commerce and enterprise are illustrated in Genesis 4. Cain and Abel are early examples of the principle of specialisation – one concentrating on livestock, the other arable. In Genesis 4:20-22, the family tree of Lamech is illustrated by reference to those who raised livestock, played stringed instruments and forged iron and bronze tools. The basic point is that this is a normal part of the biblical narrative. The ideas look back to the provision of raw materials in Genesis 2 and forward to Exodus 35:30-35 where we see how God has endowed people with skill, artistic and manufacturing ability.

Then Moses said to the Israelites, 'See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel....he has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft – to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab.... He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple and crimson yarns and fine linen, or by a weaver – by any sort of artisan or skilled designer.

Jacob and Joseph can be advanced as further Old Testament examples. Both demonstrated entrepreneurial flair, risk taking, planning. The former did so in his dealings with Laban and his flocks in Genesis 30 and Joseph in planning, collecting and managing the preparations for famine in Egypt in Genesis 41. Further examples include the entrepreneurial woman of Proverbs 31 – 'she considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard' (Prov 31:16) – in other words accumulation, deployment and investment of capital.

In the New Testament, as well as the example of Lydia 'a dealer in purple cloth' (Ac 16:14), we have Paul the tentmaker (Ac 18:3) and, of course, of Jesus himself. Jesus worked as a carpenter (Mk 6:3) in his earthly father's family business and he experienced the stresses, strains and joys of entrepreneurial life. It is inconceivable that Joseph's business enterprise was



anything other than profitable in order to have been sustainable over some 30 years. In addition to that Jesus' disciples are also examples of enterprise and work. The fishermen apostles certainly included some of wealth and means; they were business partners and (Mk 1:20) employed others. They were thus independent business people in a thriving fishing industry.⁶ Colossians 3:23 reminds us that in Christian discipleship, 'whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord.'

Manual work was honoured in ancient Israel. So, for example, Isaac's sowing and planting of crops in Genesis 26:12 led to the Lord's blessing which manifested itself in wealth and property. Hard work is held in respect and indeed linked to the acquisition of wealth and well-being; laziness is chided. Thus, Proverbs 10:4-5:

A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
A child who gathers in summer is prudent,
but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame.

Further warnings against laziness are in Proverbs 6:6 ('Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise!') and in the New Testament, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 ('anyone unwilling to work should not eat'). The bible praises the work of both the craftsman (Ex 35) and the housewife (Prov 31). This last point is not about gender issues but, rather, the principle of both economically active and inactive work (perhaps remunerated and unremunerated) being equally honoured. However, both the Mosaic law and the teaching of the New Testament offered protections to workers and limits to work that provide the moral basis for work ethics. So, in Leviticus 19:13, there is the injunction against holding back wages, in Jeremiah 22:13, warnings about growing wealthy at the expense of the honest labourer. These points are reinforced by the prophetic injunctions against injustice generally, but specifically including oppressive taxation (Amos 5:11), bribery (Amos 5:12) and other dishonest business practices (Amos 8:5-6) – *honest* labour was to be honoured and respected. In the New Testament, Christ, in reaffirming the Commandments (Mt 19:18-19), restated the basic principle of property rights. Paul quoted Lk 10:7 'the labourer deserves to be paid' and the Deuteronomic law that the ox was not to be muzzled, in a discussion (1 Tim 5:17-18) about double honour which clearly had some remunerative implications including incentivisation. In addition in the New Testament there was ownership of capital - houses and fields – but also warnings about wealth

⁶ Charles, *Social Witness*, volume 1, page 40 and note 14.



and pride. Examples include the parable of the rich man in Lk 12:16-21, Dives and Lazarus in Lk 16:19-31, and the injunctions of Mt 6:24, ‘you cannot serve God and wealth’ and 1 Tim 6:10, ‘the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil’). However, these warnings did not provoke an identical response (Mt 19:21, sell everything to give to the poor, Lk 19:8, Zacchaeus gave half of his possessions, alongside the ownership of property and wealthy business people such as Lydia). These themes are central to the ideas of covenant and ethics which we will discuss in chapter 4.

Work in general is blessed. There are many biblical warnings about the perils, temptations and dangers of wealth, but there are no reservations about the goodness of wealth itself. Property rights were established and lay at the heart of both the work ethic but also social responsibility. The biblical creation and the biblical covenant both understood work to be natural and part of human duty towards God. There are warnings against idleness and injustice. Enterprise lay at the heart of everything which the bible teaches about work. The subsequent chapters will put this biblical material into a wider theological context.



Chapter 2: Creation mandates and human dignity



The idea of ‘creation mandates’ is central to a biblical theology of work. For a theology of enterprise, a creation mandate approach is a necessary, but not sufficient condition. The creation mandate approach establishes a number of basic principles around human purpose, creativity, liberty and dignity. Creation mandates are necessary conditions for a theology of work and enterprise since it places these fundamental aspects of human life within the natural order; in other words, inalienable aspects of God’s creation. However, the consequence of the fall, the disruption of the natural order through the entry of sin into the world means that on their own creation mandates are insufficient for a fully worked out theology of work and enterprise. Further questions around ethics and how sin can be restrained will need to be considered in the next chapter.

Dorothy Sayers argues that in respect of an intelligent carpenter, ‘the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.’¹ Josemarie Escriva, the founder of *Opus Dei*, wrote from within the Catholic tradition that it is not possible to be a good Christian and a bad shoemaker.² Calvin conveyed this essential dignity of work:

Even the artisan with the humblest trade is good at it only because the Spirit of God works in him. For though these gifts are diverse, they all come from the one Spirit; it pleased God to distribute them to each one (1 Cor. 12:4). This does not refer only to spiritual gifts, which follow regeneration, but to all the sciences which concern our use of the common life.³

The theological question is why this should be so. Darrell Cosden, in his *Theology of Work*, argues for a three-fold approach to the nature of work, instrumental, relational and ontological.⁴ The former deals with means and survival (food on the table, a person works in order to eat), the second with the order and organisation of work and the latter with the intrinsic nature of work itself. If work is to have value and meaning in itself, and hence both the act of working and that which is produced convey goodness and purpose then the instrumental understanding of work cannot stand alone. As Cosden argues, in that case, ‘then

¹ Dorothy Sayers, *Why Work?* page 18

² Josemarie Escriva, *Friends of God*, first published 1977, http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friends_of_god.htm, page 61

³ John Calvin, Harmony of Ex-Dt, quoted in Ian Hart, *The Teaching of Luther and Calvin about Ordinary Work: 2. John Calvin (1509-64)*, *Evangelical Quarterly* 67:2, 1995, p127

⁴ Darrell Cosden, *Theology of Work*, page 9



much, if not most, of our human life takes on only a secondary value.’⁵ His ontological view is that work is part of the natural order of its very essence. Pope John Paul II, in his 1981 encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, links this idea to the opening chapters of the bible, in Genesis.

The Church finds *in the very first pages of the Book of Genesis* the source of her conviction that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth.⁶

David Hart argues that ‘Calvin often repeated that God had made man to work.’ Indeed in his *Commentary on Genesis 2:15*, Calvin makes this clear:

Here Moses adds that the earth was leased to man, on this condition, that he busies himself cultivating it. It follows from this that men were made to employ themselves doing something and not to be lazy and idle.⁷

Calvin adds in his *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists*, that ‘we know that men were created for the express purpose of being employed in labour of various kinds.’⁸ Luther in his commentary on Genesis 2:15 also emphasised that ‘man was created not for leisure but for work, even in the state of innocence.’⁹ Pope John Paul II and John Calvin are articulating the idea of a creation mandate, a principle set down in the origins of God’s actions and purposes in creation, prior to the fall, which conveys the intentions, demands and ultimate ends of God for humanity for all time. Hence, John Paul II adds, that these ‘truths are decisive for man from the very beginning.’¹⁰ An appreciation of the creation mandates as they relate to work is essential for the development of ideas of enterprise.

There are three central aspects of how creation narratives and creation principles apply to work and enterprise.

First, God himself is presented as a worker in the creation of the world. The opening verse of Genesis 1, ‘in the beginning when created the heavens and the earth.’ Then, in Genesis 2:2-3, ‘on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.’ Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created human beings in his own image. R. Paul Stevens lists different metaphors of God as worker which appear in the Bible, including gardener (Genesis 2:8), shepherd (Ps 23), potter (Jer 18:6), physician (Mt

⁵ Cosden, *Theology of Work*, page 10

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 4

⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on Gn 2:15* quoted in Hart, *Teaching*, pages 121-122

⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol 2, quoted by Hart, op. cit., p127

⁹ Works Luther, vol 44, 183 quoted in Hart, op. cit., page 38

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 4



8:16) and teacher (Ps 143:10).¹¹ As Van Duzer puts it, the God in whose image humanity was created was also a worker and hence:

Men and women then, were made in part to work, and by so doing to reflect this aspect of God's glory.¹²

This is a principle from derivation. Since God was a worker and humanity is created in his image, then humanity too must reflect something of the purpose of God in work. As we will see shortly this point is then reinforced by specific commands. However, if work does convey something of the ultimate ends that God intends for his creation, then we can reasonably conclude that work is good because the creation is good (Genesis 1:31), work is creative because God creates (Genesis 1:1) and that these are intrinsic values to work. From the point of view of a theology of work as enterprise we might add that work is not only creative, but also innovative; the creation itself being the prime example. A further consequence is that work must be meaningful; since if it were not, then that would imply the creation itself was meaningless. Thus Darrell Cosden states:

The person is a worker, not as an accident of nature, but because God first is a worker and persons are created in his image.¹³

Pope John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens* summarises the idea as follows:

The knowledge that by means of work man shares in the work of creation constitutes the most profound *motive* for undertaking it.¹⁴

This idea then has a further consequence, representing a second creation mandate or principle, that human work conveys dignity upon the individual. The essential dignity of the individual derives from Genesis 1:27 – ‘So God created humankind in his image.’ The dignity of the human being derives from the concept that the human carries the very image of God himself. This dignity has a number of aspects. First, the dignity that is conveyed in the creation mandate means that the value of human work derives not from the particular type of work undertaken but from its human agency. Calvin wrote that ‘no work will be so mean and

¹¹ R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters*, page 10

¹² Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, page 32

¹³ Cosden, *Theology of Work*, page 17

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 25



sordid as not to have splendour and value in the eyes of God.’¹⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* argues that man through work puts his seal on his nature.¹⁶ Work then is a realization of our humanity.

Second, since the creation is good, work too, as a participation in creation must also be good, at least intrinsically. Work glorifies God and the beauty of work is a reflection of the beautiful, and bountiful goodness of God. These are the theological reasons why Dorothy Sayers can argue ‘work is the natural exercise and function of man,’¹⁷ and Alain de Botton that work is ‘the principal source of life’s meaning.’¹⁸ So, the second creation mandate is the dignity of the human person. This mandate effects not only work itself, but also the worker. If the dignity of work comes from the dignity of humanity, then so does the dignity of the worker. This has implications for rights and responsibilities, the nature of work, remuneration and so on.

Third, humanity is commanded to work as part of the original creation. This creation mandate is the command to work itself. The command is located in Genesis 2:15, ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.’ So working the garden is part of the very purpose of God for humanity. This command to work also precedes any prohibitive commands. Work transforms nature and provides human fulfilment. Thus industriousness is a virtue and moral habit and God’s creation represents part of the givenness of the moral order. There is therefore an obligation to work. Work then has value in its own right and cannot be reduced to instrumental purposes, although clearly survival and development, and the needs of others also require work.¹⁹ There is, however, a telos, an end and a purpose in work itself. This creation mandate also means that the creation of goods and services, of value and of wealth, reflects God’s very nature. Economic growth comes from humanity’s application in the production process of the richness of God’s creation.²⁰ We see this set out for us in the creation narratives. Preceding Genesis 2:15 is the description of the precious raw materials which God had provided, gold, aromatic resin and onyx, together with the waters of the river. Thus, part of God’s clear intention for every person is that they work, they harness the resources of the world in producing goods and adding value. Very quickly in

¹⁵ Calvin, Institutes, 3.X.6, edition, LCC vol XX, edited by J.T. McNeill

¹⁶ Pope Paul VI, 1965, *Gaudium et Spes*, para 67

¹⁷ Sayers, *Why Work?* p12

¹⁸ De Botton, *Pleasures and Sorrows*, p30

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* 16.2

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* 12.2 and 12.3



the biblical story we see the development of commerce. For example, in Genesis 3-4 we read of herdsman, labourers, owners of livestock, artists and creative metalworkers.

Taken together these creation mandates are crucially important elements of a theology of enterprise. Together they mean that work is a fundamental element of human existence. Hence work should contribute to human growth and development. Equally they convey that work has some intrinsic value and cannot be understood in merely instrumental terms. Work then is part of the natural order. The creation mandates give dignity to both the creation of wealth and the worker. The fact that God rested on the seventh day means that recreation and family life is also part of the creation mandate. The moral order is fully given in the original creation, albeit obscured by sin. The creation mandates not only endow 'rights' but also responsibilities. The rights and responsibilities endowed, in the production of goods and services, would include the right to initiative, innovation, economic freedom and private property. The creation mandates are an essential element of a theology of enterprise, but they are not, in themselves, sufficient.

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*The Future of Work,
Labour After Laudato Si*

Chapter 3: Calling and vocation



The concept of calling and vocation to business and the economy is the beginning of practical ethics. The motif is one of the principal paradigms for understanding work. The idea is deeply embedded in the theology and thought of Martin Luther. When Dorothy Sayers in her famous essay argued that it ‘is the business of the Church to recognise that the secular vocation as such is sacred,’¹ she was reflecting the deep-rooted influence of Luther. Sayers puts her finger on the power of the idea of vocation.

If your heart is not wholly in the work, the work will not be good – and work that is not good serves neither God nor the community; it only serves mammon.²

Calling invests work with both meaning and ethics and hence sits alongside the creation mandates as a central feature of the theology of work. Paradoxically modern conservative Protestantism seems to have forgotten Luther whilst Roman Catholicism has embraced the concept of vocation and calling to work and business. Others have critiqued the notion from within the Protestant tradition.

We must begin with Luther. Martin Luther’s theology of vocation and calling is built upon two other theological concepts; his idea of the two kingdoms and his view of the spiritual life. Luther conceived of two kingdoms, the temporal and the eternal. The two kingdoms stand alongside each other, under the providence and sovereignty of God, and are different, but not hostile to each other. Each has their respective roles. Humanity lives in the earthly kingdom yet hopes for the eternal. Consequently, the calling to particular offices or stations in the temporal kingdom is the way in which humanity serves God. Interesting for Luther, the conflict between good and evil, between Christ and the Devil cuts across both kingdoms. Hence in the exercise of the human vocation in the temporal kingdom the conflict between God and Satan is as fully played out as it is in the eternal kingdom. This is the battle of ethics *in* both the temporal and spiritual realm, and not simply *between* them. If ethics is a battle between the two kingdoms (true ethics belonging only in the spiritual) then that is the end of ethics in work, business and the economy. There is no dualism here in Luther. Vocation and calling, ethics and

¹ Dorothy Sayers, *Why Work?* page 17

² *Ibid.*, p24



behaviour are the ways in which God is served in the temporal kingdom. Paul Althaus in his *The Ethics of Martin Luther* helpfully and coherently describes the concept:

In this context God has established two governments, the spiritual and the secular, or earthly, temporal, physical. This secular government serves preserve external secular righteousness; it thus also preserves the world. The spiritual government helps men to achieve true Christian righteousness and therewith eternal life; it thus serves the redemption of the world. God provides secular government throughout the whole world even among the heathen and the godless; but he gives his spiritual government only to his people.³

The two kingdoms both find their source in God. The spiritual kingdom is one of grace, salvation and redemption; our ultimate home. The temporal kingdom includes family, work, business and all other secular matters. Both are necessary, established by the same God. However, there are also differences between the two kingdoms, primarily one of rank. Hence the spiritual kingdom has the priority, helping us achieve true righteousness and secular government is subordinate to the spiritual. Here Luther, in his development of the nature of God's providential rule over the world, may have left open a possibility which has led to some distortion in contemporary Protestant approaches to work.

The second of Luther's building blocks in his ideas of calling and vocation lies in his rejection of the priority of the spiritual office over the secular. Although there are some scattered early references in his lectures and sermons, Luther sets out his understanding in one of his three treatises in 1520 – *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. Luther describes the distinction of the spiritual state from the temporal state as one of the three walls of the Romanists. It is, he says, 'pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the "spiritual state"; princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the "temporal estate."⁴ The only difference, according to Luther, is that of office.

A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other...⁵

³ Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2007, page 45

⁴ Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, <https://web.stanford.edu/~jsabol/certainty/readings/Luther-ChristianNobility.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.



If the temporal office is lesser in kind than the spiritual, then these tailors, cobblers, masons and carpenters should be prevented from supplying those of the higher office with shoes, clothing and houses. All are of the same estate, it is simply the work that is different.

Part of the complexity of Luther's approach is that it is driven by his rejection of any spiritual priority for the monastic vow. Thus, '...I would like to take up this kind of life, in order to discipline my body, serve my neighbour, meditate on your Word, as another chooses farming or a trade.'⁶ Gustaf Wingren also refers to Luther's treatise on the blessed life of the soldier emphasising service, skill, fitness and, the right to a wage for his labour.⁷

Calvin reaffirmed Luther's understanding and vision around calling. In the *Institutes*, Calvin argues that 'agriculture, architecture, shoemaking and shaving are lawful ordinances of God.'⁸

These are important principles underlying the idea of calling and vocation in the Protestant tradition which have become lost in the Weberian mists. True Christian vocation involves using God's gifts in service to others, an acknowledgement of the call of God and indeed of the rule of God. Vocation belongs to this world as much as the spiritual realm. As Bernard Lohse has said:

Life as a monk or a nun is thus a calling that is ultimately no different from any other secular calling. The sacralising of an especially sacred career has come to an end theologically on Reformation soil.⁹

The way in which Protestantism understands calling and vocation is deeply influential for ideas of work and enterprise. However, the priority of the spiritual kingdom leaves open the possibility of Protestantism repeating the very error of medieval Catholicism that Luther sought to resist. Luther's re-emphasis on the biblical doctrine of justification inevitably led him to prioritise the spiritual kingdom for fear of promoting a 'works' theology. This has allowed for some contemporary thinking to offer a new priority of Protestant spiritual work as we noted in chapter 1. The contemporary Protestant has replaced vocation and calling with pietism. So, Cosden argues that:

⁶ The Judgement of Luther on Monastic Vows (1521), in WA 604, 9-23

⁷ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, Wipf and Stock, Oregon, originally published, 1957, Muhlenberg Press, page 3

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.XIX.34, in McNeill, *Institutes*.

⁹ Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, page 142



Ordinary, daily, mundane work was at best a mission field, and at worst a distraction in the spiritual life.¹⁰

A truly Protestant picture of vocation and work must account for and explain work, enterprise and wealth creation in the temporal realm, and to that we will return.

There are two further matters. Firstly, the criticism of the concept of vocation. Calling and vocation can be seen as individualistic and inward. Consequently, the argument proceeds that these leads to a static concept that reinforces power relationships and indeed the capitalist economic system. Alan Richardson in *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* directly challenges the idea of vocation to the secular profession.

We must deplore and protest against the secularization of the biblical concept of vocation in our modern usage; we cannot with propriety speak of God's calling a man to be an engineer or a doctor or a schoolmaster.¹¹

Richardson effectively allies more liberal Protestantism with modern conservative evangelicalism. He suggests that our secular employment is secondary and relevant only as means of service to the Kingdom. Richardson rightly draws attention to the danger of dualism or a dichotomy in the understanding of work (that is, you cannot biblically separate out gospel work and secular work) but deals with it by seeing spiritual work as superior. There is a rather deep irony. Perhaps it is also ironic (or maybe that is the case only to a Protestant writer) that Josemarie Escriva, founder of *Opus Dei*, recognises the same dilemma but deals with it by elevating the secular employment to the level of the divine.

You cannot forget that any worthy, noble and honest work at the human level can – and should! – be raised to the supernatural level, becoming a divine task.¹²

Escriva adds that 'we Christians must not abandon the vineyard where God has placed us,'¹³ and summarises the vocation to work as:

It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers in God's creative power. It enables us to earn our living and, at the same time, to reap 'the fruits of eternal life.'¹⁴

Secondly, then, it is perhaps rather less surprising that Protestant thinking developed along Weberian lines and Roman Catholic thought sought to recover the concept of vocation.

¹⁰ Cosden, *Theology of Work*, p xv

¹¹ Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*, SCM Press, London, 1952

¹² Josemarie Escriva, *The Forge*, 687, first published 1987, http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_forge.htm

¹³ Josemarie Escriva, *Friends of God*, op. cit., 48

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57



The vocation of the businessperson is a genuine human and Christian calling. Pope Francis calls it “a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all”. The importance of the businessperson’s vocation in the life of the Church and in the world economy can hardly be overstated. Business leaders are called to conceive of and develop goods and services for customers and communities through a form of market economy. For such economies to achieve their goal, that is, the promotion of the common good, they should be structured on ideas based on truth, fidelity to commitments, freedom and creativity.¹⁵

As we noted earlier, others, Volf in particular, have sought a more dynamic approach by replacing calling with gift and focussing teleologically not on creation but on the eschatological transformation in the new creation. However, the two approaches can be seen as complementary. Vocation, albeit, not alone, is an important building block in a theology of work as enterprise. Perhaps though the idea can be best understood as the exercise of calling in the whole of the period between the creation and the new creation, a dynamic expression of discipleship under God in the temporal kingdom.

¹⁵ Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 6, Rome 2014



Chapter 4: Curse and covenant



Christian theology has interpreted the idea of work from a number of theological and philosophical perspectives. We have already explored, or at least noted, approaches that give weight to creation, vocation, election, gift and transformation. Despite their differences it is relatively easy to see in these methodologies how work is given intrinsic value and the goodness of work, enterprise and wealth creation is affirmed. From an ethical perspective concerning behaviour in the market-place we considered that vocation and calling played a significant role as the beginning of ethical behaviour. However, there remains a tension in theological writing concerning work – that is particularly prominent in the Encyclicals – between the goodness of creation with its implications for work and the impact of the fall and of sin. Consequently, there emerges friction between creation principles and ethical standards imposed by rules and regulation. This same tension is also played out in Protestant thinking where much emphasis has also been placed upon the ‘blessing-curse’ motif in understanding work. Is it possible to reconcile these conflicting themes in a constructive way which recognises the beauty of creation, the reality of sin, and the inherent complexities of a rules-basic ethic? The idea of ‘covenant’ may help us.

The appeal to the curse of work has a long history. The impact of the fall in Genesis 3 and the entry of sin into the world had a direct impact upon work. So, to Adam, God said, in the light of his disobedience:

...cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
...By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground.¹

This is the traditional biblical approach; work becomes hard and a toil. However, the implications go further. The greater the weight placed upon the impact of the fall, the more work is viewed through the idea of curse. Work has thus become corrupted and degraded. As a result work is difficult and complex, we are susceptible to greed and exploitation and we

¹ Genesis 3:17-19



face complex ethical problems around behaviour, markets and business practices. This is the reason why integrity and justice matters in work and business. The reference to ‘thorns and thistles’ in the biblical passage is a reminder of the practical impact of sin posing ethical challenges to work and business. Paul Stevens gives the example of Cain and Abel in the immediate next chapter in Genesis as an example of how this corruption led to jealousy, anger, greed and, in this case, even murder.² So the creation mandates may suggest the enjoyment of daily work with its intrinsic value and purpose, but the fall means that we cannot ignore human sin, expressed not only in the heart but in the structures of business and society.³ Calvin makes the point that although the fall curses work, the curse is partially at least lifted in Christ. As he put it, ‘the bitterness of that punishment is softened by the clemency of God.’⁴ Hence curse is not the end of the story and just as human beings can be spiritually transformed so can their human work. That which was lost is restored in Christ. This theme of restoration has been picked up by modern writers such as Cosden and Volf, but it is there in Calvin.⁵

The consequence of sin is that work can no longer be understood in a one-dimensional way. Work is mixed. This is the reason why the Encyclicals regard work not only as a source of growth and development, an obligation and a duty, but also as a source of rights.

Consequently there is a concern, at the detailed level, for matters such as just wages, the ability to participate in the economy through goods and services, the role of trade unions, the challenges of unemployment and the requirement for rest.⁶ From a theological point of view this is both necessary and complex. There is significant material in the Deuteronomic law, elsewhere in the Old Testament and in the teaching of the New Testament which reflects these demands for justice in work. So, for example, Deuteronomy 24:14-15 deals with timely and just wages, Deuteronomy 25: 13-16 with honest weights and measures – an ethical injunction returned to in Amos 8:5-6 and the numerous (if varied) challenges to the wealthy and to justice in the New Testament (see for example James 5:1-6). The ‘Teacher’ in Ecclesiastes 1 is the epitome of the negative side of work, that all is meaningless. This tension has been reflected also in Protestant and evangelical thinking. So Calvin, like Luther, ‘inveighed against fraudulent business practices’ and regarded it as sinful to offer those in

² Stevens, *Work Matters*, p21-23

³ Edward Vanderkloet, ‘Why Work Anyway?’ in *Labour of Love – Essays on Work*, Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto 1980, pp20-21

⁴ Calvin, Commentary on Genesis 3:19, quoted in Hart, *Teaching*, p122

⁵ Hart, op. cit., p123

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* 16.1, 19.1, 19.2



need of work unacceptably low wages and also that employers returning healthy profits had a responsibility to pay well.⁷ Later evangelicals had a sense of inner conflict concerning money and wealth; success in business was seen as an act of providence, even a focus of Protestant pride,⁸ but carried great responsibility. Preachers and commentators warned against fraud and dishonesty in business dealings, including honesty, adulteration, and poor treatment of employees.⁹ The themes are familiar. However, without a framework to understand the relationship of work as holding intrinsic value and enabling human development with work as distorted by sin we face the danger of dealing with the symptoms of sin without regard for God's original intent and purposes in creation.

This framework is indeed provided for in the biblical material in the concept of covenant. The idea of covenant can help us hold in tension creation and fall, relationship and contract, ethics and law. The notion of covenant is a familiar theme in Old Testament theology (see for example, Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*). There are in fact multiple covenants in the Old Testament and much work has been done on comparing these covenants with wider treaty provisions in the ancient near east. For our purposes the essential point is that the covenant involves both relationship and mutual obligation. The principal biblical formulation of covenant is Jer 30:22, 'And you shall be my people and I will be your God.' At the heart is the concept of relationship. Stevens contrasts this with contractual.¹⁰ However, at least to some extent this is a false dichotomy. From the point of view of work, it is easy to see (and indeed perhaps rather too easy to say) that *covenant work* will be relational. Certainly, this will help us when we consider what 'good work' is within the idea of covenant. However, the reality is that covenant carried obligations, perhaps even contractual obligations, on behalf of both God and the people. God promised love and relationship and the people promised fidelity. There are many worthy modern writings on the importance of relationships in the workplace; but they rather miss the point. Covenant work is both a relationship and a contractual obligation, on the part of both employer and worker. This is why covenant is so helpful. The idea can hold the original purpose of work alongside ethical expectation and requirement and protection. Any theology of work needs to avoid the trap of falling into a mere articulation of regulation.

⁷ Hart, *Teaching*, page 131.

⁸ Richard Turnbull, *Evangelicals, Money and Business*, in *The Routledge Research Companion to the History of Evangelicalism*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, page 248

⁹ Turnbull, *op. cit.*, pages 254-260.

¹⁰ Stevens, *Work Matters*, page 17.



Rodger Charles argues that God's people were 'covenant' people and points out that the social and economic system of ancient Israel was not egalitarian, but there were constant warnings about abuse and the dangers to which the wealthy were exposed.¹¹ This tension is entirely appropriate and an essential component of a theology of work as enterprise as we will consider in the next chapter.

Since the impact of the fall was that 'the original meaning of work was seriously distorted,'¹² the consequence was that work became one of the essential expressions of our very identity. Thus, what we do, what we make, the hours that are put in, the level of income generated all becoming defining features of who we are. This is the opposite of what God intended for work. Work leads to moral and spiritual growth¹³, the better ordering of human life¹⁴ and yet remains distorted and mixed.¹⁵ Essential then to the understanding of how the idea of covenant relates to work is the concept of 'good work.'

De Botton describes this tension, indeed reflected in his title, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*:

We are now as imaginatively disconnected from the manufacture and distribution of our goods as we are practically in reach of them, a process of alienation which has stripped us of myriad opportunities for wonder, gratitude and guilt.¹⁶

The British government's report on work and the 'gig economy' chaired by Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the Royal Society of Arts, was entitled *Good Work*. Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* explored the concept of decent work which included the work expressing dignity, being freely chosen, generating respect, meeting needs, allowing for free association, provides for development and growth and guarantees a decent standard of living.¹⁷

The covenant mandate enables then both positive and negative ethics. The link back to the creation mandate and the original purposes of God both enable an enterprise approach to work, but through calling and the nature of the image of God demand an ethical approach to work. The mutual obligations of the covenant after the fall bring injunctions, regulation and

¹¹ Charles, *Social Witness*, vol 1, page 22

¹² Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, page 57

¹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 127

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 27.7

¹⁵ Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, page 69

¹⁶ De Botton, *Pleasures and Sorrows*, page 35

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, para 63



law (what one might term negative ethics) into the picture. The key to a theology of enterprise is how to hold these matters in creative tension. The work covenant is built on two principles which Jeff Van Duzer has articulated as first, that creation purposes must be combined with ethical limitations and, second, that the market will not usher in the kingdom of God.¹⁸ A faithful theology of work as enterprise will recognize these tensions; work is part of the purpose of God, yet mixed; the market mechanism is provided by God, but is not unlimited.

¹⁸ Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, pages 72-79

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Chapter 5: A new paradigm - work as enterprise



We now have the building blocks in place for developing a theology of work as enterprise. The concept of enterprise is one that is very fruitful in a number of ways. First, the idea is a dynamic one, that reflects God's character and purpose. The dynamic, innovative God is an enterprising God – as shown in the very creation process. Second, the use of enterprise as a motif allows weight to be given to innovation and creativity, wealth creation, the provision of goods and services, reward and incentive. Third, the model permits investigation of human development in key areas such as skills and permits creative engagement with the challenge of, for example, emerging technologies. Fourth, the concepts of gift and responsibility can also be given prominence. All of these ideas have implications for the nature and design of work. They require good and meaningful work. We should also reflect on what a theology of work as enterprise does not mean. A theology of enterprise requires some form of market economy as that is the setting in which these ideas can best flourish. However, that is not to invest the market with some form of divinity or, in a fallen world, to suggest there is no such thing as market failure or even market abuse. That is why the principles established in the previous chapters are a prerequisite to a proper understanding as work as enterprise. The creation mandates, calling and vocation are central. However, so are the requirements of the covenant, bringing responsibility and indeed the need for law and regulation into the mix. What is crucial, however, is that the starting point and the relative priorities are clear. A theology of work as enterprise allows certain concepts – innovation, skills, calling, gift – to achieve a greater degree of significance than is often the case. Proper regulation obviously has a part to play; but if that becomes the point of initial departure, crucial elements of enterprise will be lost, or at least shrouded in mist.

The first area to discuss is innovation and creativity and the implications of that for work in the economy. What is clear from the preceding chapters is that God's action in creation is the supreme creative act and that is reflected in both human nature and human purpose. All of this conveys meaning and purpose to work. The moral order may be a given, but through, for example, entrepreneurship, that order is not static. Central, however, to the idea of innovation and creativity is the principle of wealth creation. Work must have purpose if it is to honour and glorify God. Perhaps concepts such as wealth creation grate for some. However, it is



impossible to read Genesis 2 without concluding that part of the purpose of work is combine raw materials into greater things – that is to add value or create wealth, creating economic capital. This is at the heart of work, enabling human beings to flourish, creatively combining raw materials into the goods that are needed and wanted, providing services to other people, and, as Van Duzer puts it, providing for the material well-being of God’s people.¹ This flows into the discussion of skills and the development of human capital which we will turn to shortly.

As well as ‘value creation’ the notions of innovation and creativity also leads to the conclusion that entrepreneurship is to be encouraged as the earthly expression of heavenly creativity and innovation. The Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* summarised the link of wealth creation and entrepreneurship well:

By dint of intelligent thought and hard work, man gradually uncovers the hidden laws of nature and learns to make better use of natural resources...he is stimulated to undertake new investigations and fresh discoveries, to take prudent risks and launch new ventures, to act responsibly and to give of himself unselfishly.²

This is then reflected in the development of commerce in the biblical narrative, and indeed the examples of entrepreneurship (from Joseph, to Jacob, to the entrepreneurial woman of Prov 31 to Lydia) as well as the emphasis on calling, the work ethic and responsibility. If the theology of enterprise sees such innovative and entrepreneurial activity at the very heart of what God intends for all humanity then we need to be open, in an imperfect world, to ways in which we can encourage such innovation in our work. This then opens debate around how work is rewarded and creativity incentivised. It is entirely consistent with a theology of work as enterprise that private property rights are an essential part of the reward for work, that levels of taxation need to be such that work not only is rewarded more than not being in work, but that work is not disincentivised. It is similarly consistent that enterprising, entrepreneurial innovation is encouraged through the tax system. These arguments of principle often do not feature prominently enough in the debate. Naturally this emphasis raises questions about work design, meaningful and good work, to which we will need to return.

¹ Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, pages 38-39

² Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, para 25



We also need to be wary of regulation which stifles innovation. Thus, Darrel Cosden:

Nor should we primarily or exclusively seek to moralise the markets through legislation that often times inadvertently stifles human risk and thus creativity and exploration.³

That, of course, is not the last word on regulation. However, one of the lessons or implications of a theology of enterprise is that of order and priority. There are proper debates to be had about law, regulation, the restraint of inappropriate behaviour in markets, the protection of workers, wages and conditions. The starting point, however, should not be law and regulation, but innovation and creativity as it is this which represents God's essential purpose for human work.

The second area of discussion is that of skills and education. A theology of work built around the enterprise theme will give significant weight to the development of skills, human capital and indeed personal growth and development. The value of work thus includes its ability to shape the future through the development and acquisition of new skills. This moves the idea of work away from the purely instrumental. This also clearly links into the theme of innovation and creativity and forms an important element of the dynamic of work. Hence Dorothy Sayers refers to work as 'the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction and the medium in which he offers himself to God.'⁴

The biblical narrative contains a clear, and early, progression from the combining of raw materials into goods to the recognition of the acquisition and development of skills and indeed of human capital to be passed on to other generations. We have already noted in Exodus 35 the way in which the bible describes the endowment of skills by God on individuals. Crucially, in v34, Moses adds, in reference to Bezalel and Oholiab, that he has given them the ability to teach others. A theology of work as enterprise will give clear weight to the concept of human capital. The idea of both the development of new skills and the passing on of those skills to others is an essential element of enterprise as a theology of work. Education, teaching and learning are inextricably linked to work. In addition, work leads to not only the acquisition of skills but to on-going human development. This is a constant and indeed valuable emphasis in the Encyclicals. So, *Laborem Exercens* refers to humanity through work

³ Cosden, *Theology of Work*, page 182

⁴ Sayers, *Why Work?* page 13



contributing ‘to the continual advance of science and technology’⁵ and this is reinforced in the more recent *Laudato si*’:

Work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God.⁶

So at least part of what ‘good work’ might involve must include the possibilities of development and growth, both personally and in terms of human capital. In policy terms this would certainly call for some debate around on-going skills development and acquisition, flexibility on the part of both employers and employees, apprenticeships and wider educational questions.

A further point to reflect upon in this area of skills and education is the place and indeed the challenge of technological developments. The fear of artificial intelligence, robots, the fourth industrial revolution and so on is that jobs will be destroyed and unemployment increase. A theology of work as enterprise turns this idea on its head. The process of economic development as set out in the bible directly embraces technological advancement as new skills and abilities are used in order to make economic progress. If such innovation leads to the mechanisation of certain jobs or processes, this is neither the first time this has been encountered nor does it mean inevitable unemployment – that would deny the God of enterprise. There may be reallocations of capital and labour (both of which can be painful) but there is no inevitability of net jobs being lost – there will be new and replacement jobs, but those jobs may be of a different order. This prospect links very strongly with the ideas of education and skills we have been discussing. Workers and other economic participants in the economy may need to change their skill set, to innovate and to be creative as they adjust to new economic realities; this is precisely what a theology of work as enterprise would mean.

The third area for consideration is the transforming impact of work. Theologically speaking, if work is an intrinsic part of creation then it will also contribute to the new creation. Hence, work has transformational qualities. This also reinforces that work is not reductionist, it cannot be characterised by or evaluated by its instrumental purposes alone.⁷ This emphasis also allows weight to be given to Volf’s notion of ‘gift.’ Work is both calling and gift. As a gift work then is also to be honoured, used in the service of God and humanity, and should

⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, preface

⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato si*’ para 127

⁷ Cosden, *Theology of Work*, page 154



therefore have characteristics of purpose, beauty and intrinsic value. Work has transforming qualities reflected in the move from creation, to curse, to redemption, to new creation. Work is part of the dynamic of change as the Garden of Eden is transformed into the Eternal City of the new creation as illustrated in Revelation 21-22. There is both continuity and discontinuity with the original creation. The fundamental purposes and value of work will be maintained but all trace of curse and alienation will be removed and in addition there will be new aspects and new things which characterise work in the new creation. The crucial point is that work is not static.

This then also has implications for the relationship of work and society. Work is discharged by individuals but has clear community and societal consequences. If work as an individual activity goes beyond the instrumental (that is, work is more than providing for needs) then that must be true for society as a whole. In contemporary debates about the nature and design of work, the transforming nature of work, both individually and corporately, means that clear attention needs to be given to the impact of work on society. This transforming nature of work in society is often lost in the mists of debates over flexibility, contractual arrangements, wages and rights. The way in which work changes and transforms society is multifarious. Work changes both individuals and society economically. Income is provided to individuals and families, goods and services for society as a whole, employment and well-being to individuals and opportunities for companies and firms. The purely economic effects of work should not be ignored, rather celebrated as part of God's purpose and his gift of work. However, this does mean that there are societal implications if work is not available or found (hence the creation of jobs in an economy is an overwhelmingly positive matter) and similarly there are responsibilities on employers to pay good wages (that enable economic participation beyond subsistence), clear progression from entry level jobs and wages, and good working conditions. Indeed, this brings back once again to industrial education and skills. Socially, however, work enables participation in society, enhances community and, indeed, contributes to the tax base and the provision of public goods and services.

A theology of work as enterprise then will have all of these characteristics of innovation, creativity, the development of skills, education, personal developing and the ideas of gift and transformation. In a fallen world where sin still pervades ethics will always remain central to practical debates and policies around the nature and design of work. The beginning of ethics, however, is clear purpose, value and calling and hence, although there is indeed an

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appropriate and proper place for law, rule and regulation, a theology of work as enterprise may at least suggest a rather different starting point.