

**Toward a Theology of Work & Business:
Reflections on Christianity, Calling & Commerce**

Introduction

Imagine two scenes:

SCENE ONE: I stood transfixed with a cup of coffee in my hand in the wide bulkhead of the Lufthansa 747 as I watch the slight movement of the digital picture of a jet airplane making its way along the red arched line of the flight path on the flight navigator screen. We were directly over Istanbul, Turkey, the old eastern seat of Roman Empire, Constantinople. I was on my way to Bombay, India six weeks into a grinding eight weeks of late nights and early mornings. I was in a stupor, exhausted from the rigors of an RFP response project to win a multi-billion dollar global information technology outsourcing deal. Staring at the screen, my mind wandered to where it has so often gone before, to the question of the meaning of it all. What was I doing? What was the purpose of what I spent so much time doing; was there any meaning to what so often put me in the mass of sterile, contrived comfort of airport terminals, in so many different hotels that I would too often go to the wrong room, even the wrong floor, mistaking where I was this time for where I was the week before? How could I make sense out of something that so frequently took me away from home and away from my wife whom I love so much?

SCENE TWO: Sitting in the pew, my head bowed in prayer, then rising to sing, surrounded by a crowd of familiar people, my extended family in the Faith. As we all sing the words of the mellifluous hymn, Great is Thy Faithfulness, I'm struck by the comprehensiveness of the second verse:

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Tears begin to flow down my cheek and into my beard. I am overcome. The whole of all creation, nature as we call it, me and all those around me from the depths of our souls, altogether in this very moment we join in bearing manifold witness to God's great faithfulness, mercy and love.

These two scenes speak of two worlds, it seems: One world, the life of day-to-day business, the grind and exhaustion of it and the satisfaction of a job well done; the other where the grandness of the whole story of life is made sense of, where even the majestic and incomprehensible is palpable, the world of the Spirit where we feel intimately "at home" among friends and family in common worship of almighty God.

Is reality actually two sheets of cloth or only one, sewn together in such a way that all of creation can join in manifold witness to God's great faithfulness, mercy and love? Is there one *eternal* world where the truly important things occur and another *temporal* world where the necessary but not really meaningful things occur?

Henry David Thoreau said,

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessities and means of life, it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other.¹

Thoreau's comment on the silent, unspoken thoughts of most men expresses the sense of meaninglessness of the day-to-dayness of life born of a two-cloth world. Interestingly, in context, what he says is about the day-to-day work that the average person

¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*.

does. His comment about “the catechism” and “the chief end of man” is a direct reference to the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: Q: What is the chief end of man? A: To glorify God and enjoy him forever.² Thoreau captures well the great divide so many people feel when they deeply reflect on the routines of their daily lives in comparison to activities and experiences that they associate with their spiritual life and eternally important things. And this divide, as Thoreau implies, does not simply go away when one positively answers the Catechism’s question.

Despite giving verbal ascent to the notion that the meaning in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, most Christians continue to have deep struggles with the meaning of what they do day-to-day in comparison with what they do on Sundays or in activities typically associated with the spiritual, the ministry-oriented, or the “eternally” important.

What is the church’s answer to this very real, very practical, and very pastoral problem? This is the problem I want to try to address today. I’ve called this lecture *Toward a Theology of Work & Business: Reflections on Christianity, Calling and Commerce*. My objective is not to provide a detailed and thorough exploration of this topic. Nor do I plan to answer all the nuances of the problem. Rather, in our short time, I wish simply to spur renewed interest and work within the Christian university on this topic so that the university’s reach might influence both those in or going into full-time ministry and those who do or will do work in the more common day-to-day world of business and commerce to see life in a more theologically integrated and therefore ontologically³ meaningful way.

My audience, scope and approach are as follows. First, I am speaking mostly to the church not the broader world, and specifically to the evangelical church. Second, most of what I have to say will not be new to most of you, but will be a reminder. The following is my approach.

- First, I will review briefly two broad views (distortions) held and often taught in the church that contribute to the problem of work – and I will show that even today,

² *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part I Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 1994), p. 181. Thoreau’s point is, of course, that this “end” is unsatisfying.

despite some very good recent work done on an integrated theology of work & business, the church continues to use rhetoric that contributes to rather than helps solve the problem.

- Second, I will review three salient points of a good theology of work in an attempt to re-infuse the message of the church on this subject with a robustness that moves toward a solution rather than perpetuating the problem.
- Third, to sum things up I will briefly mention how calling is the ultimate pastoral answer to an integrated, ontologically meaningful life, by helping us to see our day-to-day work lives as integral with the very acts of worship & service that so often cause us to separate life into two distinct spheres.

The Church's Contribution to the Problem of Work

Unexpectedly, the often implied and sometimes explicit teaching of the church is one of the greatest contributors to the problem of a demeaned and ontologically meaningless view of work. This is particularly unexpected in the Protestant evangelical church because of our legacy of the Reformation, Puritanism and Biblical theology. But the church does indeed contribute to the problem rather than help repair it.

This contribution to the problem can be best understood as **two broad distortions**, both under the umbrella of a dualistic view of reality. The most typical distortion in the Catholic and the evangelical church is the elevation of spiritual/eternal matters above fleshly/temporal matters – or, if you will, a marked separation between the sacred and the secular. Os Guinness calls this the **Catholic Distortion**.⁴ The second broad distortion, most typical in the liberal Protestant church, is the secularization of everything, such that there is hardly any recognition of God's true involvement any longer.⁵ Guinness describes the

³ When I use the word “ontological” or “ontologically” in this paper in reference to work and business I mean, having to do with their fundamental relation to being or a theory about their true nature of being rather than their utilitarian function.

⁴ Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville: Word Publishing) pp. 31-33.

⁵ Ibid. Note: Os Guinness doesn't group the evangelical church with the Catholic distortion; in fact he doesn't specifically mention the evangelical church. My further comments in this section will show that the Catholic distortion is not at all exclusive to the Catholic Church despite the corrective Reformation legacy of the evangelical church. And, in my section two, *The Evangelical Church and the Problem of Work*, I will show that the Protestant Distortion is not at all exclusive to the Protestant liberal church.

Protestant Distortion as simply a different form of dualism, where the “secular is elevated over the spiritual.”⁶ In this lecture I will focus on the Catholic Distortion.

The Catholic Distortion has a long legacy and it didn't go away within the Catholic Church with the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation and Trent. But ironically, despite the tremendous legacy of the Reformation⁷ and its many tributaries down to our own day, the dualism which elevates the sacred over the secular hasn't gone away within the Protestant evangelical church either. That Guinness would even write about this distortion in 1998 indicates how relevant this distortion is today. While Guinness takes up this topic in a discussion of calling, in 1987 Doug Sherman and William Hendricks took up the specific subject of a theology of work in *Your Work Matters to God*.⁸ And even the current Pope himself has taken up this subject in earnest in his 1981 encyclical, *Laborem Excercens*.⁹

Sadly however the church still doesn't get it – at least in its practices and rhetoric.

Let me be clear. What the church doesn't get is not that work can be done to the glory of God. It is common to hear lessons, for example, on Colossians 3: 17: “Whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Or on Colossians 3:23, “Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men.” These verses are very apropos to the subject of work. The problem is not that the right verses are not referenced. It's that important theological implications and proper application of them are often overlooked or under-stressed. This leads to subtle distortions.

Let me illustrate this subtlety, the rhetorical elimination of any value and meaning of work itself and the elevation of truly important spiritual or eternal work. The following is a quote from a recent sermon given on this past Labor Day Sunday:

⁶ Ibid. p. 39.

⁷ See Guinness's references to Luther's, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, to William Tyndale, William Perkins', *A Treatise on the Vocations or Callings of Men*, John Milton's, *Paradise Lost*, Bishop Thomas Becon, and Abraham Kuyper's famous phrase “There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine! This belongs to me!’”p. 33-35 And, see Kuyper's famous Princeton “Lectures on Calvinism” in 1898.

⁸ Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress).

⁹ Pope John Paul II. *Laborem Excercens*. September 14, 1981.

[L]et me close this morning by challenging you ... to apply [this] to your life in two very radical ways.

Radical way #1: In light of the fact that God has forgiven you...cleansed you...opened up a whole new door of forgiveness, a new life for you, I want to challenge you to change your career. Starting Tuesday, change your career...without necessarily leaving your job or not going to the place where you usually go on Tuesdays, but to change your career in two ways. First of all by getting a new boss. ...[I]n our Ephesians series, God through Paul said that we are to do everything as unto the Lord.

God...Jesus is our real boss! So change your career by getting a new boss and go to work Tuesday working for Christ rather than who you usually think you work for.

Secondly: Get a new mission statement for your career...your job. Why do you go to work? To make money? To acquire status? To punch a clock? To put bread on the table...cause it seems it's a neat thing to do? Well, change your mission to catching people for Christ. That's what Jesus wants to do for you and me.

Evangelism is a form of worship outside of these walls.¹⁰

Overall the sermon was excellent, and it offered real possibilities to speak to the intrinsic value and meaning of work, especially “Radical Way # 1”. But right at the end the message subtly declared that the truly important thing about work is the *workplace* as a context to do evangelism. It is very true that “evangelism is a form of worship.” However, with no ontological meaning to work, the work itself will always be demeaned and understood *primarily* if not only as a *place* to win people to Christ.

This is not an uncommon phenomenon. The church offers very little discussion about the meaning of work itself. By this omission the church suggests that the work itself

¹⁰ The preacher of the sermon will remain nameless because I don't wish to impugn someone whom I know makes every attempt to avoid distorting the Gospel. But it's real and true. It was given on August 31, 2003.

is unimportant. The implication is that what is really important, *truly meaningful (and obedient)*, is the spiritual activities we do at work. The work itself is incidental, little more than a contextual tool for doing sacred work.

Let's explore further how the church contributes to the problem of work.

The dualism which the church allows to stand and sometimes promulgates comes in several forms. Sherman and Hendricks point out four: "(1) God is more interested in the soul than the body; (2) the things of eternity are more important than the things of time; (3) life divides into two categories, the sacred and the secular; and (4) because of the nature of their work, ministers and clergy are more important to God's program than the laity."¹¹ Let's look quickly at each of these.

First the **Body-Soul Hierarchy**: the idea that the body is somehow less important than the soul. Few perhaps would consider that theology of work distortions might have any relation to classical doctrinal problems but the Body-Soul hierarchy distortion raises a series of philosophical ideas and doctrinal problems that the church has dealt with through the centuries. Examples of these include various schools of Platonism and Stoicism, and numerous Gnostic sects, such as Docetism, Cerinthianism, Manichaeism, and others.¹² Among the most serious problems with this distortion is the damage it does to the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. At Nicea I (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431) and particularly Chalcedon (454), after great pains the church was finally able to articulate the teaching of Scripture about what happened when God became man in Jesus Christ. In doing so the church confirmed that the corporeal world is fundamentally good – in strong contrast to prevailing aberrant Platonic worldviews that saw it as something to be disdained with little meaning and value. Even the church's understanding of creation came into clearer view as it explicated and articulated the meaning of the incarnation.¹³ The Body-Soul Hierarchy distortion leads to a demeaning of day-to-day life. Ordinary work is seen as bad or meaningless. The Body-Soul Hierarchy distortion is quite problematic.

Next is the **Eternal-Temporal Hierarchy**: The nuance here is a metaphysic that separates the permanent or unchanging from the fluctuating and changing. Christianizing

¹¹ Ibid, p. 46.

¹² See F.L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

¹³ See St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Press, 1996) p. 25-30.

this idea, the notion is that eternal reality is more real than temporal reality. Sherman and Hendricks rightly point out that “the Bible declare(s) that both time and eternity are very real and very important to God. The natural universe is just as real as the supernatural universe. One is not ‘ultimate reality’ while the other is ‘just reality.’ Both exist with absolute certainty.... An eternal God exists and creates a time-space universe. The eternal God is real; the universe He creates is just as real. The universe is not a ‘shadow’ of eternity. It is a completely real dimension called the time-and-space universe.” They go on to make a helpful and appropriate qualification: “There is a sense, of course, in which eternity is the ultimate reality, in that it will be our final destiny. In this sense ultimate means ‘the last in sequence’ or ‘eventual’.”¹⁴ In many ways this is the heart of the problem. If eternal matters are truly more important than temporal matters, the logical conclusion would be that to lead a meaningful life every Christian should be in fulltime Christian ministry. But if this is so one has to ask, what was the original purpose of creation? Was it just a cosmic game by God that ultimately would lead to the redemption plan that in turn would lead to Christians living and working for eternal matters? In the Eternal-Temporal distortion there is no room for an ontological meaning to temporal life at all. In this view one has a very hard time making any real sense out of the verses regarding “doing whatever we do as unto the Lord.” The Eternal-Temporal distortion is quite problematic.

The **Sacred-Secular Hierarchy**: This is a variation on the eternal-temporal theme. It is actually the core of the sensation I described at the beginning of this paper, where one senses such a huge qualitative difference in what they are doing at work and what they are doing at worship. The perception is that there are two separate worlds. This is a real sensation, of course, but it is a false reading of the situation. In many ways this problem is the most prevalent distortion both in and outside the church. The truth is there really are not separate sacred and secular worlds. All of creation is made and kept by God through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:17). The problem here is one of being more aware of God’s presence when we are in corporate worship and less aware of God’s presence when we are at work. This is a spiritual problem of awareness and perception not one of ontological distinction. At work we are less or unaware of and do not acknowledge God’s presence as often or as easily as during corporate worship or when doing “spiritual” activities.

¹⁴ Sherman and Hendricks, pp. 49-50.

Finally, the **Clergy-Laity Hierarchy**: This distortion is directly related to career distinctions. It is the classic Catholic Distortion. This distortion may in part remain so strongly because of the hierarchical governance structures in some parts of the church (e.g. Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, and Methodist). But it is certainly not exclusive to the hierarchy-based ecclesiastical churches. Despite John Calvin's reforms in ecclesiology which dramatically shifted to a plurality of elders (the session), comprised of both ordained clergy and laity holding equal authority, this distortion continues even within the Reformed evangelical church. The evangelical church has made a special effort over the last 30 years or so to break down some of the barriers between the clergy and laity. Take for example Ray Stedman's ground-breaking book, *Body Life*, back in 1972, which started the trend within non-charismatic churches of gifts discovery and practice among the laity in the church.¹⁵ Or for example, Gareth Icenogle's, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, which provides the foundations for mutual lay care ministries within the church.¹⁶ Or, consider the classic, *The Layman in Christian History*, by Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber.¹⁷ And, most recently Miraslov Volf's new book, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, which sees spiritual giftedness as the proper framework for understanding common everyday work.¹⁸ Despite efforts to break the barrier there remains a practical hierarchy of vocations between the clergy and laity. The breach between clergy work and laity work lies deep within the church's self-consciousness. A big part of the reason why is because the church continues to practice an inadequate theology of work.

So in summary, the church contributes to the problem of work in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, by teaching or allowing bad theological ideas to stand; and indirectly by omitting serious discussion about the ontological meaning and place of work within Christian theology. Both perpetuate obfuscation of the meaning of day-to-day work for laypeople that sit in the pew on Sunday and go to the office on Monday. This confusion contributes to the practical, pastoral problem of lives lived in quiet desperation. The

¹⁵ Ray Stedman, *Body Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1972).

¹⁶ Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber, *The Layman in Christian History* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1963).

¹⁸ Miraslov Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

overarching problem that continues to plague the church's theology of work is various forms of a dualistic view of reality. The result is either the classical Catholic distortion or the Protestant distortion. These are very much evangelical distortions too. But, as Os Guinness says, the truth is "[i]f all that a believer does grows out of faith and is done for the glory of God, then all dualistic distinctions are demolished."¹⁹

What, then, are the cornerstones of a good theology of work? To this we now turn our attention.

Cornerstones of a Theology of Work & Business

For the sake of time, I will only lay out a brief framework of a good theology of work by focusing on three key cornerstones. In doing so I will point out areas for future, more detailed exploration that I believe the evangelical church needs to take up in earnest.

The seat of a good Christian theology of work rests on three-legged stool: the theology of creation, the theology of anthropology, and the theology of the incarnation. I will make a few brief comments on each and then try to weave them together.

The Theology of Creation

Initial Creation: In God's creation of all things we see Him working.²⁰ "Genesis 2:2 calls this activity 'work'"... [which is] "the same word that is used for man's work in the Ten Commandments."²¹ Work is therefore a part of the character of God himself and by extension is part of the nature of man. God declares his work good²² and this therefore by extension means that the work of man, in terms of it being a part of our nature, is fundamentally part of who are and good.²³

Humans Have Dominion Over Creation: As a part of the first blessing of God upon human beings, He gave them dominion over creation.²⁴ At least two messages regarding our work arise out of this: 1. work even before the fall was part and parcel of

¹⁹ Guinness, *The Call*, p. 43.

²⁰ Genesis 1-2.

²¹ Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, p. 78.

²² Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31 (After creating man and commanding them to work, it was "very good".)

²³ I must briefly disabuse a common misunderstanding about the Fall, the Curse and Work. It is commonly thought that work is part of the curse of God for sin. In fact that's not so. God curses the ground, which resulted in a greater burdensomeness of our work. (For a fuller explanation on this point and more generally on the effect of sin on work, see Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, specifically on this point, p. 99; and on the effect of sin on work, pp.97-107.)

²⁴ Genesis 1:28

who human beings were – this is as God’s creation was originally designed it to be, not an aberration after the fall; 2. human work is an act of stewardship to help manage the limited resources of the earth, to meet human needs and to foster the perpetuation and maintenance of His creation. In this work man is a participant in the creative and maintenance work God. From this we again see that human work, like God’s work, continues. The routine of continual daily work is part of who we are created in the image of God.

The Continuing Work of God: In addition to the creation *ex nihilo* by God, from which he rested on the seventh day, he also does the work of sustaining his creation. “Jesus declared to the Pharisees, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.’”²⁵ Sherman and Hendricks rightly point out that God’s continuing work includes four dimensions: 1. He upholds creation (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3); 2. “He meets a broad range of needs that his many creatures have” (Psalm 104:10-30); 3. He is working out His purposes in history (Deuteronomy 11:1-7); and 4. He accomplishes the great work of redemption in Jesus Christ and will ultimately fulfill this work in the final consummation (John 4:34; Psalm 111). Through our work we participate in God’s continuing work.

The Theology of Anthropology

The *Imago Dei*: Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that God created human beings in His image. This is the core teaching on theological anthropology. I must say at this point, this is an area of theology that needs a lot more exploration specifically in terms of what it means with regard to man’s work. The cacophony of noise around this subject in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially from the more liberal wing of the church, has been a stumbling block for evangelicals. Nevertheless, it is core to our understanding of human work. In the mid to late nineteen eighties there were several excellent works that should contribute to new work in this area.²⁶ Be that as it may, the fundamental teaching in

²⁵ Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, p. 78.

²⁶ See Anderson, Ray S. *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*. Grand Rapids, ILL: William B. Eerdmans. 1982; Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Packer, J.I. and Howard, Thomas. *Christianity: The True Humanism*. Waco, TX: Word Books. 1985; Pannenberg, Wolfhart. Translated by Matthew J. O’Donnell. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1985 (Primarily an anthropological apologetic.); and here are two excellent bibliographies on the subject: Human Dignity: http://www.acton.org/research/reading/human_dignity.html; McGrath, Alistair. “Updated

regards to this passage and human work may be best captured by Pope John Paul II in his *Laborem Exercens* (Encyclical on Human Work) and in John Calvin in *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, as quoted in *Why America Doesn't Work*:

Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God Himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore he is called to work.

Pope John Paul II²⁷

All men were created to busy themselves with labor ... for the common good.

John Calvin²⁸

Part of the very make-up of human beings is that they are workers. The Pope further says this about man and work:

Through work man must earn his daily bread and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology, and above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family. And work means any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances; it means any human activity that can and must be recognized as work, by virtue of humanity itself. ... Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by occupying his existence on earth. Thus work bears a particular mark of man on humanity; the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature.²⁹

Bibliography” to Chapter 14, 3rd Edition, of *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers. <http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/mcgrath/textbook/chap14bib.htm>.

²⁷ Pope John Paul II. *Laborem Exercens*. September 14, 1981, p. 1.

(1. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens_en.html; 2. <http://www.newadvent.org/docs/jp02le.htm>)

²⁸ Chuck Colson and Jack Eckerd, *Why America Doesn't Work* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991), p. 31.

“Set within us from the beginning, this purposeful nature drives us to work hard, to be productive, to create, and to accumulate the results of our labor.”³⁰

Theology of the Incarnation

The third and final leg of the theological stool of work is the incarnation of the Word of God. A theme that has run through this paper is the two-story or dualistic view of reality, which when allowed to stand, as we have seen, distorts our view of work. The Incarnation is the definitive statement against this view. The eternal Logos of God confirmed once again the goodness and importance of His material creation when he came to dwell with us in human flesh. (John 1:14) St. Athanasius, in many ways the architect of the Nicene formulation, says “He sanctified the body by being in it. ... He gives all things their being and sustains them in it.”³¹ This is a reiteration of Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:16-17. Further, he says, “the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning.”³²

Evangelicals have always held firmly to the true incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. It has been one of the evangelical distinctives, along with all orthodox Christian communions.

Most discussions of the Incarnation focus on its place in the historical Christological controversies of the early church up to Nicea (325) and especially from Nicea to Chalcedon (451), which focused on the humanity of Christ; and if not on those early church controversies, the focus is on battling the rationalist denial of the possibility of incarnation which flow from Enlightenment naturalism. There is no doubt that the core theological import of the doctrine of the incarnation has to do with our salvation. Confirmation of the goodness, importance, and meaning of material creation is the secondary theological dimension of the Incarnation. I submit that this dimension is what speaks most to the theology of work. This dimension has been under-stressed by many within the evangelical tradition. It tends to be stressed much more so with the sacramental Christian communions, most especially the Eastern Orthodox Church.

²⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Excersens*, p. 1.

³⁰ Chuck Colson and Jack Eckerd, *Why America Doesn't Work* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991), p. 32.

³¹ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, p. 46.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Now I do not wish to create misunderstanding. I am not suggesting that everyone here should become a sacramentalist, nor a member of the Orthodox Church. I do believe, however, this area of Catholic and Orthodox thought is an area of theological opportunity for evangelicals. In so doing I believe we have an opportunity to realize a more profound theology of work.

In this spirit, let me just mention a few thoughts by Bishop Timothy Ware in his little book, *The Orthodox Church*.

Not only our human body will be transfigured but the whole of the material creation. (Revelation 21:1)

Redeemed humankind is not to be snatched away from the rest of creation, but creation is to be saved and glorified along with humans.

The created universe waits with eager expectation for God's children to be revealed ... for the universe itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and will enter into the liberty and splendor of the children of God.

The idea of cosmic redemption is based ... upon a right understanding of the Incarnation: Christ took flesh – something from the material order – and so has made possible the redemption and metamorphosis of all creation – not merely the immaterial, but the physical.

[There is an] intrinsic sacredness of the earth – created good by God, corrupted through the fall, but redeemed in Christ ...³³

I am not completely endorsing the full Orthodox meaning of these assertions. But I am suggesting that the Incarnation has something very deep to teach us about the role of the human activity we call work in reference to the everyday life of the sub-creative, stewardship and maintenance work which is a part of our call in this present world. The

³³ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new edition (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 234-235.

classical Reformation teaching that we should be about participating in the transformation of life, so that it conforms more and more into the likeness and to the order of Christ as Lord is not too far from such ideas. A robust understanding of the Incarnation gives our daily human work new meaning, even our business work which has a great deal to do with performing and enabling the stewardship of the limited resource we call creation.

A good theology of work rests firmly on these three legs, The Theology of Creation, Theology of Anthropology, and the Theology of the Incarnation. They form a solid stool. These are not new to evangelicalism. Woven together these elements make a whole cloth: The Theology of Creation gives us a proper perspective on Christian Anthropology; and a good Christian Anthropology is defined fully only by a proper understanding of the Incarnation. Together they teach us about our day-to-day life of work. They are solidly Biblical and thoroughly within our tradition. I suggest that we do three things with these three legs: Believe them, intentionally teach them, and further explore and better articulate them, and do so specifically in reference to the day-to-day work where most Christians live. If we will do this, we will find that we are less likely to fall into either the Catholic or the Protestant distortions.

Calling: The Pastoral Answer to an Integrated Life

Finally, with the back-drop of a renewed appreciation for a good theology of work, let me just briefly touch on the subject of calling to tie our discussion together. The ontological key to maintaining the right perspective on work is a renewed sense of calling. Calling is that Christian idea that ensures that when we are doing day-to-day work we maintain a clear sense of the vertical dimension. As Os Guinness points out, calling is two-dimensional in character: there is a caller (God himself) and there is the called (human beings, of course). God's call is *primary*, man's callings are *secondary*. (Emphasis mine) Making this point Guinness says, “[h]umanness is a response to God's calling. This is far deeper than an exhortation to write your own script for life.”³⁴ Further he says, “Calling is the premise of Christian existence itself. Calling means that everyone, everywhere, and in

³⁴ Guinness, *The Call*, p. 24.

everything fulfills his or her (secondary) callings in response to God's (primary) calling."³⁵ Calling is the pastoral answer to an integrated life.

Our work is but an outgrowth of our being called into existence and being sustained by God. Our work is nothing less than part and parcel of the sacred activity of worship in our day-to-day lives. The difference in the work of worship on Sundays, in personal prayer times, in Bible studies, etc. and the work of worship in our day-to-day lives is not a difference of kind. It is a difference of concentration, of quantity. When the church gathers together in worship there is a concentration of the light (the light of God Himself, incarnated in the gathered Body of Christ the church). When the church is scattered to the four corners of the world in day-to-day work activity, it is no less the light; rather the light is simply refracted. There is no *real* difference at all. The distinction we make in our day-to-day lives is a matter of perception not reality.

Because the true picture of reality is as a single cloth not two³⁶, all of our activities in life can be "done unto the Lord" truly. This is why Os Guinness encourages us to think of the whole of our living as being "unto the audience of one."³⁷

In this light, calling to business work is on par with calling to other kinds of work, including full-time Christian ministry work. Business activity is integral to being sub-creators, providers for our own sustenance and for others, to being stewards and co-laborers with God in sustaining His creation. "... [B]usiness has a special role to play in bringing hope—and not only hope, but actual economic progress—to the billion or so truly indigent people on this planet." And finally, as Michael Novak says, "business is, bar none, the best real hope of the poor. And this is one of the noblest callings inherent in business activities; to raise up the poor."³⁸ Business is both an ontological expression of who we are created in God's image and a utilitarian means for realizing the Great Commandment.

Calling is the ontological key to our work and it is the moral rudder in the water. Without a sense of calling, all work including business work will founder and bob with the winds. This will lead to a sense of desperation sometime, if only on the deathbed. "For

³⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

³⁶ This is not to suggest pantheism in, for example Hegel and Spinoza; nor is it to suggest panentheism as in Process Theology.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

³⁸ Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p. 37.

what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”³⁹

³⁹ Matthew 16:26

Conclusion

In conclusion let me review my key points. By our own experience it is very common to perceive reality as two separate pieces of cloth, one sacred and one secular. It is not, however. Created reality is a single piece of cloth, which finds its source and sustenance in the one and only God: Father, Son, and Spirit. Despite the Church's historical struggle to properly articulate this reality and despite history's firm declaration of it in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, The Logos, the church itself too often continues to foster a bifurcated reality at least in its practice and rhetoric. This must change. We must rediscover and emphasize the crucial theological categories that will enable a good theology of work. The key theological categories that will allow us to do just this are the Christian doctrines of creation, anthropology and the incarnation. These confirm that reality is one whole not two and enable us to see work in its proper light. In the end, we must re-embrace the unifying ontological principle of calling. This Christian notion serves as the proper integrative principle which will allow us to see work in general and business work in particular as the valuable and meaningful activities of human life that they are. Integral to the notion of calling is that each of us find our identity and purpose only in our personal relationship with God. God calls us to Himself and the He calls us to particular work in life. Our daily work is imbued with ontological meaning because our human beingness resides in God Himself. Understanding this allows even the lowliest of tasks to become part of our worship. And even the earthiest tasks, such as business work, can be ennobled and become instruments of our worship.

As this occurs, the arduous tasks we call work, including tiring flights over the Adriatic to a remote land, and standing and singing praises to God in the comfort of our home church can be recognized as of the same nature when done unto the Lord. Indeed, at home or at work, in a remote hotel room away from our family or nestled next to our loved ones, we can always sing:

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.