

THE CENTRE FOR ENTERPRISE, MARKETS AND ETHICS

THEOLOGY AND THE MARKET SERIES

WORK AS ENTERPRISE:
RECOVERING A
THEOLOGY OF WORK

RICHARD TURNBULL

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INTRODUCTION

Work matters because it is one of the most profound expressions of our humanity. Consequently, since humanity, for the Christian, 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 timespan. Christian discipleship extends across the whole of life in both dimensions – latitudinally, there is nothing in life that 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 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. The complex nature of work and its consequences are therefore 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, as human ingenuity, creativity and development reflect God's character as creator. There have been two significant periods of history in which the nature of work has changed dramatically and fundamentally. The first was from, say, 1760 to 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, giving rise to 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 Revolution,¹ has enormous implications for work, employment and leisure, not least with regard to new ways of working, such as the so-called, 'gig economy'. Although, theologically speaking, some observers are depressed about

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.

the prospects, 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.

For Darrell Cosden, 'Work is a notoriously difficult concept to define',² a view with which David Miller, in turn quoting the editor of *The Oxford Book of Work*, concurs: 'Work is harder to define than one might think.'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 that 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 its daily bread.⁵ Miroslav Volf describes work as 'social activity', designed to create products or states of affairs that satisfy the needs of the work and others.⁶ The approaches here of the Pope and of Volf, while 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 a group of ship-spotters observing a ship and its cargo from the end of a pier in enormous detail; how this gives them insight into origins, purposes and destinations in a way of which most of us are largely ignorant:

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 says 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 writes that humanity 'is stimulated to undertake new investigations and fresh discoveries, to take prudent risks and launch new ventures'.⁹

So can we define work? Put simply, we might say: 'Any activity that reflects human enterprise with intrinsic purpose and meaning and to provide for individuals, families and society'. This allows for

2 Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 9.

3 David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 18, quoting Keith Thomas (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xiii.

4 Ibid., p. 19.

5 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, para. 1.1.

6 Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 10–11.

7 Alain de Botton, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* (London: Penguin, 2010, 2015), p. 30.

8 Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God: (And What Still Needs to be Fixed)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), p. 47.

9 Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, para. 25.

paid and unpaid work, reflects wealth creation and enterprise and is functional but not restricted to the individual.

Work is a deeply theological concept.

CHAPTER 1

APPROACHES TO A THEOLOGY OF WORK

There is a long history of approaches to the theology of work across the Christian traditions. This chapter 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 on 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 reminds us of this history in his two-volume *Christian Social Witness and Teaching*,¹ 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; Charles points out how labour was blessed and commended but that cheating and exploitation were 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, Charles says, the apostle commanded 'useful work'.⁴ In the classical world, work was a complex phenomenon. Cicero regarded wages as slavery;⁵ 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 was the development of the monastery. The Rule of Benedict commands several hours of manual labour daily, since 'idleness is the enemy of the 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

1 Rodger Charles, *Christian Social Witness and Teaching: The Catholic Tradition from Genesis to Centesimus Annus*, 2 vols (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998, 2006).

2 Charles, *Christian Social Witness*, vol. 1, p. 22.

3 Ibid., p. 40.

4 Ibid., p. 42, referring to Ephesians 4.28.

5 Ibid, p. 49, n. 21.

6 Rule of Benedict, ch. 48.

7 Quoted in Charles, *Christian Social Witness*, vol. 1, p. 217.

private property as the basis of dealing with social questions. The encyclical, however, in its reflections on work and the respective responsibilities of employer and employee, marked a turning point in Catholic thought, on which subsequent encyclicals built.

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. Humanity expresses itself in work; in *Mater et Magistra* (1961), Pope John XXIII writes: ‘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; thus Pope John Paul II, in *Laborem Exercens* (1981): ‘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. 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, hence they need to be at a sufficient level. In *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Pope Benedict XVI 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 – in *Populorum Progressio* (1967), Pope Paul VI refers to humanity being ‘stimulated to undertake new investigations and fresh dimensions, to take prudent risks and launch new ventures’.¹⁵ And in *Centesimus Annus* (1991), 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’* (2015): ‘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

8 Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, para. 82.
 9 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, para. 1.2.
 10 Ibid., para. 4.2.
 11 Ibid., para. 25.2; emphasis in original.
 12 Ibid., para. 27.7.
 13 Ibid., paras 19.1 and 19.2.
 14 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, para. 63.
 15 Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, para. 25.
 16 Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, para. 31.
 17 Ibid., para. 32; emphasis in original.
 18 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, para. 128.

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 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 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 that 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. Psychologically, however, 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 less rigorous, were the sociologist's causal links of particular doctrines and commercial effect, and his failure properly to understand the nature of both Protestantism – which he rather assumed to be monolithic – and indeed capitalism itself. So, for example, the role of discipleship in the world for the Protestant is an important motif in reflecting on 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 in part be due to the low ebb of Protestantism at the time of *The Protestant Ethic's* publication; or at least because the dominant form at the time was a rather rationalistic version of the tradition. The impact has been twofold.

¹⁹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930; Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1992, 2001), p. 67.

First, the 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 simply be set aside, and his approach to vocation and calling remains a central motif in any Protestant theology of work. Indeed, the work of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) from within the Calvinist tradition, with his emphasis on the idea of common grace and development of the concept of sphere sovereignty, may prove a more helpful representative of Protestantism than Weber. We will consider this in more detail in subsequent chapters.



The First Thanksgiving by Jennie Augusta Brownscombe, 1914.

Second, the countercultural discipleship of the Protestant theology of redemption has shaped other more contemporary approaches to work. In Protestantism this approach to work is perhaps most clearly seen in aspects of the Faith and Work movement and a pietistic withdrawal in parts of reformed evangelicalism. In his book *God at Work*, David Miller analyses 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 and draws attention to a double problem: first, ‘lay ministry’ is viewed as increased levels of participation in the institutional church rather than as working out a vocation or calling in the world of business; second, the theological motif of liberation theology leads to a general hostility towards business. In both cases, for different reasons, work and business are relegated to a secondary status.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 is that work can come to be viewed entirely in instrumental terms – in other words, rather than containing intrinsic meaning

20 David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 76–7.

21 Ibid., p. 56.

22 Ibid., p. 10.

and purpose, its true rationale is primarily to provide support for the 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 Darrell 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. 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 oriented forward toward the future new creation rather than backward toward the restoration of the initial creation.'²⁴

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 on gifts and charisms rather than vocation. 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 that calls, endows and empowers Christians in their vocations. The presence of the Spirit is essential, on the one hand to allow Christians to carry out their calling and discipleship, on the other as the ultimate force that enables the transformation of values and behaviour as a sign of the new creation.²⁷

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

1. There are significant resources across the theological traditions to enable us to reflect and develop a theology of work with contemporary meaning and relevance.
2. There are important motifs across both Catholic and Protestant traditions that come together to form and shape such a theology.
3. Historic themes and theologians need to be allowed to speak in their own terms.
4. Fourth, Contemporary approaches can add significant insight but should be seen as complementary rather than replacing historical insights.

23 Darrell Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), p. 2.

24 Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 46.

25 Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 79.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 104–5.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14.

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 indeed the nature of human flourishing. We have noted pitfalls to avoid, but we also 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 cannot simply be chosen between but are, rather, nuanced methodologies of approach. This chapter will review the basic biblical motifs and texts concerned with work; subsequent chapters will consider the theological themes that shape this material.

The first problem, as has already been hinted at 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. God, of course, has purpose in work for all humanity in creation, not only those who receive the redemptive transformation of Christ. 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 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 principal 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 fulfil 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

The importance of the task of appreciating the true nature and purposes of work 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

1 Dorothy Sayers, *Why Work?: An Address Delivered at Eastbourne, April 23rd, 1942* (London: Methuen, 1942), p. 1.

2 Ibid., p. 21.

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 that 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 remunerated as well as unremunerated work.⁵ David Miller and Darrell Cosden both end up with rather longwinded definitions. However, perhaps one might say that work involves at least the following:

- human activity;
- activity that 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. In any event, 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; subsequent chapters will consider the implications.

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.

3 David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 18.

4 Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God: (And What Still Needs to be Fixed)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), p. 47.

5 R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 2.

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 on 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 in 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.



Christ in the House of His Parents by Sir John Everett Millais, 1849-50

In the New Testament, as well as the example of Lydia, ‘a dealer in purple cloth’ (Acts 16.14), we have Paul the tentmaker (Acts 18.3) and, of course, the example of Jesus himself. Jesus worked as a carpenter (Mark 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 employed others (Mark 1.20). 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. 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 (Exod. 35) and the housewife (Prov. 31). This last point is not about gender issues, 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. 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 (Matt. 19.18–19), restated the basic principle of property rights. In a discussion about double honour that clearly had some remunerative implications, including incentivisation (1 Tim. 5.17–18), Paul quoted Luke 10.7 (‘the labourer deserves to be paid’) and the Deuteronomic law that the ox was not to be muzzled. In addition in the New Testament there was ownership of capital – houses and fields – but also warnings about wealth and pride. Examples include the parable of the rich man in Luke 12.16–21, Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16.19–31 and the injunctions of Matthew 6.24 (‘You cannot serve God and wealth’) and 1 Timothy 6.10 (‘the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil’). However, these warnings did not provoke an identical response: in Matthew 19.21, it is to sell everything to give to the poor; in Luke 19.8, Zacchaeus gave half of his possessions; and then there are the ownership of property and wealthy business people such as Lydia. These themes are central to the ideas of covenant and ethics that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

⁶ Rodger Charles, *Christian Social Witness and Teaching: The Catholic Tradition from Genesis to Centesimus Annus* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998, 2006), vol. 1, p. 40 and n. 14.

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 the Bible teaches about work. The following chapters will put this biblical material into a wider theological context.

CHAPTER 3

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 they place these fundamental aspects of human life within the natural order; in other words, as 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 Josemaría Escrivá, 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 *A Theology of Work*, argues for a threefold approach to the nature of work: instrumental, relational and ontological.⁴ The first 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 last 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. In that case, as Cosden argues, ‘then 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 life’s

1 Dorothy Sayers, *Why Work? An Address Delivered at Eastbourne, April 23rd, 1942* (London: Methuen, 1942), p. 18.

2 Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, first published 1977, http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friends_of_god.htm, p. 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, p. 127.

4 Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 9.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

very essence. In *Laborem Exercens* (1981), Pope John Paul II links this idea to the opening chapters of the Bible: ‘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 He 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 In his own commentary on Genesis 2.15, Luther 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, these ‘truths are decisive for man from the very beginning’.¹⁰

Abraham Kuyper, as a representative of the Calvinist tradition, draws attention to an important point of difference between Luther and Calvin. Kuyper was a pastor, theologian, politician and journalist. He defended conservative theological positions, founded a university, newspaper and a political party and served as the prime minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905. Most of Kuyper’s work was written in Dutch, although his 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton, *Lectures on Calvinism*, were published in English and his wider works are currently being translated into 12 volumes. In his first lecture on Calvinism, Kuyper makes the point that ‘Luther’s starting point was the special-soteriological principle of a justifying faith; while Calvin’s, extending far wider, lay in the general cosmological principle of the sovereignty of God.’¹¹ He expanded this in his third lecture, ‘Calvinism and Politics’: ‘this dominating principle was not soteriologically, justification by faith, but, in the widest sense cosmologically, the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible.’¹² Kuyper is essentially setting out the idea of a creation mandate within neo-Calvinism. This has implications for both the place of the mandates in a fallen world (see Chapter 3) and for vocation and calling (see Chapter 4).

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 in the opening verse of Genesis 1: ‘In the beginning when God 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. Paul Stevens lists different metaphors of God as worker that appear in the Bible, including gardener (Gen. 2.8), shepherd (Ps. 23), potter (Jer. 18.6), physician (Matt. 8.16) and

6 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, para. 4; emphasis in original.

7 Calvin, ‘Commentary on Gen. 2.15’, quoted in Hart, op. cit., pp. 121–2.

8 Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 2, quoted in Hart, op. cit., p. 127.

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

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

11 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Lecture 1 (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), p. 13.

12 Ibid., Lecture 3, p. 57.

teacher (Ps. 143.10).¹³ As Jeff 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.’¹⁴ 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 (Gen. 1.31), work is creative because God creates (Gen. 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 were it not, the implication would be that the creation itself was meaningless. Thus 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.’¹⁵



Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden by Wenzel Peter, 1829.

In *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II 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.’¹⁶ This idea then has a further consequence, representing a second creation mandate or principle:

13 R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 10.

14 Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God: (And What Still Needs to be Fixed)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), p. 32.

15 Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, p. 17.

16 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, para. 25; emphasis in original.

that human work confers dignity on 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 sordid as not to have splendour and value in the eyes of God.’¹⁷ In *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), Pope Paul VI argues that man through work puts his seal on his nature.¹⁸ Work then is a realisation of our humanity.

Second, since the creation is good, so work, 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 that work is ‘the natural exercise and function of man’,¹⁹ and Alain de Botton that it is ‘the principal source of life’s meaning’.²⁰ The second creation mandate is therefore the dignity of the human person. This mandate affects 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.’ 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.²¹ 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.²² We see this set out for us in the creation narratives. Preceding Genesis 2.15 is the description of the precious raw materials 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, harness the resources of the world in producing goods and adding value. Very quickly in 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. The debate over what Paul Ricoeur refers to as ‘what degree of independence is to be accorded the doctrine of creation in relation to the fundamental soteriological affirmation that is assumed to

17 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.X.6, Library of Christian Classics, vol. XX, ed. J. T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960).

18 Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, para. 67.

19 Sayers, *Why Work?*, p. 12.

20 Alain de Botton, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* (London: Penguin, 2010, 2015), p. 30.

21 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, para. 16.2.

22 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, paras 12.2 and 12.3.

run through both testaments of the Bible?²³ crucially shapes attitudes to work, politics and wider public engagement. These creation mandates 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 are 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.

23 Quoted in Craig Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2017), p. 35.

CHAPTER 4

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, while 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, whose theology of vocation and calling is built on 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 from but not hostile to each other. Each has its respective role. 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 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 behaviour are the ways God is served in the temporal kingdom. Paul Althaus, in *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 to preserve external secular righteousness; it thus also preserves this physical, earthly, temporal life and thereby preserves the world. The spiritual government helps men to achieve true Christian righteousness and therewith eternal life; it thus serves the redemption of the

1 Dorothy Sayers, *Why Work? An Address Delivered at Eastbourne, April 23rd, 1942* (London: Methuen, 1942), p. 17.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

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 that 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, he 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

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



Martin Luther (1483-1546)

3 Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1972, 2007), p. 45.

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

5 Ibid.

6 Quoted in Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), p. 142.

on the blessed life of the soldier, which emphasises 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* he 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 that 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 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. Thus Cosden argues that: '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. Here, however, we should refer further to Abraham Kuyper and the idea of sphere sovereignty and how that relates to vocation and calling. He developed the concept of sphere sovereignty both in his *Lectures on Calvinism* and in his inaugural address at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880. He viewed the world as divided into spheres, each of which was independent and had its own rights and prerogatives, each sphere being under the sovereignty of God. Hence each sphere was to be honoured in its own right. Business was one such sphere:

. . . we understand hereby, that the family, the business, science, art and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the state, and which do not derive the law of their life from the superiority of the state, but obey a high authority within their own bosom; an authority which rules, by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the State does.¹¹

7 Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1957; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), p. 3.

8 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.XIX.34, Library of Christian Classics, vol. XX, ed. J. T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960).

9 Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, p. 142.

10 Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. xv.

11 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Lecture 3 (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), p. 66.

The implication of this for both vocation and work generally is clear. Business and the economy is a sphere of work in its own right under the sovereignty of God. Hence, ‘the duty is now emphasised of serving God in the world, in every position of life.’¹² This, for Kuyper, is the beginning of ethics:

Wherever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand, in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art and science, he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of God, he is employed in the service of God, he has strictly to obey God, and, above all, he has to aim to the glory of God.¹³

Kuyper’s voice needs to be heard again in any theology of work and enterprise.

There are two further matters. First, the criticism of the concept of vocation. Calling and vocation can be seen as individualistic and inward. Consequently, the argument proceeds that these lead 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 secularisation 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.’¹⁴

Richardson effectively allies more liberal Protestantism with modern conservative evangelicalism. He suggests that our secular employment is secondary, relevant only as a means of service to the kingdom. Although he 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), he deals with it by seeing spiritual work as superior. There is a rather deep irony. Perhaps it is also ironic – or maybe that is only the case to a Protestant writer – that Josemaría Escrivá, 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.’¹⁵ Escrivá adds that ‘we Christians must not abandon the vineyard where God has placed us’,¹⁶ 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”.’¹⁷

Second, 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:

12 Ibid., Lecture 1, p. 19.

13 Ibid., Lecture 2, p. 37.

14 Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* (London: SCM Press, 1952).

15 Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge* (first published 1987), p. 687; http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_forge.htm.

16 Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God* (first published 1977); http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friends_of_god.htm, p. 48.

17 Ibid., p. 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.¹⁸

As we noted earlier, others – Miroslav Volf in particular – have sought a more dynamic approach by replacing calling with gift and focusing 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.

18 Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection*, 4th edn (Vatican City: Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, 2014), p. 5.

CHAPTER 5

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 marketplace, 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 – 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 on the ‘blessing–curse’ motif in understanding work. Is it possible to reconcile these conflicting themes in a constructive way that 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 on work. God said to Adam, 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. (Gen. 3.17–19)

This is the traditional biblical approach: work becomes hard and a toil. However, the implications go further. The greater the weight placed on 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 face complex ethical problems around behaviour, markets and business practices. This is the reason why integrity and justice matter 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.¹ The creation mandates may suggest the enjoyment of daily work with its intrinsic value and purpose, but the fall means we cannot ignore human sin, expressed not only in the heart but in the structures of business and society.² Calvin makes the point that although the fall curses work, the curse is, partly at least, lifted in Christ. As he put it: ‘the bitterness of that punishment is softened by the clemency of God.’³ Hence curse is not the end of the story, and just as human beings can be spiritually transformed, so can their human work. What was lost is restored in Christ. This theme of restoration has been picked up by modern writers such as Darrell Cosden and Miroslav Volf, but it is there in Calvin.⁴ The theme is further developed by Abraham Kuyper who, in his exposition of the idea of common grace, argued that ‘the curse is restrained by grace.’⁵ Kuyper argues that God, in his mercy, institutes order and government, as instruments of common grace for the good of all people. This clearly continues the idea of Calvin’s cosmological principle: common grace preserves, at least to some degree, creation after the fall and upholds and underpins the creation mandates. Work and enterprise will retain intrinsic value, alongside the complexities introduced by the fall and sin.

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, as well as elsewhere in the Old Testament and in the teaching of the New Testament, that reflects these demands for justice in work. So, for example, Deuteronomy 24.14–15 deals with timely and just wages, and 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. Calvin, like Luther, ‘inveighed against fraudulent business practices’ and regarded it as sinful to offer those in need of work unacceptably low wages; 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 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,

1 R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 21–3.

2 Edward Vanderkloet, ‘Why Work Anyway?’, in Paul Marshall et al., *Labour of Love: Essays on Work* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1980), pp. 20–1.

3 Calvin, ‘Commentary on Genesis 3.19’, quoted in Ian Hart, ‘The Teaching of Luther and Calvin about Ordinary Work: 2. John Calvin (1509–64)’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 67:2, 1995, p. 122.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

5 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Lecture 1 (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), p. 20.

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

7 Hart, ‘The Teaching of Luther and Calvin about Ordinary Work: 2. John Calvin’, p. 131.

8 Richard Turnbull, ‘Evangelicals, Money and Business’, in *The Routledge Research Companion to the History of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 248.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 254–60.

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 is a familiar theme in Old Testament theology – see, for example, Walther Eichrodt's *The Theology of the Old Testament*.¹⁰ There are in fact multiple covenants in the Old Testament and much work has been done on comparing these 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 Jeremiah 30.22: 'And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.' At heart is the concept of relationship. Paul Stevens contrasts this with contractual obligations or relationships.¹¹ 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 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.

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 that there were continual warnings about abuse and the dangers to which the wealthy were exposed.¹² 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',¹³ the consequence was that work became one of the essential expressions of our very identity. Thus what we do, what we make, the hours we put in, the level of income generated all become defining features of who we are. This is the opposite of what God intended for work. Work leads to moral and spiritual growth,¹⁴ the better ordering of human life,¹⁵ and yet remains distorted and mixed.¹⁶ Essential, then, to the understanding of how the idea of covenant relates to work is the concept of 'good work'.

Alain de Botton describes this tension, indeed reflected in the title of his book, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*: 'We are now as imaginatively disconnected from the manufacture and distribution

10 Walther Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1961).

11 Stevens, *Work Matters*, p. 17.

12 Rodger Charles, *Christian Social Witness and Teaching: The Catholic Tradition from Genesis to Centesimus Annus* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998, 2006), vol. 1, p. 22.

13 Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God: (And What Still Needs to be Fixed)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), p. 57.

14 Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, para. 127.

15 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, para. 27.7.

16 Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, p. 69.

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.¹⁷



Rocket Factory, SpaceX, (California, USA)

The report produced by the review chaired by Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the Royal Society of Arts, for the British government on work, including the ‘gig economy’, was entitled *Good Work*.¹⁸ In *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Pope Benedict XVI explored the concept of decent work, which included work expressing dignity, being freely chosen, generating respect, meeting needs, allowing for free association, providing for development and growth and guaranteeing a decent standard of living.¹⁹

The covenant mandate, then, enables both positive and negative ethics. The link back to the creation mandates, the original purposes of God and the idea of common grace enables an enterprise approach to work, but through calling and the nature of the image of God demands an ethical approach to work. The mutual obligations of the covenant after the fall bring injunctions, regulation and 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.²⁰ A faithful theology of work as enterprise will recognise these tensions; work is part of the purpose of God, yet mixed; the market mechanism is provided by God but is not unlimited.

17 Alain de Botton, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* (London: Penguin, 2010, 2015), p. 35.

18 *Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices* (London: Royal Society of Arts, 2017).

19 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, para. 63.

20 Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, pp. 72–9.

CHAPTER 6

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 fruitful in a number of ways:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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 of work as enterprise. The creation mandates, common grace, 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 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 their implications for work in the economy. What is clear from the preceding chapters is that God's action in creation is the supreme creative act, 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, but it is impossible to read Genesis 2 without concluding that part of the purpose of work is to 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 Jeff 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, to which we will turn 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 Proverbs 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 we can



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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 is not only rewarded more than not working, but is also 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.

We also need to be wary of regulation that stifles innovation. Darrel Cosden writes: 'Nor should we primarily or exclusively seek to moralise the markets through legislation that often times

¹ Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God: (And What Still Needs to be Fixed)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), pp. 38–9.

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

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 that represents God's essential purpose for human work.

The second area to discuss is 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, which 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, from Exodus 35, the way the Bible describes how God endows individuals with skills. Crucially, in verse 34 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 their passing on 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 not only to the acquisition of skills but also to ongoing human development. This is a constant and indeed valuable emphasis in the encyclicals. *Laborem Exercens* refers to humanity through work contributing 'to the continual advance of science and technology',⁵ which 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 ongoing skills development and acquisition, flexibility on the part of both employers and employees, apprenticeships and wider educational questions.

A further point to reflect on 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 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

3 Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 182.

4 Dorothy Sayers, *Why Work? An Address Delivered at Eastbourne, April 23rd, 1942* (London: Methuen, 1942), p. 13.

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

6 Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, para. 127.

of which can be painful), but there is no inevitability of net jobs being lost – there will be new and replacement jobs, but these 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 to discuss 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 or evaluated by its instrumental purposes alone.⁷ This emphasis also allows weight to be given to Miroslav Volf's notion of 'gift'. Work is both calling and gift. As a gift, then, work is also to be honoured, used in the service of God and humanity, and should 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; it 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 traces of curse and alienation will be removed and in addition there will be new aspects and new things that characterise work in the new creation. The crucial point is that work is not static.

This 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 ways work changes and transforms society are multifarious. It changes both individuals and society economically: incomes are provided to individuals and families, goods and services to society as a whole, employment and well-being to individuals, and opportunities to companies and firms. The purely economic effects 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), provide clear progression from entry-level jobs and wages, and good working conditions. Indeed, this brings us back 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 will have all of these characteristics of innovation, creativity, the development of skills, education, personal development and the ideas of gift and transformation. In a fallen world in which 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 appropriate and proper place for law, rule and regulation – a theology of work as enterprise may at least suggest a rather different starting point.

7 Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, p. 154.

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