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Shaping the Lenses on Everyday Work: A Neo-Calvinist Understanding of the Poetics of
Work and Vocational Discipleship

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“The Gospel is a good message not only for a few individuals but also for humanity, for families and society and the state, for the arts and sciences, for the whole cosmos, for all of creation that sighs.”¹

~ Herman Bavinck

“A preaching of the gospel that calls men and women to accept Jesus as Savior but does not make it clear that discipleship means commitment to a vision of society radically different from that which controls our public life today must be condemned as false.”²

~ Lesslie Newbigin

“man [sic], as he grew estranged in his work, lost God in losing himself. Work no longer had any significance and so could not have a religious one. To restore its integrity instead of invoking external moral remedies... is, theologically speaking, to re-establish work in its cosmic and human functions, and in the design of God the Creator. It is, of course wrong to deify work, but those who fall into this idolatry, thereby both destroying their souls and denying God, are only trying to satisfy their need to worship. This desire finds mistaken outlets because theologians failed to consider work as a subject worthy of attention in the sphere of human destiny.”³

~ M.D. Chenu

“when you find a man [sic] who is a Christian praising God by the excellence of his work—do not distract him and take him away from his proper vocation to address religious meetings and open church bazaars. Let him serve God in the way to which God has called him. If you take him away from that, he will exhaust himself in an alien technique and lose his capacity to do his dedicated work. It is your business, you churchmen, to get what good you can from observing his work—not to take him away from it, so that he may do ecclesiastical work for you. But, if you have any power, see that he is set free to do his own work as well as it may be done. He is not there to serve you; he is there to serve God by serving his work.”⁴

~ Dorothy Sayers

¹ Herman Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” translated by George Harinck, “Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to us”: The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 248-262 (257).

² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel in Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 132.

³ M.D. Chenu, *A Theology of Work: An Exploration* (Chicago: Henry Regnery CO., 1966) (trans. Lilian Soiron), 22.

⁴ Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?: Why Christians Must Choose Either Dogma or Disaster (Or, Why It Really Does Matter What You Believe)* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 1999), 110.

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SUMMARY: English

Since the last decade of the 1800's theologians have endeavored to offer theological reflections on the dynamics of human work. These studies have produced an array of studies from biblical scholars, philosophers and systematic theologians that have illuminated the biblical understandings of work and philosophical analysis of the economic and social changes on work in Western societies brought about by the Industrial Revolution. No theology of work extant has been developed which incorporates empirical research into contemporary experiences of workers.

In order to take the theology of work conversation forward, "Shaping the Lenses on Everyday Work: A Neo-Calvinist Understanding of the Poetics of Work and Vocational Discipleship" uses an interdisciplinary methodology that incorporates methods from qualitative research to explore the lived realities of contemporary Christians in their work and church contexts. The first third of the dissertation provides an historical analysis of the early theologies of work written by Pope Leo XIII and Herman Bavinck as well as critical reflection on the leading contemporary theologies of work. These historical and literary analyses outline the necessary methodological and theological issues that must be addressed in a theology of work for the twenty-first century.

The guiding theological framework of human work of this dissertation is a biblical theology of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. This theological framework is used to interpret the ethnographic research conducted in three congregations. A concluding chapter draws several conclusions for constructing a theology of work for congregations as well as suggestions for how to cultivate a theological imagination for everyday work in Christians.

Samenvatting: Nederlands

Sinds het eind van 1800 streven theologen ernaar om theologische reflecties aan te bieden op het dynamiek van het werk. Door deze onderzoeken zijn een aantal studies ontdekt waarin de Bijbelse ideeën over het werk en waarin een filosofische analyse van de economische en sociale veranderingen van het werk in het Westerse maatschappij, die door de Industriële Revolutie zijn gekomen, worden toegelicht door bijbelgeleerden, filosofen en systematische theologen. Er is nog nooit een bestaande theologie van werk ontwikkelt die empirisch onderzoek combineert met hedendaagse ervaringen van werknemers.

Om het gesprek over het theologie van werk voort te zetten, gebruikt “Shaping the Lenses on Everyday Work: A Neo-Calvinist Understanding of the Poetics of Work and Vocational Discipleship” een interdisciplinaire methode die methodes van kwalitatief onderzoek gebruikt om de ervaringen van hedendaagse christenen in hun werk en kerkgemeenschappen te ontdekken. Het eerste een-derde deel van de thesis geeft een historische analyse van de vroege theologieën van het werk die door Paus Leo XIII en Herman Bavinck zijn geschreven, evenals een kritische reflectie op de grootste hedendaagse theologieën van het werk. Deze historische en literaire analyses benoemen de nodige methodologische en theologische kwesties voor een theologie van het werk in de 21^{ste} eeuw.

Het leidende theologische kader van het werk van deze thesis is een Bijbelse theologie van de *missio Dei*, ook wel: de missie van God. Dit theologisch kader wordt gebruikt om het etnografische onderzoek van de drie kerkgemeenschappen te interpreteren. Het hoofdstuk met de conclusie trekt meerdere conclusies voor zowel het ontwikkelen van

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To Monica Marie, the one I love to love. No other gift to me has revealed the profound mystery and absolute absurdity of God's abundant grace.

Chapter 1: Exploring Work Anew

Introduction

Some aspects of life are so ordinary and habitual that they often escape the conscious attention of Christians. Human work is precisely one of these everyday realities that form the fabric of our lived experience all the while escaping the focused attention of theological reflection. Fortunately, in recent years there has been a growing body of literature devoted to equipping Christians for their everyday culture-making vocations.

Steven Garber is one of the most creative and avid promoters of vocational discipleship and his work at the Washington Institute over the past decade has sought to repair the chasm between vocational discipleship and local churches. He has devoted his professional career to promoting the message that “vocation is integral and not incidental to the *missio Dei*.”⁵ Garber’s research on institutions has found that not only are churches silent on the topic of vocational discipleship but the seminaries who train pastors also fail to address a theology of work for the laity. The problem here is not a shortage of theological treatments of these subjects by academicians and practitioners (one thinks of Dorothy Sayers, Yves Congar, Hendrik Kraemer, Richard Mouw, Steven Garber, R. Paul Stevens, Andy Crouch, Amy Sherman and Tom Nelson, to name but a few).⁶ Yet, as Garber has noted, this theology of work and vocation is not making its way through seminaries and local congregations into the lives of Christians. There is a danger in a dissertation such as

⁵ Steve Garber, “Vocation as Integral Not Incidental,” available at: <http://www.washingtoninst.org/893/vocation-as-integral-not-incidenta/>. Garber looks to John Stott’s discussion of “mission” in *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 25-54) for the theological and biblical grounding of the mission of God.

⁶ Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (1949); Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity* (1957); Kraemer, *Theology of the Laity* (1958); Mouw, *Called to Holy Worldliness* (1980); Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness* (1996), and *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (2014); Stevens, *The Other Six Days* (1999); Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (2007); Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (2011); Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (2011).

this, to assume that more theology will, in and of itself, remedy these persistent problems. As we will see in Chapter 4, more theological work is needed to ground Garber's claim that work is integral to the *missio Dei*.

In this dissertation I will attempt to explore the dynamic relationship between work experiences on the one hand and the failure of Reformed theology of work and vocation to make its way into the everyday lives of Christians and their work. In order to accomplish this, serious attention will be devoted to the life and practices of local congregations and to the Bible. Within the context of the local church ethical discernment and Christian discipleship is best formed. This congregational focus will allow inquiry into the intended formation that occurs within a religious tradition as well as the appropriation of that tradition that takes place by its members. Alongside this, attention will also be given to how Scripture depicts work as good and God-intended and therefore as something that must be configured into any understanding of what it means to be human and to live a God-honoring life. Yet no theological exploration of work can bypass the effects that sin has had on work down to the present day. These harsh realities cannot be glossed over even as we push beyond these and seek evidences of the ways in which Christ's work makes it possible for human work to be redeemed and experienced as a part of a satisfying life whose *telos* is worship of God.

The good news of Christ's redemption always takes place in concrete socio-cultural, historical, and even familial settings. All of these embedded influences offer different strategies for how to use work to find a satisfaction. For this reason this dissertation takes a grounded theory approach to ethnographic research in three congregations in order to

identify the processes by which work becomes satisfying and lifegiving for Christians.⁷ *Ethnography* is an approach to qualitative research that seeks to offer an “insider’s perspective” of life within a specific context using a combination of participant observation, and interviews. *Grounded theory* is a bottom-up approach to analyzing and systematizing empirical data using a mix of “indigenous” and “sensitizing” concepts in the analysis so that the themes are grounded in the data itself.⁸

Related questions to this research are: In what ways (if any) does the theology of the congregation make its way into the lives of Christians and influence how they experience work? How does work influence the non-work life of Christians, especially their experience of corporate worship? The findings of this ethnographic study will be interpreted in light of a theological vision of God’s active presence in this world that persists from its initial creation on into its new creation. This theological framework will be used to support the argument that work needs not be experienced solely as a toilsome curse but can be embraced as “poetic practices” which are symbolic culture-making practices that instantiate the central human desires as people pursue a satisfying and God-honoring life.⁹ The concluding chapter will put forward various ways in which the

⁷ Larger macro questions and perspectives on human dynamics at a societal level are of secondary importance to this mode of inquiry. The task of developing analyses that are universally true across cultures and history is traded for a local/micro description of what is seen and experienced within a given context at a specific place and time (Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22-25). The role of ethnographic research in theological inquiry is explored in Chapter 5.

⁸ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 2-3.

⁹ William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), x). Poetic practices contain within them implicit visions of the good life, and over time, display their formative power by cultivating desires for this *telos* (James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 47; 25; 68). A *grounded aesthetic* is a complimentary concept and seeks to trace the dynamics of symbolic activity and transformation at work

theological resources of this study can be used to promote the discipleship efforts within the three congregations under study.

Problem Addressed

The global economy, migration patterns, and rapidly advancing technologies are creating radical changes in workplaces around the world. In the United States people spend a third of their lives at work, which makes this their primary context for serving God and His mission. As Lesslie Newbigin argued in *Foolishness to the Greeks*, the topic of work is of great importance to holistic Christian discipleship to which the Neo-Calvinists in the Dutch Reformed tradition have much to contribute.¹⁰ Yet a gap still persists between theology and the experiences of Christians in their work contexts. More work remains to be done in bringing resources from this tradition to bear on the experiences of Christians in their work.

With the growing body of literature on the theologies of work, Christians in the marketplace continue to struggle integrating their faith and work. Theologians drawing on the Neo-Calvinist tradition (especially Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck) have provided resources aimed at shaping a Christian worldview that sees work as part of God's larger activity in the world. This Reformed understanding of vocation and work has been challenged by Miroslav Volf's *Work in the Spirit* where he shifts the focus away from creation theology to matters of pneumatology and eschatology. The debate surrounding

among a specific group of people within particular contexts (Paul Willis, *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 22; 21).

¹⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, 7th edition (London: SPCK, 2001), 143.

Volf's critique of Reformed theology of vocation is addressed at length in Chapter 3. This has ushered in a variety of responses arguing for a new grounding for a theology of work. Common to almost all of these theological approaches is an absence of ethnographic research on the lived experience of Christians in their work.

This dissertation is based upon a theological reading of ethnographic research conducted in three congregations. Qualitative research offers a window into the work experiences of Christians as well as the discipleship practices of their respective church communities. My study began with a few curiosities about work and the Christian faith. How does work become satisfying for American Christians? How are workers able to experience their everyday work as life giving when work intensity and volume has risen to such an intense level?¹¹ And what role (if any) does a person's religious tradition (teachings and practices) play in this process?¹²

The ethnographic research will identify the tensions and challenges encountered by Christians in the workplace, and explicate the various vernacular theologies operative among these Christians that guide the integration of their faith and work. Resources from the theology of Herman Bavinck and Lesslie Newbigin will be put in dialogue with recent scholarship to offer a framework for identifying the Triune God's presence in the daily life of work. It will conclude with three proposals for the formation of theological imagination within these congregations.

¹¹ A recent Gallup poll (August 24, 2014) found that the average workweek of Americans is not 40 but 47 hours per week, and that 25% of salaried employees work 60 hours or more per week (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/175286/hour-workweek-actually-longer-seven-hours.aspx>, accessed 9/18/14).

¹² T.M. Lührman, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Random House, 2012), xi-xii.

Aim: My aims for this dissertation are twofold. First, I hope to provide biblical and theological resources to help evangelical and Reformed congregations cultivate a theological imagination for the everyday work of their congregants. Second, in order to develop this type of theology I will deviate from the established modes in systematic theology and set out a new method for constructing a theology of work that is interdisciplinary in nature. To accomplish these aims I critique the established theological methods in systematic theology and offer an alternative approach to developing a theology of work (Chapter 5) which incorporates empirical research (Chapter 6) into my analysis of the history and development of theologies of work (Chapter 2), recent theologies of work in systematic theology and biblical studies (Chapter 3), as well as an analysis of human work in Scripture's teachings of God's manifold mission in the world (Chapter 4).

Thesis: A theology of work is best developed by attending to the manifold purposes of the Triune God as revealed in the unfolding narrative of Scripture's drama that climaxed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in order to discern the Spirit's active presence in the world. In this light, my thesis is that *work is an integral part of human existence, it can be a poetic project through which humans seek joy and cope with suffering.*¹³ *Work plays an integral role in how Christians seek to glorify God as they pursue a satisfying life in the face of pain and adversity.*

Central Research Question

What theological resources can be drawn from the Neo-Calvinist tradition, biblical studies,

¹³ Recall the discussion above and footnote 6 that "poetic practices" refer to symbolic culture-making activities by which people attempt to experience a satisfying life.

theology of work scholarship, and qualitative research methods to interpret and inspire the poetic practices¹⁴ of the everyday work of Christians?

Chapter Sub-Questions

- Chapter 1: How should the topic of a theology of work be approached at the beginning of the 21st Century?
- Chapter 2: What can be learned from early Catholic and Dutch Reformed engagement with the Social Question with regard to work?
- Chapter 3: What are the distinct contributions and limitations of the leading Protestant and Catholic texts on theology of work?
- Chapter 4: How does Scripture portray God's presence in the world and how might this offer insight into the ways Scripture addresses the subjects of human work and culture-making vocations?
- Chapter 5: How can ethnographic research be used to construct a grounded theory of poetic practices of everyday work? How can this analysis be integrated into the development of a theology of work?
- Chapter 6: How are local congregations attempting to cultivate a theological imagination that impacts how their congregants pursue their work? What role (if any) do these teachings and practices play in a person's pursuit of the good life and the processes by which work becomes satisfying and life giving?
- Chapter 7: In what ways can an updated Neo-Calvinist understanding of work and the human person assist local congregations in understanding the relationship

¹⁴ Poetic practices are defined above on page 4 and further discussed in footnote 9.

between worship and work and the implications for forming a theological imagination for vocational discipleship?

Methodology in Brief

An important methodological assumption of this dissertation is as follows: the kind of theological reflection needed to sustain a faithful Christian presence in work contexts can only be forged by attending to the authoritative texts of Scripture as well as the “vernacular theology”¹⁵ constructed by Christians as they draw on the materials at hand (ideas, beliefs, practices) in their religion, culture, and community. I use the term vernacular theology as developed by William Dyrness to name the often “implicit” theology that is constructed by Christians as they attempt to live faithfully in light of the biblical vision of discipleship in their cultural and vocational contexts. Thus while it is not accurate to say that every Christian is a trained, professional theologian who does theology in a formal way, it is not a fair assessment to say that all theologizing by lay Christians is merely “implicit.”

Surfacing the vernacular theologies embedded in everyday practices and rituals generates awareness of the lived needs that Christians must address if the Christian faith is to come alive in their concrete circumstances. The theological reflection needed to help cultivate a faithful Christian presence at work requires a dynamic interchange between

¹⁵ The term “vernacular theology” comes from William A. Dyrness, *Invitation to Cross-Cultural Theology: Case Studies in Vernacular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). The term is derived from vernacular architecture where buildings are constructed by those who inhabit them using materials readily on-hand and constructed to suit their lived needs. Vernacular theology and its relationship to formal theology will be discussed in Chapter 5.

formal theology and vernacular theology. The place to begin is with an inquiry into the theological reflection already transpiring in the everyday life of Christians.

The goal of this dissertation is to develop a method that recognizes the dialectic between vernacular and formal theologies in order to resource local churches in their work of vocational discipleship. Chapter 5 will address four critical methodological questions. First, how are we to understand God's purposes and presence in culture and cultural activities? Second, is there a way to move beyond worldview analysis of explicit messages and interpret cultural practices? Third, how can we unearth the implicit theologies embedded in cultural practices and understand their formative influence on human agents? What tools from the social sciences can guide this research into the vernacular theologies? Fourth, how do we recognize the dialectic between formal theology and the vernacular theology captured in people's accounts of work? Chapter 5 concludes with an overview of the methodology used in my ethnographic research.

Preliminary Definitions

Cultural Discipleship: Discussions of Christ and culture often take for granted that Christ through his Spirit is already in relationship to the cultures of the world. But what these conversations about Christianity and culture are properly concerned about is the fundamental challenge followers of Christ face in navigating the shape discipleship must take amidst the competing commitments and allegiances at work in their socio-cultural context. In this dissertation, *cultural discipleship* refers to the totality of the Christian's life and duty as a disciple of Christ to live *coram Deo*, before the face of God. Living all of life before God's watchful eyes requires us to connect our inner life to our "world-formative"

activities in the public square: from politics to culture making, from participation in the arts to habits of consumption. This impulse to work at world formation was given by God to humankind (Gen. 1:28), nevertheless work is subject to sinful distortions in its collective manifestations throughout history. Consequently, particular occupations, social structures, and other collective processes of world-formation must be the subject of reform as well as the means by which we seek to serve the common good of others.¹⁶

Work: The Pentateuch shows how the rhythms of work and rest are an essential part of the human experience instituted by God. Commenting on what this rhythm entails, the Talmud draws a distinction between labor and work from Exodus 25:8, “Six days shall you labor and do all your work.” For the Rabbis *labor* was to be understood as a person’s occupation and means of livelihood, whereas *work* refers to what a person does in their spare time.¹⁷ In this dissertation the term *work* is used to encompass both senses of the Talmud’s discussion of labor and work. Work is viewed as an important subset of cultural discipleship that addresses the alignment of a Christian’s daily activities of “world-formation”—whether in the home or outside the home, paid or unpaid—with the manifold mission of the Triune God. To parse out these world-formative activities I will draw on Darrell Cosden’s argument that work consists of “dynamically interrelated instrumental,

¹⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 5-7. Wolterstorff argues that work occupations and social structures are human-made and therefore alterable because they are touched by sin. “What also follows is that one will begin to think of the whole array of occupations as man-made. Once one is convinced that each occupational role ought to serve the common good, but that as a matter of fact many are corrupted so that they do not, then it will be impossible to think of the social order as given by God. One will inevitably think of it as made by human beings and capable of alteration. One will think of us as responsible for its structure.” (Ibid., 16-17)

¹⁷ Rabbi Abraham Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 191-93. The interpretive approach of the Rabbis held that there is no tautology in Scripture and that every word is significant. Hence, work was not interpreted as a synonym for labor.

relational, and ontological dimensions.”¹⁸ Work is not intended to simply be an end in itself, it can also be a means for providing care for ourselves and families as well as a way of contributing to the wellbeing of others and society as we take up the cultural mandate that is basic to human existence on earth. The configuration of these three dimensions will vary between the experiences of workers, and yet the Holy Spirit is the common presence that brings life to each person through God’s gift of work.

Because work is fundamental to human experience and inextricably bound up with notions and pursuits of the good life, it is the focal point of some of our most deep-seated aspirations and anxieties. Given the above claim that work need not be experienced solely as a toilsome curse but can be embraced as a poetic practice in pursuit of a satisfying and God-honoring life, the experience of work is an important *locus* for theological reflection. The Holy Spirit who breathed life into the first humans is actively present in our East of Eden existence in which the toils and joys of work are inseparably bound together. A theology of work that attends to the presence of the Holy Spirit amidst this ambivalence must take seriously the normative role of Scripture as well as the activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians.

¹⁸ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 178-79.

**Chapter 2: Historical Background:
Herman Bavinck's and John Paul II's Engagement with "the Social
Question."**

Introduction

Since the middle of the twentieth century the topics of the laity and their work have become increasingly important to the Christian church in Western Europe and North America. The roots of this emphasis go back to the nineteenth century and the concomitant effects of the Industrial Revolution on society. At the closing of the nineteenth century the social issues could be ignored no longer and Catholic and Reformed theologians sought to address the social fallout of society's "progress" by addressing what they termed the "social question." It was Pope Leo XIII who set the agenda for subsequent Catholic social teachings with his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. The Reformed theologians, for the most part, returned to the Old Testament moral vision of society as well as the writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin and attempted to adapt the doctrine of vocation to their context.

In this chapter we will explore the early engagement of the social question by Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) and Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and analyze the ways they attempted to ground a theology of work in the biblical vision of the human person and of society. We will then move on to consider at length what is to date the most definitive Catholic theology of work, Pope John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*, and elucidate the methodological principles that enabled him to avoid some of the hermeneutical challenges that Bavinck encountered in his later writings. The chapter concludes with reflections on lessons that can be learned from these theologians for developing a theology of work fit for our contemporary context.

The Industrial Revolution & It's Discontents: Protestants and Catholics Address the "Social Question"

The father of modern management thought, Peter Drucker (1909-2005), once wrote: "Very few events have as much impact on civilization as a change in the basic principle for organizing work." In the middle of the eighteenth century, argued Drucker, the Industrial Revolution spawned numerous innovations and ushered in massive changes to the social landscape of western countries. The shift from rural agricultural life to urban industrial life was precipitated by the reorganization of work around machines rather than humans and animals.¹⁹ For all its benefits of enabling entrepreneurship, and improved productivity and efficiency, the Industrial Revolution had a shadow side. Work moved from farm to factory and workers migrated from rural to urban living. These shifts resulted in housing shortages, consolidation of power into the hands of a few, low wages, poor working conditions, and the dissolution of ancient work guilds.²⁰ Society was ripe with social upheaval and struggle between liberal capitalism and communist socialism reached a fevered pitch. It was in this social context that Pope Leo XIII delivered his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (*RN*). "[T]here can be no question whatever," wrote Pope Leo XIII, "that some remedy must be found, and quickly found, for the misery and wretchedness which press so heavily at this moment on the large majority of the poor."²¹ *RN* brought a Catholic vision of public theology to bear on the "social question" in the late

¹⁹ Peter Drucker, *The Essential Drucker: In One Volume the Best of Sixty Years of Peter Drucker's Essential Writings on Management* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2000), 338.

²⁰ Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum: The Condition of Labor*, in David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (eds.), *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 14.

²¹ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 15.

nineteenth century and set the course for subsequent development of Catholic social thought.²²

In November of 1891, just six months after Pope Leo XIII delivered *RN* at Saint Peter's in Rome, Herman Bavinck addressed the first Christian Social Congress in the Netherlands regarding the "social question." In his address Bavinck sought to identify principles in the Mosaic Law to serve as a hermeneutical bridge to bring Scripture to bear on the labor problems of the day. Embedded in the moral law of the Old Testament, Bavinck asserted, there are eternal principles intended to guide humanity into paths of life that would bring about the well-being of family, society, and nation.²³ There are, in Bavinck's words, "*eeuwige beginselen wselke in het Woord Gods voor de verschillende levenskringen neergelegd zijn*" (Translation: "eternal principles laid down in the Word of God for the various spheres of life") that can be used to test laws that govern society.²⁴ Like Leo XIII's own concerns expressed in *RN*, Bavinck was troubled not only by the economic injustice brought on when capitalism accumulates resources in the hands of the few, but also the problematic loss of ownership entailed in communism.²⁵

²² O'Brien & Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought*, 12-13.

²³ Herman Bavinck, "*Welke algemeene beginselen beheerschen, volgens de H. Schrift, de oplossing der sociale quaestie, en welke vingerwijzing voor die oplossing ligt in de concrete toepassing, welke deze beginselen voor Israël in Mozaïsch recht gevonden hebben?*", in Johan Adam Wormser, *Proces-verbaal van het social congress, gehouden te Amsterdam den 9, 10, 11, 12 November, 1891* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Zoon, 1892), 149-157 (157). See also John Bolt's essay on Bavinck's address: "General Biblical Principles and the Relevance of Concrete Mosaic Law for the Social Question Today (1891)", (*Journal of Markets & Morality*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (Fall 2010): 411-46 (430; 426).

²⁴ Bavinck, "*Welke Algemeene Beginselen*," 157.

²⁵ Propositions 5d and 5e of Bavinck's address highlight the importance of guarding against the injustices created within capitalism (Bavinck, *Ibid.*, p. 157). Section III of Bavinck's address outlines the nature of ownership of private property as part of stewardship to God as the true owner of all creation (*Ibid.*, 152-3).

Ten years later Bavinck returned to the topic of Scripture’s authority in a debate over the application of biblical commands to contemporary labor challenges.²⁶ In the debate, Aritius Sybrandus (Syb) Talma (1864-1916)—a Dutch self-identifying ethical theologian and Christian socialist—claimed that the Apostle Paul’s command, “servants obey your masters” (Col. 3:22-24; Rom. 13:1), did not apply to the modern worker.²⁷ Talma believed that although workers were “free” persons and the slave in antiquity was not, they faced a grimmer reality than the slave. At least in antiquity, he argued, a master had a vested interest in protecting his “investment” in his human property. The modern worker, by contrast, was treated as an expendable resource that could be used and discarded with little concern.²⁸

Talma considered the tension between Scripture’s teaching of freedom (1 Cor. 7:22) with the admonition to servants to “be obedient to their masters in everything” (Col. 3:22), but insisted that the Apostle Paul did not have the modern worker in mind when he gave this command. Paul was not endorsing a perpetual system of slavery but was in fact laying out the true freedom of the gospel to overturn all servitude and oppression. Consequently, instead of the paradigm of “authority” governing relationships in the factories, “leadership” was a more fitting way of framing the relationship between workers and employers. In a sense, factory workers were more like bakers who voluntarily agreed to provide for their customers rather than being bound by authority structures that were

²⁶ The debate was ignited by an article by Piet van Vliet entitled, “Proper Relationships” and took place in *Patrimonium* on March 28, 1902. (Gerard van Krieken, “Syb Talma: A Dutch Christian Socialist,” *Journal of Markets & Morality*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (Fall 2011): 393-428 (410).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 393-8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 395; 409-10.

“ordained by God.” The way forward advocated by Talma and his fellow Dutch Christian Socialists was that employers and employees should negotiate fair working conditions and wages. The employer-worker relationship was not based on authority structure of master-servant but on a negotiated contract, therefore the issue of obedience was not at stake. Society should not be modeled after the family or feudalism, but required voluntary agreement between citizens with equal rights.²⁹

Bavinck shared Talma’s concern for the plight of workers but he took exception with what he saw as the tearing apart of Scripture’s authority. Talma’s approach undermined Scripture’s ability to speak to all areas of life and to place both masters and servants (employers and workers) under the governance of God. In liberating employees from Paul’s command to obey those in authority, Talma was at the same time setting *employers free* from Paul’s command to provide what is just and fair for their employees (Col. 4:1). In Bavinck words: “*Als de zedelijke band van de eene zijde verbroken wordt, kan hij van d andere zijde niet meer gehandhaafd worden*” (Translation: “If the moral band of the one side is broken, it will no longer be maintained from the other side as well.”)³⁰ Years later, in his 1920 publication, *Biblical and Religious Psychology*, Bavinck returned to the dilemma of how to understand the enduring authority of Scripture and highlighted the ways in which the debate over labor was an “eloquent example of the difficulty into

²⁹ Ibid., 410-13.

³⁰ Bavinck, “Heeren en Knechten,” in *De Bazuin*, May 9, 1902. See also Krieken, “Syb Talma,” 410. It should be noted that Bavinck was not unmindful of the ways in which inequities in wealth, class, and human giftings could be perverted by sin and become solidified in system injustices. To curb such abuses Bavinck advocated various principles that protected the weak, vulnerable and poor (Section III of his 1891 Address).

which life can put us if it would earnestly direct itself according to the rule of Holy Scripture.”³¹

Of utmost importance to Bavinck was the struggle to bridge the gap between the commands of Scripture and the contextual realities of the day. For Bavinck, either Talma was right and the present social structures were incommensurate with those of the Apostles’ period, or the unchanging unity of humanity meant the enduring authority of Scripture’s commands could continue to be applied in straightforward ways.³² What is not clear in this debate is why Bavinck moved from his prior method of bridging the Scripture-context gap through principles derived from the Mosaic Law (1891), to this later method in 1902 that concentrated on the direct application of specific New Testament texts about masters and servants to the contemporary labor challenges. Furthermore, it is puzzling why he couldn’t see a third option for the hermeneutical bridge—something other than proving the discontinuity between socio-historical contexts or an unchanging human nature that transcends contextual realities. What is apparent in this hermeneutical quandary is that much of the rich theological anthropology that Bavinck had been developing was shelved in his debate with Talma. Bavinck’s application of his ethical vision to his context seemed to have run aground.

Bavinck’s primary concern for upholding the authority of the Bible is evident in what he described as the incarnational principle of Scripture. “This principle of incarnation controls the whole of special revelation,” wrote Bavinck. “This incarnation is always from

³¹ Herman Bavinck, *Bijbelshce en Religieuze Psychologie* (Kampen: Kok, 1920) (trans. Herman Hanko; Grand Rapids: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Church, 1974), 7.

³² *Ibid.*, 8.

above and yet is organically united with the world and humanity, and makes itself an indestructible part of cosmic life [...] It always brings a word of God to us, but always entering into the word [and world] of man, and insofar as this is true, it bears a human, historical, local, temporal character.”³³ Instead of simply writing off Scriptural commands as outdated, Bavinck insisted that we must find a way forward that does justice to both the enduring authority of Scripture and the contextual complexities of our day.

Near the end of the 20th Century, this same hermeneutical question beset Pope John Paul II as he sought to relate the enduring authority of Scripture to the modern worker. In his 1981 encyclical, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work (LE)*, he revisited the social question by developing a theological vision from the Old Testament—a vision that bears striking resemblance to Bavinck’s 1891 Address to the Social Congress. This encyclical sheds light on a hermeneutical bridge between Scripture and contemporary issues of work, thus opening a door to a Bavinckian theology of work capable of speaking to the labor issues of the twenty-first century.

Laborem Exercens

Context and Background

In 1981, on the eve of what would come to be known as Reaganomics and Thatcherism—U.S. and British Hayekian economic bulwarks against the expansion of Soviet Communism—³⁴ Pope John Paul II began his encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, by

³³ Ibid., p. 9; cf. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 45.

³⁴ See Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw’s book, *Commanding Heights: The Battle for the World Economy* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), for a historical overview of the way in which Hayekian economics

saying: “We are celebrating the ninetieth anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* on the eve of new developments in technological, economic and political conditions which, according to many experts, will influence the world of work and production no less than the Industrial Revolution of the last century.”³⁵ *LE* brought forth a marked development in modern theology of work and has become the classic text on this subject. While aligned with traditional Catholic social teaching, it goes further, offering a social critique of modern industrialism and singles out human work as “a *key*, probably *the essential key*, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of man’s [sic] good. And if... the gradual solution... must be sought in the direction of ‘making life more human,’ then... human work, acquires fundamental and decisive importance.”³⁶ In saying this, *LE* aimed at the heart of the social question that had been of critical importance to Catholic Social thought since *RN* some 90 years earlier.

LE’s theology of work implements a Catholic social vision that navigates through the communism-capitalism impasse. With *RN*, write Catholic theologians O’Brien and Shannon, papal encyclicals took on a less inward looking spirituality and turned their focus on specific social evils and various forms of exploitation.³⁷ In the years following World War II, a distinct priority was given to the laity in Catholic social teaching. Vatican II

came into the ascendancy over Keynesian planned government during the years of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

³⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work* (trans. Vatican; Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1981), 7. The encyclical identifies the following developments that must be addressed: increase in automated production, cost of energy and raw materials (scarcity and pollution of the earth), and increased demand among rising nations for a place at the decision table.

³⁶ *Laborem Exercens*, 10 (Italics appear in *LE*); David J. O’Brien & Thomas A. Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought*, pp. 41-2; Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 5, 9; Miroslav Volf, “On Human Work: An Evaluation of the Key Ideas of The Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 37 (1984): 65-79 (3).

³⁷ O’Brien & Shannon, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 12-13.

documents *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*, as well as Yves Congar's, *Lay People in the Church* (1951) and the World Congress for Lay Apostleship in Rome (1951)³⁸ reflect this emphasis on the laity within Twentieth Century Catholic thought. The term "theology of work" was first coined by Catholic scholars in the 1950's, finding its first systematic reflection in M.-D. Chenu's book, *The Theology of Work: An Exploration* (1963). This Catholic theology of work provided a neo-Thomist theology in lieu of the traditional Reformed-Lutheran vocation paradigm for work.³⁹

LE should be viewed in the same vein of Catholic social teaching for it carries on the tradition of elevating the role of the laity in the life of the church. Like *RN* in the previous century, it is keen to critique the ways in which work becomes dehumanizing in contemporary societies. Drawing on the themes of creation, mercy and justice in his earlier work, *Redemptor Hominis* (March 1979), Pope John Paul II provided a theological vision of the human person by which to discern those areas where the church needs to protect human dignity.⁴⁰

The Vision of Human Work in Laborem Exercens

LE draws on the rich troves of biblical creation theology and never travels far from it in discussion of human work.⁴¹ The *locus classicus* of *LE* is Genesis 1:28, "And God said, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion ...". In

³⁸ Yves M. J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (trans. Donald Attwater; Westminster: The Newman Press, 1967), xi.

³⁹ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 22; Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 71.

⁴⁰ O'Brien & Shannon, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 371.

⁴¹ Pope John Paul II asserts that creation theology is the 'guiding thread' of the whole encyclical (*Laborem Exercens*, 29).

this text Pope John Paul II sees “the first gospel of work” in which humans are taught to imitate the Creator God and participate in His activity in the world in the “most ordinary everyday activities.”⁴² Work in this encyclical is defined in broad terms and “means any activity of man [*sic*], whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances... any human activity that can and must be recognized as work” in the course of human endeavors.⁴³ Work is fundamental to human existence for it is through work that, “man [*sic*] in a sense continues to develop that activity [of God in creation], and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation.”⁴⁴ *LE* shows how work not only transforms nature, it also provides a means of self-realization; work being the way in which a person “achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being.’”⁴⁵

LE also teaches that embedded in creation are potentials that await discovery and development.⁴⁶ Through work humans take a small portion of creation’s resources “onto [their] workbench,”⁴⁷ and fulfill God’s command by enabling nature to bear fruit. Humans draw on the storehouses of two inheritances to conduct their work: the first is nature with its potentials and resplendent resources, and the second is culture with its accumulation of technologies and goods. It is through work that a person finds sustenance for themselves and others, and it is through work that they contribute to the development and health of the

⁴² *Laborem Exercens*, 58. (Quoting *Gaudeum et Spes*).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

human community. In short, work is intended to be a form of imitating God that simultaneously draws creation and human potential towards God's intention for the flourishing of all creation.⁴⁸ From these convictions *LE* derives this guiding principle by which to evaluate all systems of work: in order for work to be what God intended, humans must always be the “subject and deciding agent” of their work rather than a mere “object” of work.⁴⁹

The Effects of Sin on Work Today

It is against this backdrop of God's intention for work to actualize the potentials of humanity and nature that we can better understand *LE*'s assessment of labor problems at the end of the twentieth century. While sin does not cancel out the cultural mandate, it does adversely affect human work. *LE* focuses on the ways in which work conditions undermine human dignity by impeding rather than facilitating the realization of human potential.⁵⁰ In particular, it examines the dehumanization that is found in both capitalist and communist systems.

1. Capitalism: When Humans Become the *Object* of Work

One of the factors contributing to dehumanizing work is the infiltration of “materialistic and economic” thought that reduces work to mere “merchandise” that workers sell to employers. In this way, work becomes an instrumental “impersonal force” necessary for production—a mere means to an end that can be used and then discarded like

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31; 38-39, 11-13, 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16; cf. Volf, ‘On Human Work,’ 68.

⁵⁰ *Laborem Exercens*, 22; 13-14.

any other “raw material.”⁵¹ It is a short step from renaming work as such to treating humans as primarily an object of work, rather than as the subject and “deciding agent” of work.⁵² *LE* explains how this reversal of order takes place when capitalism goes awry and humans are treated as if they were created *for work* rather than work being created *for them*.

[I]t should be recognized that the error of early capitalism can be repeated wherever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work—that is to say, where he is not treated as *subject and maker*, and for this very reason as the true purpose of the whole process of production.⁵³

Thus, objectification of labor leads to the objectifying of humans. This, according to *LE*, stands God’s intentions on its head. For if work is to be the means by which humans obey God by realizing their own God-given potential through their development of creation, then humanity’s dominion must be expressed over nature as well as over a person’s work.⁵⁴ Capitalism reduces work to a commoditized transaction and treats human workers as expendable resources in the pursuit of maximized profits.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17-18; O’Brien & Shannon, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 376.

⁵² *Laborem Exercens*, 17-18. Objective refers to the agricultural means, industrial processes, or microprocessing in order to subdue the earth. Subjective, on the other hand, refers to ‘the human capacity to act in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself and with a tendency to self-realization.’ (*Ibid.*, 13-15; O’Brien & Shannon, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 376).

⁵³ *Laborem Exercens*, 18-9 (Emphasis added).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19; 15-17.

2. Communism: Stripping Humans of A Rightful Claim to the Outcomes of Their Work

Just as *LE* draws on the theological anthropology of Genesis 1 for its critique of “rigid” capitalism, so it draws on the same basis for its critique of communist solutions to labor problems. Here the encyclical distinguishes between labor and capital, insisting that the Catholic Church has always taught the principle that labor has priority over capital—the latter being the aggregate of agricultural goods and production processes.⁵⁵ In giving the command to subdue the earth, God—who is owner of all creation—puts before humanity the gifts of nature: affording humans a degree of ownership as they draw out the hidden resources embedded in nature. In order to make nature’s resources bear fruit, “man [*sic*] takes over ownership of small parts of the various riches of nature... by making them his workbench. He takes them over through work and for work.”⁵⁶ The problem with communism is that “merely taking these means of production (capital) out of the hands of their private owners [does not] ensure their satisfactory socialization,” nor that it will be used for the well-being of society.⁵⁷ Inevitably making the means of production a property of the State rather than of private owners ends up placing control of this capital under the direct control of a ruling elite. But if the good of society is to be pursued then it must be on the basis of their work that “each person is fully entitled to consider himself [*sic*] a *part-owner* of the great workbench at which he is working with every one else.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-36; 27-28; O’Brien & Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought*, 376-7.

⁵⁶ *Laborem Exercens*, 29.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 37; 34-35; cf. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice*, 67.

If capitalism goes awry when it objectifies humans by treating their labor as just another cog in the wheel of the industrial machine, communism dehumanizes the individual by severing their rightful claim to the capital (of nature and means of production) necessary for contributing to society through their work. Capitalism dehumanizes work when it places humans on the workbench as production material. Communism dehumanizes work when it prohibits workers from having any meaningful ownership of the workbench and its outcomes. In both cases, through different paths, unfettered capitalism and Marxist communism treat humans as the object rather than subject of work.

A Third Way Between Rigid Capitalism and Communism

Genesis 1 provides the “first gospel of work,” rooting human dignity in the act of imitating God by working. In their everyday activities of work people participate in God’s own activity: thereby fulfilling the command to subdue the earth.⁵⁹ This vision of humanity and human work has the potential to mitigate against the social ills of the modern worker. Work was created for humans. The inversion of the Creator’s ordering, through communist or capitalist economic structures, inevitably leads to dehumanizing and immoral work environments.

LE insists that remedies for these problems must not neglect the reality of sin’s effect on the blessing of work and the introduction of toil into all our cultural labors. Alongside the original gospel of work laid down in the first chapters of Genesis, we must also remember the gospel of work proclaimed and fulfilled in the works and words of Jesus. It is in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus that we find the necessary elements of a spirituality of

⁵⁹ *Laborem Exercens*, 57-58.

human work fit for our times. For it is in Jesus that we see a preview of how human work can participate in the activity of God Himself.⁶⁰ As we pursue peace and justice in and through our toilsome work, Christ “animates, purifies and strengthens those noble longings ... by which the human family strives *to make its life more human* and to rend the whole earth submissive to this goal.”⁶¹ The cross, then, is indispensable to a spirituality of human work, for it enables us to confront the distortion of human hearts and social structures. Just as the cross is inextricably tied to the resurrection of Jesus, so too human work contains within it, “through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the Gospel,’ a small ‘glimmer ... of the new heavens and the new earth.’”⁶²

The ramifications of this “gospel of work” for human dignity are readily apparent. In order for work to actualize the humanizing intentions of God, *LE* argues that the following should be present in society: 1. Suitable employment should be available to all without distinction, 2. Workers must be paid a fair and just wage, 3. Work processes should uphold human dignity, and 4. Workers must be free to form unions.⁶³

Critiques of *Laborem Exercens*

Work and the Full Experience of Being Human

For all its merits, a few elements of *LE* require amendment if we are to develop a theology of work fit for today’s work environments. When *LE* teaches that work is a form

⁶⁰ *Laborem Exercens*, 61-62; 59.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 63. (Quoting *Guadem et Spes*). (Italics appear in *LE*).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 38; O’Brien & Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought*, 377.

of “self-realization” by which a person becomes, “more of a human being,”⁶⁴ it jeopardizes human dignity by making dignity something that we have to achieve through our work rather than something we receive as a gift from God. This, as Miroslav Volf notes, makes the elderly, the disabled, and children vulnerable to dehumanization.⁶⁵

Like *LE*, Bavinck’s theology emphasizes the genuine developmental role that work has to offer to humanity, but his language preserves human dignity. He writes, “Work does not make a person a rational, moral, and religious being, but presupposes that one is such a being; in work, a person’s humanity comes to light.”⁶⁶ While a person’s human dignity is not at stake, their *experience of being human* can be adversely affected by their work.⁶⁷ *LE* is certainly correct that there is indeed something at stake in human work because of its inextricable tie to the development of creation and culture. But this is better understood in terms of how work leads to the “fullness of life” that God intends as we share in His ongoing work in this world. In the words of author and former CEO of Herman Miller furniture company, Max De Pree, “Work should be and can be productive and rewarding, meaningful and maturing, enriching and fulfilling, healing and joyful. Work is one of our

⁶⁴ “Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more of a human being.’” (*Laborem Exercens*, 23). “By working, human beings achieve a deeper realization of their personhood through a deeper participation in community and the common good” (CST, 377).

⁶⁵ Volf, *SJT*, 72-73. Volf prefers viewing work in terms of self-expression rather than self-realization—through work a person expresses their dignity rather than actualizing their dignity

⁶⁶ Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, 118. Other passages that discuss the connection between the unfolding of the image of God through work include: 113, 117, 119, 122; cf. *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. IV* 715-30.

⁶⁷ I find a similar train of thought in the writings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who is Man?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 27-29; 16-17.

greatest privileges. Work can even be poetic.”⁶⁸ De Pree’s words point to the profound possibilities of how work can not just be merely utilitarian but a life-giving way in which humans display their creativity as their bear God’s image.

Creation but No Ecology

Darrell Cosden finds the creation-based theology of *LE* methodologically misguided. It is overly foundationalist in its anthropology and conception of work, and it downplays the doctrines of nature and eschatology. This creates a problematic hierarchical relationship between relational and instrumental aspects of work.⁶⁹ “If the material products or objects of work are included in nature and thus in the resurrection in any way, (and therefore are included in the new heavens and new earth),” writes Cosden, “then work again objectively develops a value unique to itself. It ceases to be simply ‘for man’ [*sic*] in the way described in *Laborem Exercens*.” It is not just *humanity* but also *work* that must be considered as the subject and not just the object.⁷⁰

With the emphasis on the doctrine of Creation in *LE*, Miroslav Volf finds it surprising that there is not more of a critical evaluation of the ways in which technology is used to abuse the environment. An emphasis on the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:28 ought to note the ways in which humans are accountable to God in their subjugation of the earth.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Max De Pree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 32.

⁶⁹ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene: Wipft & Stock, 2004), 33.

⁷⁰ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 35.

⁷¹ Volf, *SJT*, 74-75.

What Should We Learn from *Laborem Exercens*?

The above analysis of *LE* demonstrates that John Paul II brought Scripture to bear on the capitalist-communist impasse of the 1980s. There is much in *LE*'s creation theology that resonates with Reformed theology of creation and vocation.⁷² While each of these areas deserves more attention, I will comment here on just one area in which the encyclical addresses the impasse that Bavinck encountered on how to interpret Scripture's commands for contemporary issues of work.

Part of an answer to the challenge Bavinck faced in his debate with Talma finds a remedy in the objective-subjective distinction that *LE* makes concerning work. At issue in the debate over servants and masters was not simply the interpretation of Scripture, but also the evaluation of Dutch society. Bavinck argued that the fundamental unity of human nature spans the centuries thus establishing continuity between the varieties of history so that new socio-cultural contexts do not free modern society from the authority of Scripture. Talma, on the other hand, argued that the Dutch context at the turn of the 20th century was so different from the New Testament that Paul's commands to servants were irrelevant to the labor crisis at hand. *LE* provides a third way beyond this impasse.

With Bavinck, *LE* affirms that the subject of work, humanity, "is always the same." Even as the encyclical is closer to Talma's view that "when one takes into consideration its objective directions one is forced to admit that there exist many ... different sorts of

⁷² These common themes include the following: a reclamation of creation theology in the development of theological anthropology; the importance of the cultural mandate for a holistic understanding God's manifold purposes for this world; a focus on the embedded potentials of creation unfolded in human culture; and the critical need to focus on the public expressions of discipleship in light of the enduring value of cultures in the new creation.

work.”⁷³ In other words, *LE* provides a method that addresses both the enduring unity of human nature and the contextual changes throughout history. The distinction between the subjective and objective aspects of work attuned the encyclical’s social analysis of labor to the ways in which work undermines human dignity established by God at creation. Thus, *LE* is sensitized to contextual realities as it evaluates work in light of the biblical vision of the human person.

This raises questions. What was it about the debate with Talma in 1902-03 that led Bavinck away from drawing on principles from the Mosaic Law as the means for evaluating the labor issues of the day? Was it Bavinck’s concern over the revolutionary impulses of Talma’s socialism, a socialism that threatened to dismantle the legal relationships of society while leaving the moral relationships untouched? Or did he sense that the pervasive application of the “social contract” to all levels of society threatened to undermine the diversity that God intends for creation? Although these questions deserve to be explored, this chapter will focus on a fundamental tension within Bavinck’s theology. And as we shall see, this tension sheds light on this issue of the enduring authority and applicability of Scripture’s ethical vision.

In his book, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, Nicholas Wolterstorff identifies a tendency of later Neo-Calvinists to give more attention to the proper unfolding of each sphere’s nature than to an assessment of how the activities within these spheres impact the well-being of humanity. We find this tendency in Bavinck’s 1891 address in which he argued that creational diversity involves an inequity of giftings between people, even as he notes the way the Mosaic Law ensured that these inequities would not become systemic

⁷³ *Laborem Exercens*, 19.

injustices (i.e. laws that protect the poor, weak and vulnerable, etc.).⁷⁴ We must never forget, writes Bavinck, that “Old Testament morality is written from the point of view of the oppressed.”⁷⁵ Yet Bavinck’s theology is not without defect. Bavinck had a concern for the poor but he also believed that God intended diversity (“inequity”) between classes and to a certain degree of rich and poor. In “Masters and Servants” his emphasis shifted away from the plight of the poor to advocating a non-revolutionary “leavening” method of slow social reform. These two themes in Bavinck’s earlier address must be put in proper order—concern for the oppressed must hem in the development of creational diversity in this fallen world. If we are to avoid the errors of second-generation Neo-Calvinists contemporary theologies of work must attend to worker experiences, especially of the most vulnerable.

Wolterstorff draws on Bob Goudzwaard for a corrective to this one-sided focus. Goudzwaard argues that while God does desire diversity, “It is the fullness of human life that is the decisive test, not the proper realization of each sphere’s inner nature.”⁷⁶ This danger to give priority to creational diversity over social justice is especially present when Neo-Calvinists isolate themselves from the suffering of the oppressed. When this happens the focus of theology becomes the ways humankind was created for the sake of structures.⁷⁷ *LE* is an important corrective for Neo-Calvinists who hope to counter these elements within their tradition that propel us towards social conservatism to the neglect of the vulnerable in society.

⁷⁴ Bavinck, ‘*Welke algemeene beginselen*,’ 154.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice*, 58-59 footnote. Wolterstorff quote is taken from Bob Goudzwaard, *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, 242-43).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

Conclusion

Turning to our contemporary context, the pioneer of early modern management thought, Peter Drucker, is once again helpful. “In 1946, with the advent of the computer, information became the organizing principle of production,” he writes, and “[w]ith this, a new basic civilization came into being.”⁷⁸ As the Industrial Revolution in the mid 18th century moved *people to the work*, Drucker notes, the information revolution of the 20th century set in motion the pattern of *moving work to people*. Today the communism-capitalism impasse is no longer prominent in the West. Rather, the question seems to be, what form of capitalism will we have? In this new context I will argue that we need to evaluate work environments and worker experiences in light of the ethical vision of Scripture.

At the beginning of this new century fresh opportunities and challenges are before us and it is in the area of theological anthropology that we can find a rallying point for cooperation between Catholics and Protestants.⁷⁹ The legacies of Herman Bavinck and Pope John Paul II include a resolute commitment to Scripture’s authority and its enduring relevance for all ages. They remind us that if we wish to uphold human dignity amidst the onslaught of dehumanizing forces, then we must repeatedly return to Scripture to discern a theological vision that speaks to the lived experiences of all members of society and cultivates a spirituality of work fit for our times. What is needed, however, is not simply a repristination of their theologies (nor for that matter of John Calvin and Martin Luther),

⁷⁸ Drucker, *The Essential Drucker*, 338.

⁷⁹ Georg Langemeyer, ‘Image of God,’ in *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), eds. Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, pp. 369-71.

but rather to follow their example of returning to Scripture to find a vision of humanity (replete with concrete spiritual practices) that addresses us amidst our hectic pace of life and eroded boundaries between work and rest.

The next chapter of this dissertation explores recent attempts by Protestant theologians to respond to the growing needs of workers with the intention of developing theological frameworks for grounding a Christian understanding of work in a more dynamic understanding of human society and of Scripture. Special attention will be given to how Miroslov Volf's proposes his pneumatological eschatology as a replacement for the traditional Reformed doctrine of vocation. Volf's *Work in the Spirit* is the most comprehensive post-*Laborem Exercens* theology of work to date and has spawned various counter proposals from Reformed theologians attempting to update the doctrine of vocation. Among these counter proposals are the works of Lee Hardy and Douglas Schuurman, who offer substantive critiques of Volf's work and afford a fair assessment of much of the present-day Reformed theology of vocation.

Chapter 3: Overview of Contemporary Theologies of Work

Introduction

Building upon the aforementioned historical development of theologies of work, this chapter offers an analysis of some of the leading contemporary texts in the field of theology and work since the publication of *Laborem Exercens*. The selection of theologians is based on the following rationale. First, Miroslav Volf's *Work in the Spirit* continues to be the leading theology of work text among theologians today, along with *Laborem Exercens*. All subsequent theologies of work invariably engage with the arguments of these two books.⁸⁰ In spite of its relatively minimal influence on local churches to date, *Work in the Spirit* deserves attention for its argument that the classical Protestant doctrine of vocation dating back to Martin Luther and John Calvin has outlived its usefulness and relevance to the contemporary world of work.

Second, the writings of Lee Hardy and Douglas Schuurman taken together provide the best representation of a Reformed counter-proposal to Volf's work in their updated Reformed view of vocation. More recent books have been written from Protestant perspectives such as David Jensen's *Responsive Labor*⁸¹ and Joshua Sweeden's *The Church and Work*,⁸² but the perspectives of Hardy and Schuurman more closely represent the type of Reformed theology of work found among the churches in which qualitative

⁸⁰ For example, in his article "Theology of Work," Gordon Preece uses Pope John Paul's *Laborem Exercens* as the leading creation-based theology of work and Miroslav Volf's *Work in the Spirit* as representative text on an eschatological/pneumatological theology of work. (Preece, "Theology of Work," in the *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, eds. William A. Dyrness, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Juan F. Martinez, Simon Chan (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 938-947).

⁸¹ David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

⁸² Joshua R. Sweeden, *The Church and Work: The Ecclesiological Grounding of Good Work* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

research was conducted.⁸³ The Reformed theology of vocation based on the biblical drama has been one of the strongest resources for Christian discipleship in these evangelical churches, and Hardy and Schuurman provide the best contemporary theological backdrop of this theological paradigm.

In the analysis of these authors, special attention is given to the ways each author presents the relationship between God's presence in the church and in the world and the implications this has for the everyday work of Christians. The chapter concludes by identifying further theological and methodological tasks that an updated Neo-Calvinist theology must address if it is to have contemporary relevance to the lived experiences of the everyday work of Christians.

Miroslav Volf - *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*

Overview

Miroslav Volf's, *Work in the Spirit: Toward A Theology of Work* follows Pope John Paul II's effort to take seriously the widespread alienation and dehumanization associated with work after the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. To date, Volf argues, it has been Roman Catholic theologians who have led the way in reflection on theology of work in the twentieth century. Protestants, he insists, have seen fit to live off of the theological reflection on vocation by Martin Luther and John Calvin—a locus whose shelf life is outdated. This is something that Miroslav Volf seeks to remedy in his book.⁸⁴

⁸³ Even when Hardy and Schuurman's books were not referenced in these churches, writers who popularize this Reformed doctrine of vocation (such as Timothy Keller, Amy Sherman, and Steven Garber) were influencing the language and theology of those communities.

⁸⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001), viii-ix, 76.

Drawing on the work of his mentor, Jürgen Moltmann, Volf seeks to shift the grounding for Protestant theologies of work from protology to pneumatological-eschatology and to replace the primary category of “vocation” with that of “spiritual gifts.”⁸⁵ Volf’s thesis is that Christians should understand their mundane work as “work in the Spirit” who calls and gifts people to work in active anticipation of the eschatological transformation in the world.⁸⁶ Such an eschatological perspective, he argues, enables Christians to see their work in light of God’s eschatological purposes, and the pneumatological emphasis inspires Christians to take up their work as cooperation with God in their own development and in the transformation of the world. The focal image of Volf’s theology of work is Paul’s teaching of *charisms*, or giftings of the Spirit, which links the present work of the Spirit with the eschaton. Volf’s theology emphasizes that God is at work both at the end of history and in the present through the Holy Spirit to inspire and enable anticipations of God’s new creation in the present age.

Two Challenges for Contemporary Theology of Work

There are two important claims that Volf makes that should be kept in mind in an attempt to develop a theology of work that addresses the changing contexts in which we find ourselves today. The first is an understanding of the weaknesses and potential pitfalls of the creation theology on which the Reformed doctrine of vocation rests. The second is the importance of a theology of work to simultaneously attend to the world of work and

⁸⁵ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, viii-ix.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 123; 164; 99-102.

world of Scripture. We will examine these two issues first before proceeding to a discussion of the central argument of Volf's *Work in the Spirit*.

1. Volf's Problem With Vocation

The impetus for Volf's new approach to a theology of work is the outdated nature of the 16th Century Reformed vocation paradigm and its irrelevance to today's work experiences. Volf's criticisms of this doctrine include the following. First, the classic Reformed doctrine of vocation is based upon a creation theology that consists of a static view of society and social stations common in Reformation Europe. Rigid views of social status assume a stable work environment in which individuals remain in a single occupation throughout their life. Second, the vocation doctrine continues to be co-opted to reinforce the injustice status quo of hierarchical societies. Volf's point here is that if there is a divinely given social order with prescriptive class structures then passive resignation is engendered among believers. Third, in post-industrial societies where alienating work is widespread, a dynamic understanding of work is needed to guide Christians as they endeavor to develop their gifts through their work. In the face of such widespread alienation through work, Volf argues, a Christian theology of work should both *inspire* and *guide* a transformation of work experience.⁸⁷

2. Method: Challenges Addressing the Problem of Work

Volf states that a robust theology of work requires critical theological reflection on the concrete realities of human work in an effort to evaluate and reshape the world of work in light of promised new creation. For this type of analysis theologians need to learn how

⁸⁷ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 160.

people *conduct* their work as well as *interpret* it—the doing and interpretation of work are inseparable.⁸⁸

But bridging the gulf between ancient Scripture and modern work is no easy feat and requires more than an inductive study of the few biblical passages on work. Given the limited discussion of work in Scripture, he argues, inductive study of isolated biblical passages will not yield a robust theology of work. A “synthetic” approach which locates work in light of the larger eschatological context of Scripture offers a coherent view of work that can bridge the worlds of the Ancient Near East and modern industrial societies.⁸⁹

These two challenges of providing a dynamic understanding of work for today’s society and the need to simultaneously attend to Scripture and work contexts will be used to evaluate Volf’s own project as well as the responses of Hardy and Schuurman. A brief overview of each author’s central argument and assumptions will be provided, followed by an analysis of the debate that ensued between them.

Central Argument and Assumptions of *Work in the Spirit*

Eschatology and Transformatio Mundi

A basic assumption of Volf’s book is that a proper Christian approach to a theology of work must place human work in the larger context of God’s eschatological purposes in redemptive history before proceeding to reflect on norms for human nature and work. It is an “incontestable fact,” he argues, that the entire message of the New Testament reflects

⁸⁸ Ibid., 25; 27-42; 42-45.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 78; cf. Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries Into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 191.

an eschatological character.⁹⁰ Drawing on themes set forth in Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, Volf argues that work must be "done under the inspiration of the Spirit and in light of the coming new creation,"⁹¹ for it is the Spirit of God who gifts people to work in anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world (*transformatio mundi*).⁹²

Central to Volf's eschatology is the belief that there is a significant degree of continuity between this present creation and God's coming new creation. The Scriptural support for this is found in those passages that depict the earthly context of the Kingdom of God (see especially Matthew, Isaiah, and Revelation), along with its liberating nature of the consummation of this kingdom for all of creation (see Rom. 8). This eschatological framework encompasses creation with all the human work that constitutes its present form. Volf insists that it is not sufficient to view work as part of God's ongoing creation (*creation continua*); work needs to be seen in light of the *transformatio mundi* that will repurpose what humans have done so that they can be used as building materials for God's coming kingdom.⁹³

Given Volf's eschatological assumptions concerning the *transformatio mundi*, work has an intrinsic value as an end in itself because it forms a part of God's enduring purposes for the created order. The biblical vision of the future displays the ways the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28) has been carried out in history and various ways this work finds its place in the coming kingdom of God (Isa. 60; Rev. 21:24-27). Human work,

⁹⁰ Miroslav Volf, "Eschaton, Creation, and Social Ethics," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 135, 130; Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 74.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 79; 91-93.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 96; 98-9.

because it is grounded in creation, will endure into the Eschaton—albeit after first undergoing a purifying transformation. This enduring value of work undermines the Medieval hierarchy of spiritual contemplation over ordinary secular work, for both creation and culture will find their place in God’s new creation.⁹⁴

This way of interpreting continuity between creation and new creation raises the question, for Volf, of whether human and Divine work are compatible. Beginning with the premise that new creation will arrive as a gift from God and not arise from human achievement, Volf explains that this expectation inspires human action rather than passivity. Expectation of the future inspires active cooperation with God in the present. Because God is at work both in history and at the end of time, God’s work and human work must not be seen as mutually exclusive. Rather, humans are kingdom co-workers who partner with the God who “completes creation and renews heaven and earth.”⁹⁵ In this way the Holy Spirit works in history to bring foretastes of the new creation. Human work inspired by the Spirit can be seen as an “active anticipation of the exclusively divine *transformatio mundi*.”⁹⁶ How the Spirit of God works amidst human work leads us to the second part of Volf’s theology of work project.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 89; 93; 91; 93-4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 100, cf. Jürgen Moltmann, “The Right to Work,” 45.

⁹⁶ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 100. Consummation is God’s work alone but “since this solitary divine work does not obliterate but transforms the historical anticipations of the new creation human beings have participated in... human work is an aspect of active anticipation of the exclusively divine transformation mundi.” (Ibid., 100)

Pneumatology and the Church-World Relationship

Volf's eschatological backdrop sets the context for a pneumatological focus given the inextricable connection between new creation and the work of the Spirit. The New Testament teaching on the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts are central to Volf's theology of work and serve as the impetus for wanting to shift the conversation from matters of vocation within a protological framework to that of *charisms* within a pneumatological eschatology. For Volf, the doctrine of Creation is *necessary but insufficient* as a foundation for a theology of work because it is linked to preservation of the created order rather than its transformation.⁹⁷ Volf asserts that the work of the Holy Spirit in this present age focuses on this transforming work. For the Spirit is the firstfruits of the "future salvation (see Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22) and the present power of eschatological transformation in them."⁹⁸

For too long, argues Volf, Protestant theology has confined the work of the Spirit to personal salvation and inner transformation. If the totality of the human person and experience of work is to come into purview, a vision of the Holy Spirit as Creator and Redeemer of this world is needed (see Jn. 1:12). The Gospels portray the salvation brought by Jesus as encompassing the material world: healing of human bodies, liberation from oppression and poverty, and reconciliation between people groups. The entirety of creation is the Spirit's sphere of activity so "the Spirit is not only the Spirit of religious experience but also the Spirit of worldly engagement."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 102.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 104.

Volf praises Luther's theology of vocation for overturning the monastic hierarchy between inward spiritual contemplation and outward action in the world. Luther argued that all Christians have a vocation and that every type of work performed by Christians can be transformed into a vocation. In practice, Volf argues, Luther's view of vocation has often bred indifference to alienating forms of work. Part of the reason for this is the difficulty in reconciling his description of the Christian's two callings and the ambiguous ethical implications of the Christian's spiritual vocation and external vocation.¹⁰⁰ Whereas Luther built his thinking on around Paul's writing on calling (*klesis*) in 1 Corinthians 7:20, Volf prefers the word *charisma* (gifts of the Spirit) which extend beyond the general character of the Christian life in the Spirit to include the specific functions that God equips Christians to perform. All Christians are called to manifest the fruit of the Spirit,¹⁰¹ and this calling "branches out in the multiple gifts of the Spirit to each individual."¹⁰²

The biblical basis for Volf's understanding of *charisms* are those Old Testament texts that describe God's gifting of specific craftsmen and artists to construct the temple (see Ex. 35:2-3 & 1 Chron. 28:11-12), and the various leaders to guide His people (Jd 3:10; 1 Sam 16:13; Prov. 16:10). In the New Testament these giftings are then expanded to all of God's people who are called and gifted by the Spirit to exhibit the values of the new creation which are captured in Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).¹⁰³ The Old Testament description of the Spirit's gifts are not only expanded church-wide in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 106-08.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 110-12.

¹⁰² Ibid., 113.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 113-14.

the New Testament, but Volf goes further and argues that, “All human work, however complicated or simple is made possible by the operation of the Spirit of God in the working person; and all work whose nature and results reflect the values of the new creation is accomplished under the instruction and inspiration of the Spirit of God (see Isa. 28:24-29).”¹⁰⁴ Volf uses the term “cooperation” to describe the way the Spirit of God works in enabling humans to participate in God’s shared project. Partnership with God is “cooperation with God in work is proleptic cooperation with God in God’s eschatological *transformatio mundi*.”¹⁰⁵

The Presence of God in the Church and World

The New Testament’s teachings on the Spirit’s gifts are limited to the community of believers, but Volf does not stop with an ecclesiological limit on the Spirit’s work. Since Jesus is Lord of all humanity and is active in all people through the Spirit, all human work is in fact carried out “in the power of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁶ The Holy Spirit is not confined to the church but is active in the world bringing forth firstfruits of the kingdom. The difference between the Spirit’s work in the church and in the world is a difference of *degree* and not of *kind*. In the church the Spirit is “redeeming and sanctifying the people of God,” and in

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 114.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 115.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 118. “If the world will be transformed, then the work of non-Christians has in principle the same ultimate significance as the work of Christians: insofar as the results of non-Christians’ work pass through the purifying judgment of God, they, too, will contribute to the future new creation” (Ibid., 118).

the world he is “sustaining and developing humanity.”¹⁰⁷ The Spirit strives to lead both the realm of nature and of grace toward their final glorification.

This common *telos* justifies an analogy between the realms of grace and nature. Beginning with the church, Volf extends the nature and manner of the Spirit’s working out into the world. The difference between the work of Christians and non-Christians depends not on their motive but upon their conscious or unconscious openness “to the prompting of the Spirit.” Non-believers can be, in a sense, anonymous cooperators with God to the degree that their work is an “anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world, even though they may not be aware of it.”¹⁰⁸ For both Christians and non-believers conformity to the new creation is the criteria by which we evaluate work. Work that endures, regardless of motive, must first pass through purifying judgment. As Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21:24-26 point to, it is possible that at the final judgment a person may be barred from the kingdom while their work is purified and preserved. This keeps us back from an ideological glorification of work while simultaneously infusing work with meaning.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ “The difference in the activity of the Spirit in these two realms lies not so much in the different purposes of the Spirit with the two groups of human beings, as in the nature of the receptivity of human beings.” (Ibid., 119)

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 119.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 120-21. He writes: “all work that contradicts the new creation is meaningless; all work that corresponds to the new creation is ultimately meaningful.” We prepare building blocks for the glorified new creation (Ibid., 121).

Discussion of Volf's *Work in the Spirit*

The Enduring Influence of Work in the Spirit

More than twenty years after its first publication, *Work in the Spirit* continues to be the benchmark text on theology of work. While counterproposals have abounded in the past two decades,¹¹⁰ the influence of this book still impacts how subsequent theologies of work are undertaken.

The reception of *Work in the Spirit* among scholars has effectively shifted the debate from matters of creation and anthropology to eschatology and pneumatology. Even those who reject Volf's thesis see the need to respond to his four-fold reasoning for privileging eschatology over protology:

- The thoroughly eschatological nature of Christian existence,
- The teleological trajectory of creation to new creation points to actualization, not repristination of creation,
- Creation theology is inherently concerned with preservation rather than transformation,
- Creation theologies reinforce social conservatism and the reinforcing of the status quo.¹¹¹

Evaluating Volf's work in light of the two challenges he set forth for contemporary theologies of work we observe the following. In terms of methodology, Volf, much like

¹¹⁰ For example, Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of this World*, Gordon Preece, "The Threefold Call: A Trinitarian and Reformed Theology of Vocation in Response to Volf's *Work in the Spirit*" (PhD Diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Paternoster Press, 2006), and David Jensen, *Responsive Labor*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 85; 101-2.

Bavinck and Pope John Paul II, argues that a theology of work needs to attend to the world of the Bible and the world of work as it attempts to tease out contemporary implications for today.¹¹² Volf's call for a distinct method of doing theology of work according by attending to the entirety of Scripture and the modern experiences of work is compelling, but he fails to sufficiently address his own stated challenges. His insistence on a single locus undermines his "synthetic" handling of Scripture and turns his analysis into an overly harmonized and narrow account of the biblical accounts of work. In insisting that all theological development must be conducted from a strict eschatology the diversity of perspectives on work in the biblical texts are sacrificed.

In terms of the content of his theological argument, Volf's pneumatological eschatology has raised important questions of how we understand God's active presence in the world and has helped recover eschatology as an important theological and ethical resource. Yet here as well Volf achieves a unified vision of God's presence and work by sacrificing the biblical accounts of the Spirit's diverse activity in the world. By basing his view of the Spirit's work in the world on the model of the Spirit's work in the Church, Volf's approach runs the danger of collapsing the multifaceted presence of the Spirit in the world and church described in Scripture.¹¹³ The diversity in the work of the Spirit should be seen as an *asset* rather than a liability for Christian ethics, in spite of Volf's claims that

¹¹² Ibid., 84. Volf writes: "Alienation in work is not equivalent to dissatisfaction with work; one can obviously be alienated without being dissatisfied... A theory of alienation that concentrates on work satisfaction cannot make this necessary step beyond people's feelings and preferences." (Ibid., 159). Alienating work has both objective and subjective dimensions to it that need to be attended to (Ibid., 157-58). When examining alienation at work subjective examination through job satisfaction alone can leave aside discussion of the objective character of their work. Dissatisfaction with work can be influenced by unhappiness in other areas of life. In short, dissatisfaction may not be an indication of alienation and certainly more is needed than personal feelings (Ibid., 159).

¹¹³ Cf. Hardy, "Work in the Spirit," 194.

it promotes ethical ambiguity.

What remains to be developed is a response to Volf's criticisms that a Reformed theology of vocation cannot provide a dynamic understanding of work for contemporary society. In the following section, we will explore the responses of Lee Hardy and Douglas Schuurman to Volf and their development of Reformed theological resources for a theology of work that involves seeking the transformation of unjust social structures.

Reformed Criticisms and Responses to Volf's *Work in the Spirit*

One or Multiple Theological Loci?

Lee Hardy believes that the pneumatological eschatology articulated in *Work in the Spirit* provides a powerful argument for all theological studies to give proper weight to the *telos* of creation and the corresponding ethical implications that flow from this. Human work should be seen as a form of cooperation with God in the transformation of the world. He lauds Volf's eschatology for safeguarding against championing human progress in naïve triumphalism. Hardy writes:

In facilitating a transformation of human work, a theology of work cannot operate with an evolutionist understanding of social realities. The concept of new creation precludes all naïve belief in the permanence of human moral progress. A truly new creation can never result from the action of intrahistorical forces pushing history toward ever-superior states....¹¹⁴

The recovery of eschatology as a central locus for Christian theology is an important development in 20th Century theology. This, Hardy argues, has helped to break

¹¹⁴ Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 84.

down the problematic dualism of Luther's two-kingdom theology and, in a different form, the public-private dualism embedded in Western societies following the Enlightenment (particularly the French expression of it). Furthermore, the renaissance of eschatology has raised the awareness among many Christian scholars of the dynamic tension between the "already" and the "not yet"—an invaluable ethical resource that keeps Christian engagement in culture back from the extremes of pessimism and triumphalism. In short, Hardy agrees with much of Volf's four critiques of creation-based theologies but sees these as historical accretions rather than congenital defects.

Hardy argues that Volf's privileging of eschatology over creation poses problems in how we understand continuity between creation and new creation. Hardy sees new creation as an important theological locus, but when isolated from other doctrines, it lacks specific criteria to guide human action towards God's revealed *telos*. Inevitably, Hardy asserts, a theology that seeks to influence human action will need to draw, as Volf's does in *Work in the Spirit*, on creation categories, such as the image of God, to construct criteria for ethical discernment and guidance.¹¹⁵ The problem is that "to the degree that there is continuity between creation fallen and creation renewed, the eschatological theology of work will in fact prove to be parasitic on the protological."¹¹⁶ Instead of privileging eschatology, Hardy asks why not examine work from the doctrines of creation, fall and redemption and integrate "all three moments of salvation history"?¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Hardy illustrates this point by showing how Volf does this by developing his notions of freedom and responsibility in his analysis of alienation in work (Lee Hardy's review of Volf's, "Work in the Spirit: Toward a New Theology of Work," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 194-95).

¹¹⁶ Hardy, "Work in the Spirit," 195.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

In response to Hardy's criticisms, Volf voices doubt over whether it is possible to have more than one center for theological reflection without at some point making one or the other locus redundant. Volf prefers to begin with eschatology and then ask how the doctrines of creation and sin impact this eschatological framework.¹¹⁸ The justification for this eschatological starting point is, as Volf claims, the "incontestable fact" that "the message of the New Testament as a whole is eschatological in character." This assumption shapes the entirety of Volf's project.¹¹⁹ For Volf eschatology should have primacy (though not monopoly) because new creation texts of Scripture are the places where we see God's intentions for creation most clearly.¹²⁰

Douglas Schuurman aligns his theology with Hardy and goes on to draw out the methodological assumptions of Volf's theological schema. Schuurman rebuffs Volf's assertion that multiple loci is redundant for theological reflection and attempts to provide the balanced attention to creation, fall, redemption, and new creation that Volf lacks.¹²¹ Critical to the debate over one or multiple theological loci is the issue of continuity and discontinuity between creation and new creation. Volf approaches continuity in his discussion of *transformatio mundi*, which, in opposition to the protological *creatio continua* logic, entails not a repristination of the garden in the age to come, but a genuine realization of creation's potentiality and the surprising newness (discontinuity) of the new creation. Schuurman senses here that a pragmatic element motivates Volf's argument in

¹¹⁸ Volf, "Eschaton," 134-35; 153-54.

¹¹⁹ He writes: "If the Christian life is a life in the Spirit of the new creation, the Christian work can be no exception; work in the Spirit is one aspect of life in the Spirit." (Ibid., 135)

¹²⁰ Ibid., 136-37.

¹²¹ Douglas J. Schuurman, "Creation, Eschaton, and Social Ethics: A Response to Volf," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 144-45.

that the protological basis of vocation has led to static views of work and social structures and to a socially conservative Christian ethic.¹²²

On this point Schuurman demurs. He responds, first, by pointing to the socially transformative power that creation theology can have for social ethics (For example, the fact that humanity was created in the image of God has provided revolutionary notions of the human person that were subversive to powerful regimes and oppressive structures).¹²³ Second, he shows how continuity can be seen throughout the creation, fall, redemption, new creation narrative in the three foundational human relationships between God, other people and nature. As the biblical narrative unfolds, the original integrity and life-giving nature of these interdependent relationships was effected by the fall, found consistent redemptive healing in the covenant people of Noah, Abraham, Israel, and the Church, and will finally find glorified perfection in the new creation. Each chapter of this narrative brings to the fore irreplaceable insights concerning work in light of human nature and God's enduring purposes. This multi-loci approach, he argues, is an *asset* for theologies of work in that it enables a more thorough treatment of ethical issues.¹²⁴

Schuurman goes on to argue that underlying both creation and new creation is a shared theological core that *enriches* theological and ethical reflection and is not redundant. Specifically, it holds back Christian piety from running off into either over-realized "this worldly" eschatologies or into world-flight asceticism. Creation theology provides an ontological grounding that the multivalent visions of the new creation draw upon. Without

¹²² Ibid., 149-51.

¹²³ Gordon Preece offers additional theological support and historical examples that support the argument Schuurman is making here. (Preece, "The Threefold Call," 279-80).

¹²⁴ Ibid., 144-45.

this grounding interpreters of Scripture might be tempted to, for example, throw off the temporal bonds of marriage or carelessly leave our child to play unattended near a den of poisonous snakes.¹²⁵ Similarly, eschatology alone provides a weak criterion for discerning the difference between good and alienating work.¹²⁶ What new creation does provide, however, is a vivid reminder that the remedy for the fallen world will not arise from within it, but rather arrive as a fresh act of God. This hope, arising from beyond the bounds of history, shapes the ethic of the church as it follows the pattern of the suffering love of Jesus Christ. This ethic, as Schuurman notes, cannot be derived from observing the creation order alone.¹²⁷

For all its merits of profound insights, Volf's eschatological vision in *Work in the Spirit* has been criticized for its utopianism and abstraction cut loose from the earthy realities of work in a good-but-fallen world.¹²⁸ This should give us pause to reflect on whether Volf's single loci causes his synthetic method of handling of Scripture to flatten the biblical texts in order to fit them into his theological schema. Gordon Preece argues that the difference of emphasis between Hardy/Schuurman and Volf is that the former highlight the *ontological* priority of creation, whereas Volf is emphasizing the *epistemic* priority of the Eschaton.¹²⁹ Preece's evaluation of that debate is sound but his endorsement

¹²⁵ Ibid., 154-56; cf. Hardy, "Work in the Spirit," 195.

¹²⁶ Hardy, "Work in the Spirit," 194. As noted above, Volf necessarily has to draw on creation theology for concrete criterion of alienating work.

¹²⁷ Schuurman, "Creation," 156-58.

¹²⁸ See David Brown, "Book Review: *Work in the Spirit: Towards a Theology of Work* by Miroslav Volf," in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 6 (1), 1993, 76-77.

¹²⁹ Preece, "The Threefold Call," 286-87. That is to say, in Volf's framework eschatology has epistemic priority in that it has the controlling say in theological matters over all other theological loci.

of Volf's epistemology is problematic and misses the revelatory value of Scripture's cumulative teachings through each stage of the redemptive drama. While creation texts need to be seen in light of the *telos* of new creation, and new creation texts assume and draw from the ontological grounding of creation, both sets of texts need to be viewed within the manifold purposes of the mission of God as revealed in Scripture's unfolding story of creation, fall, redemption and new creation.

More accurately, in these passages where we do see God's intentions revealed in eschatological texts, they often reveal His purposes more clearly. But this is not always the case. Should the ceasing of marriage in the Eschaton lead us to abandon the gift of this institution in the present? Similarly, is the procreation mandate nullified with this vision of the future without marriage? Following this logic, we dismiss out of hand tremendous resources for guiding public theology (For example, maintaining the view that "marriage as a gift instituted by God for human happiness and wellbeing," allows Christians to support this institution and its value to the human community at large). One can grant a qualified degree of priority to eschatology provided that it is tethered to the larger narrative of Scripture. Failure to hem in such one-sided privileging of eschatology leads to a failure to uphold the reality that when it comes to the Eschaton (even in the light of Scripture), "we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12a, NRSV).

Eschatological texts provide powerful resources for Christian ethics but they are not intended to be comprehensive in scope—rather, they are intended to be glimpses of God's fulfilled promises that arouse hope in readers. When we look at how the creation texts describe God's divine commands to cultivate the embedded potentials of creation in light of the new creation, then they become more illuminating. As Herman Bavinck

powerfully expounds at the closing section of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, while the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is derived from creation texts, it is only in the new creation texts that we see the full-orbed nature of this image bearing as including not only male and female but also “a great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9, NRSV).¹³⁰

Here we come to one of the most profound weaknesses of Volf’s sweeping eschatological visions: by insisting on having only one locus of theological reflection, he flattens the diverse witness of Scripture’s ethical vision and thus impedes a holistic Christian ethic for public life. The hermeneutical method of heeding the biblical drama of Scripture functions best when it helps interpreters attend to the diversity of biblical teachings, rather than prematurely harmonizing them under a single theological locus. This theological framework, then, can be used to attune Christians to the ways in which God’s Spirit may be at work in our present context accomplishing His purposes for creation. This, I suggest, is a stronger biblical and theological foundation for grasping the diverse modes of the Spirit’s work in the church and the world. It also has profound implications for how we approach nurturing a spirituality of work.

The debate between Volf, Hardy and Schuurman has surfaced important assumptions about the unity of God and the diverse modes of the Spirit’s presence in the world. What will be argued in Chapter 4 is that the presence of the Spirit in the world is better understood in light of *the Scripture’s revelation of the Triune God’s manifold mission in the world*. This is a more solid biblical foundation for understanding the mission

¹³⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. IV*, 715-730.

of God, the Spirit's dynamic presence in the world, and the church's commission to embody what it means to be truly human in the already-but-not-yet world.

Are Spiritual Gifts the Best Way of Understanding the Active Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and World?

Hardy also takes issue with Volf's synthesis of the Holy Spirit's active presence in the New Testament Church with the Old Testament accounts of the Creator God's work in the world. This approach, says Hardy, "drain[s] the New Testament concept of spiritual gifts of its specific redemptive-historical meaning."¹³¹ By reading back into the Old Testament meanings revealed by the new covenant, Volf severs *charisms* from the role they played at that particular context in redemptive history. In response to the criticism, Volf argues that it is the oneness of God that establishes the analogy between the works of God in these two realms of church and world. Volf later clarified his earlier position by stating that it is by *extension* that the spiritual gifts of Christians are used in secular work. And it is by *analogy* that we understand how spiritual gifts relate to non-Christians.¹³² Hardy, in contrast, starts with the two works of God in providence and redemption and sees two different types of gifts in operation.¹³³

Volf argues that the difference between him and Hardy on this point is one of emphasis. Although both writers see spiritual gifts as the proper means of bridging the gap between church and world, Hardy emphasizes that when it comes to vocation, there is no gifting without *calling*. Volf, on the other hand, emphasizes that there is no calling without

¹³¹ Hardy, "Work in the Spirit," 194.

¹³² Ibid., 143; cf. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 118-9.

¹³³ Hardy, "Work in the Spirit," 140.

an endowment of *gifts* by the Spirit. Thus “vocation” and “*charism*,” says Volf, are ways of referring to the same unity of gift and call by the Spirit. This effectually unhinges vocation from soteriology (à la Luther’s interpretation of *klesis*) and locates it in ecclesiology, thus rendering the analogies between external call to spiritual call (or particular to general) erroneous.¹³⁴ From this ecclesiological starting point, Volf argues, the *charism* paradigm helps us understand mundane work.¹³⁵

Through the metaphor of *charism* Volf attempts to provide a means of unity and yet distinction in how to understand God’s work outside the church. The work of the Holy Spirit in the church and world to bring about the eschatological transformation of the created order provides a unifying theme of his theology. And yet Volf’s own system struggles to give a convincing account of any differentiation in the work of the Spirit in these two realms. At the outset of his book Volf criticizes those visions of the good life that consist of multiple spheres of social life that operate with their own internal logic.¹³⁶ This oversimplification misrepresents both the Neo-Calvinist theology of sphere sovereignty as well as the Catholic social teaching on subsidiarianism.

Volf’s use of *charism* as an analogy for how the Spirit works in the world rests upon a problematic exegesis of Scripture. New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington, argues that Volf’s distinguishing between “spiritual gifts” and “gifts from God” is

¹³⁴ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 132-3.

¹³⁵ Volf, “Eschaton,” 133. Volf writes: “Hardy and I agree that in constructing a theology of work one should travel from ecclesiology to theology of secular realities and that the concept of “charisma” is the best vehicle for undertaking the trip.” (Ibid., 133)

¹³⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

unwarranted.¹³⁷ Witherington argues that in 1 Corinthians 7 the term *charism* “refers to the grace gift either to remain single for the Lord or to remain married in the Lord. It has nothing to do with our vocation [work].”¹³⁸ Furthermore, he argues, in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 “differing *persons* are said to ‘be’ gifts [*charisms*] to the church (‘God has given some to be apostles’), but the gift or *charism* here *is the person*, not the work!”¹³⁹ The message of these passages, Witherington argues, is that the Holy Spirit gifts the community with people (*charisms*) who in turn build up the body through their gifts.

So what should be made of Volf’s *charism* paradigm in light of this exegesis that it refers to a *person*, not a gift? Is it of any value for understanding the unity between God’s work in the church and the world? Exploring this line of thought leads us to consider if God gives certain people as gifts for the wellbeing of society in a similar way that He does within the church. This, as Hardy argues, is similar to how some 17th Century Calvinists in the British Isles drew on 1 Corinthians 12 and conceived of society operating as a body with interdependent parts.

¹³⁷ Volf, “Eschaton,” 142. Volf’s reasoning for this is that, “it is the same Spirit given to Christians as the first installment of what is to come.” Yet Volf still ends up creating two categories of gifts: *charisms* are gifts for those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are used by Christians in the church and by extension these function in society. These “spiritual gifts are related to the work of non-Christians by analogy.” (Ibid., 142-143; cf. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 118.) “What can be said of work of Christians on the basis of the biblical understanding of charisms can also be said by analogy of the work of non-Christians....” Volf goes on in a note of optimism when he writes that provided that non-Christians are open to the Spirit then their work too can be an “anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world.” Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 119. “To the extent that non-Christians are open to the prompting of the Spirit, their work, too, is the cooperation with God in anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world, even though they may not be aware of it.”

¹³⁸ Witherington, *Work*, 37. While I find Witherington’s book as a whole disappointing and his approach unconvincing, his textual work on these NT passages are helpful for understanding the NT teaching on *charisms*.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 36-37. Emphasis mine. Witherington goes on to say that the person may indeed be gifted to do the work, “[b]ut the work itself is not called a gift; the ability to do the work is.”

What is perplexing when reading Schuurman is why in his study of biblical texts on work he follows Volf and Hardy in using the vocation, calling, *charisms* paradigms for interpreting Scripture and bridging the gap between the Spirit's work in the church and the world. In spite of his biblical study, Schuurman never seriously considers whether another biblical text or metaphor could be used for these tasks. Is the language of "calling" the best paradigm for examining the topic of discipleship and work in Scripture? And are 1 Corinthians 7 and 12 the best texts for understanding human work? The Reformers may have landed on these as helpful texts given their socio-historical needs, but must we take them as ours as well? Finally, does upholding the unity of God necessitate a monolithic way of seeing his engagement in the world (à la Volf)? Spiritual gifts and callings presuppose larger purposes of God, and yet exchanges between Schuurman, Hardy and Volf are so focused on the calling and gifting passages of the New Testament that they do not give proper attention to other biblical passages that describe the ways in which the Spirit of God is active in the world. Attention should first be given to how Scripture describes the Spirit's work in the world in light of God's manifold mission as the basis for developing a theology of work.

Should Theologies of Work Bother With Job Satisfaction?

Volf and Hardy both downplay the importance of worker job satisfaction in the development of a theology of work. This makes addressing the world of work for contemporary workers—that Volf argues is essential—problematic. Hardy's reason for caution on this matter is that making job satisfaction the *primary* criteria for making job-related decisions easily leads to a self-focused lifestyle characterized by "expressive

individualism.”¹⁴⁰ Volf’s language is less measured as he writes that in the debate over alienating work modern social sciences the focus on job satisfaction is misleading; for, he argues, “[a]s subjective states, attitudes are often deceptive”¹⁴¹ and often don’t correlate with the objective character of their work.¹⁴²

David Jensen finds this cautionary approach to job satisfaction understandable but resists closing off inquiry into the subject experiences of workers. For Jensen, Buechner’s dictum—“The place where God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet”¹⁴³—*necessitates* inquiry into these “subjective” experiences.¹⁴⁴ Jensen’s critique is helpful and points to a fundamental flaw in both Hardy and Volf’s thinking: To grant some significance to job satisfaction can open the door to the Spirit’s present work within the believer pointing out areas for maturing or even repentance as well as guidance on one’s career path. Following Hardy’s argument that the alignment of gifts and work context is of primary concern for discernment, we would expect *greater attention* to be given to the experiences of workers.

Volf’s cautionary response to job satisfaction is even more surprising. Given his pneumatological framework that emphasizes the work of the Spirit to gift and to guide it is strange that he would discount the Spirit’s intimate work in a person’s life. This raises the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 98. Hardy is picking up on a term popularized by Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 49, 333-4. Hardy nuances his views with the word “primary,” but this shapes his approach to the topic of work in such a way that worker experiences of satisfaction are not taken into consideration.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴² Ibid., 158-59.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 110; cf. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: The Seeker’s ABC* (HarperOne, 1993), 95.

¹⁴⁴ Jensen, *Responsive Labor*, no. 34 on page 125; cf. 10.

question of whether the humanizing work of the Spirit applies to the subjective experiences of work, even if merely to the sanctifying dimensions of a person's life? It is hard to understand how Volf can maintain this view of the "deceptive" nature of human attitudes with his advocacy of work as a means of "self-expression" rather than self-actualization. Worker dissatisfaction may indeed, as Volf claims, be more indicative of unhappiness in other areas of life, but this is an argument for greater focus on how the experience of work relates to a person's pursuit of a flourishing life.¹⁴⁵ This requires a more holistic approach of theological and qualitative research of which this dissertation seeks to accomplish.

In light of his attention to spirituality and religious affections it is disappointing that Schuurman follows a similar path to that of Volf and Hardy on this point. For example, in his reactionary response to Parker Palmer's emphasis on the "self," Schuurman overlooks the implications that Buechner's quote has for the issue of self-fulfillment.¹⁴⁶ What do we make of the emphasis on "deep gladness" in light of the Christian experience of joy and fulfillment? In Schuurman's overreaction to Palmer's self-fulfillment paradigm he fails to take seriously the relationship between God's commands with the experience of being fully alive (what I take to be Calvin's third use of the law¹⁴⁷). Thus while self-fulfillment in terms of the maximization of freedom/choice should be rejected, there is a legitimate sense in which we can properly speak of the role that work plays in relationship to the development and fulfillment a person is intended to experience in life. To acknowledge as John Paul II, Volf, and Palmer do that there is a relationship between work and fulfillment,

¹⁴⁵ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 159.

¹⁴⁶ Schuurman, *Vocation*, 78-82; 117-24.

¹⁴⁷ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.vii.6-12.

can also grow out of a biblical understanding of God's intentions for the development of the human person. While we can debate the proper language for this topic (self-realization, actualization, or fulfillment), we should not throw out all language of the "self" and satisfaction in the work discussion. Shouldn't joy and obedience coincide in the Christian life? And might this be the way into being more fully human? Schuurman is right that self-fulfillment/realization is not the primary end, but he is wrong not to go further and explore how obedience and joy co-adhere in Scripture.¹⁴⁸

The very subjective experiences of work satisfaction that Volf and Hardy dismiss as being "deceptive" and "expressive individualism," should be taken up as an important inroad into exploring the Spirit's work in a person's life. Furthermore, the difference between work as a means of "self-actualization" or "self-expression" need not be understood as oppositional. The human impulse to work derives from the commission of God to humanity. In responding to this command, humans become more fully alive (actualized) as they undertake their work in their unique ways as part of their pursuit of a meaningful life (self-expression).¹⁴⁹

In the final section of this chapter several parts from the analysis of Volf, Hardy and Schuurman will be used in charting a path for the development of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁸ Volf argues that good work involves self-forgetfulness (going out of one's self) in work and finds true joy therein engaging in *self-realization* of potential. He writes, "self-realization [will] be added to us when we seek good work, when we serve others by self-forgetful, enjoyable work that does not violate our personhood." (Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 201)

¹⁴⁹ Indeed, several people interviewed talked about their work as providing an opportunity to grow that no other avenue in their life afforded, the church included.

The Desired Contribution of this Dissertation: The Need for An Updated Neo-Calvinist Theology of Work

In the preceding pages the works of Miroslav Volf, Lee Hardy and Douglas Schuurman have been analyzed for the purpose of understanding the key challenges and possibilities involved with reclaiming a Reformed theology of work for today. Volf, much like Herman Bavinck and Pope John Paul II before him, argued that in order for such theology to have contemporary relevance it must simultaneously engage the authoritative Scriptures as well as the rapidly changing contexts of modern workers. Volf put forward his pneumatological eschatology as a replacement for the older Reformed doctrine of vocation. The subsequent exchanges between Volf, Hardy and Schuurman have brought to the fore the need for a theological paradigm to give a normative account of the diverse modes of God's presence and work that will help Christians navigate the complexities of work in the "already-but-not-yet" world.

In this final section of this chapter we will summarize the theological and methodological insights learned from the historical overview in Chapter 2 and the Volf-Hardy-Schuurman debate in this chapter as we set out to develop a theology of work that addresses the contextual realities identified in the ethnographic research conducted for this dissertation.

Desired Contribution of this Dissertation

Work is fundamental to human experience. This is true regardless of whether one's experience of work consists more of the instrumental, relational or ontological dimension. Given this foundational role, work is inextricably bound up with notions of the good life. For a great many people, work is the source of some of their most deep-seated aspirations

and anxieties. The full range of these experiences is relevant to the development of a theology of work. As stated in Chapter 1, *the thesis of this dissertation is work is an integral part of human existence, it can be a poetic project through which humans seek joy and cope with suffering. Work plays an integral role in how Christians seek to glorify God as they pursue a meaningful life in the face of pain and adversity.* As such, the experience of work is an important locus for theological reflection. The Holy Spirit who breathed life into the first humans becomes actively present in our East of Eden existence in which the toils and joys of work are inseparably bound together this side of the new creation. A theology of work that attends to the presence of the Holy Spirit amidst this ambivalence must take seriously the normative role of Scripture as well as the lived experiences of Christians.

Matters of Methodology

1. *The Worlds of Scripture and Work*: Pope John Paul II and Miroslav Volf provide the most interdisciplinary approaches to theology of work to date combining biblical, theological, philosophical, and historical sources into their respective works. Both writers are to be praised for their advancements of theological, anthropological and pneumatological insights, as well as for keeping the plight of contemporary workers as a motivating concern for their work. Yet given the intended purpose of their studies, their discussion of contemporary work realities rely heavily on the historical works of Karl Marx, Adam Smith, and Max Weber to explain and critique the development of work following the Industrial Revolution.

Taking the theology of work conversation forward will require that future inquiries examine the lived realities of contemporary people in their specific work contexts, and to

inquire as to the influence of their religious tradition.¹⁵⁰ On this point Volf rightfully sites Alistair MacIntyre's that "we have not yet fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be."¹⁵¹ Of concern, then, is whether any sort of theological reflection informs this relationship between religious beliefs and work experience. In order to answer this question we need to look at concrete realities of work and not simply theological texts. New tools from social sciences are needed to accomplish this type of theological reflection on qualitative research.¹⁵² The integration of qualitative research into a theology of work requires careful examination and reflection.

The question of how to relate the enduring authority of Scripture to contemporary society is of primary importance to this theology and culture dissertation. Herman Bavinck and Pope John Paul II both highlight the need for a dual exegesis of Scripture and cultural acts, artifacts and practices. Similarly, Miroslav Volf's claim that a proper theology of work must attend to the world of Scripture and the world of work expresses a shared concern of the writers surveyed thus far. Yet Volf and Hardy's dismissal of worker experiences of job satisfaction as subjective and without relevance to an objective

¹⁵⁰ Volf is correct in arguing that a theology of work sufficient to meet demands of the modern world of work must be "cross-cultural and cross-historical, a pan-human theology of work" (Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 86), but the means of pursuing such a theology cannot be accomplished apart from a grounding in the lived experiences of workers throughout the globe.

¹⁵¹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 76. Citing Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 2nd Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 23.

¹⁵² *Ethnography*: an approach to qualitative research that seeks to offer an "insider's perspective" of life within a given culture or context. Larger macro questions and perspectives on human dynamics and social systems are of secondary importance to this mode of inquiry. The task of developing analyses that are universally true across cultures and history is traded for a local/micro description of what is seen and experienced within a given context at a specific place and time (Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22-25).

evaluation of work creates an obstacle to theological interpretations of work. While such subjectivity may or may not coincide with an objective analysis of alienating work, they should not be written off as a secondary or tertiary concern of theological inquiry. As will be explained further in Chapter 5, theological interpretations of the world of work requires qualitative research into worker experiences.

2. *One or Multiple Loci?:* Hardy and Schuurman's argument for multiple theological loci for developing a theology of work is preferred for its ability to attend to a diversity of Scriptural texts and for holding a pluriformity of voices in tension. Gordon Preece adopts a similar approach in his theology of work but draws on creedal forms of Trinitarian theology rather than the redemptive drama as an organizing framework. He argues that the three articles (Father, Son and Spirit) are like revolving doors into a Trinitarian understanding of work—the point of entry depends on context and need and is not prescribed.¹⁵³ This dissertation brings together the insights from Preece, Hardy and Schuurman with the following organizing motif: the *manifold mission* of the *Triune God* as revealed in *unfolding narrative* of Scripture. In this, the Trinitarian aims of Preece are upheld but not confined to creedal statements. It is the narrative approach of Hardy and Schuurman that helps assist the disclosure of the Triune God's purposes in Scripture. This discussion will be taken up in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

3. *The Search for a Locus Classicus?:* Related to this issue of theological loci is the debate over the proper *locus classicus* for a theological framework. The struggle to understand how the enduring authority of Scripture speaks to our ever-changing world is a perennial issue for theologians. This hermeneutical challenge involves a theological

¹⁵³ Preece, "The Threefold Call," 27, 321, 346.

interpretation of Scripture (as opposed to selectively choosing isolated texts), and a theological interpretation of the context in which we find ourselves. The methods employed in *LE* and Bavinck's 1891 address to the Social Congress shed light on the need for a "mediating analysis" to bridge Scripture and contemporary society.¹⁵⁴

As we saw in Chapter 2, the *locus classicus* of *LE* is Genesis 1:28. This had special significance at that moment in history. Amidst the onslaught of dehumanizing communism in the early 1980's (especially in Pope John Paul II's homeland of Poland), and the commodification of labor in capitalist societies, the Genesis 1 vision of work upheld human dignity by asserting that work is a humanizing gift from God. The search for a new *locus classicus* to fit the needs of our changing context continues among biblical scholars and theologians. As early as 1984 Miroslav Volf advocated for the Genesis 2 vision of humans as "tenders" and "keepers" in an effort to curb the abusive exploitation of the earth.¹⁵⁵ More recently Richard Bauckham has written an extensive critique of the ways in which the Genesis 1:28 view of stewardly dominion has been adopted uncritically and reinforced a mentality of humanity's total control over the nonhuman creation without any consideration of God's involvement in nature. Such thinking, he argues, sets humans above but not within the rest of creation in a hierarchical and one-way relationship.¹⁵⁶

Is the search for a *locus classicus* misguided? The felt need for a grounding text is more prominent among systematic theologians than biblical scholars and reveals the

¹⁵⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 45.

¹⁵⁵ Volf, "On Human Work," 74-9. For a more recent argument for Genesis 2 as the *locus classicus*, see Ellen F. Davis, *Getting Involved With God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Boston: Cowley Publication, 2001), 185-201.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 2-12.

tendency of the former to create coherent systems of thought. In and of itself this is not wrong, especially when the aim is to help strengthen the life of faith of a particular community in a given setting and provided that such constructions are seen as provisional, open to continual revisions in light of the entire counsel of Scripture. We must also consider that the Old Testament contains a diversity of texts and metaphors that relate to human work. It is important to allow these texts inform our theology of work.¹⁵⁷ There is some legitimacy to highlighting the ways specific texts speak directly to pressing issues of today.

In order to address the specific needs identified in the ethnographic research among congregations (Chapter 6), I will draw on recent biblical scholarship on the Old Testament and the theologies of Herman Bavinck and Lesslie Newbigin to ground human work in the *missio Dei* (in Chapter 4). At the same time I will also rely heavily on the book of Psalms (in Chapter 7) as a *locus classicus* that brings together the rhythms of work and worship in light of the Holy Spirit's work in the world and believing community. The "earthy" texture of the Psalms guides us into how to bring the duality of work experiences as "gift" and "toil/curse" before God. For in the Psalter we find "[t]he experience of being human before God exposed and sharpened."¹⁵⁸ The *liturgical structure* of the Psalms provides a framework for the practice of communal worship as the gateway into the symbiotic relationship between our individual labor and corporate liturgy.

¹⁵⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 273-5; John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology Volume 3: Israel's Life Volume 3, Psalm 90-150* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 16, 46; Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 64-102.

¹⁵⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 12.

Matters of Theology

1. *Eschatology at the Helm?*: Volf's development of Moltmann's writings have helped recover the importance of Eschatology in systematic theology. It provides an important corrective to the understated emphasis on newness and discontinuity evidenced in the collapsing of the Eschaton into redemption in the creation-fall-redemption framework. As such Volf's emphasis on *transformatio mundi* safeguards the *telos* of the redemptive drama from being seen as merely a repristination of the Garden of Eden.¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, this shouldn't lead to an over-harmonized reading of Scripture either. As Karl Barth's theology was criticized for being more consistently Christological than Scripture itself,¹⁶⁰ so too Volf's theology at points seems to be more consistently eschatological than the biblical texts. What is needed is a firm grasp on God's multiple purposes, something Volf's eschatological framework ultimately collapses. Herman Bavinck's view of the manifold purposes of God offers a fuller picture of the modes of God's works as revealed in Scripture and holds together God's creational intentions with His eschatological completion.

2. *The Active Presence of the Holy Spirit*: In Bavinck's discussion of the manifold purposes of God, the Spirit's work in the church and world is seen as multifaceted and diverse. This ambidextrous work of the Holy Spirit points to the contextually sensitized presence of God in the world and the church.¹⁶¹ This theological foundation (in Chapter 4) provides the backdrop for interpreting the qualitative research of Chapter 6. Seen from this

¹⁵⁹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 98-9.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. G.C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 52.

¹⁶¹ See Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

angle, the interviews are my attempt to trace the work of the Holy Spirit in the work and worship experiences of Christians.¹⁶²

3. *The Church-World Relationship*: In the vocation-*charism* debate the discussion of whether the language of “analogy” or “extension” should be used to understand how spiritual gifts operate in society at large points to the need for a larger frame of reference for work and vocation. This dissertation takes up the topic of theology of work within the larger concerns of the Reformed tradition’s concern for *coram Deo* “all of life” discipleship. The fact that Scripture seems unconcerned with the question of how spiritual gifts relate to cultural engagement must be noted. What is of greater importance to the biblical writers is the relationship between the role the people of God play in relation to humanity at large. A theology of the *missio Dei*, as will be argued in Chapter 4, is a way into understanding the diverse texts that speak to this issue of public theology.

This is seen, for example, in how the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 is foundational to how we understand the “indigenous creaturely responsibility to humanize the world.”¹⁶³ However, Scripture shows that the embodiment of this differs across the changing socio-cultural contexts of history. For example, whereas Jeremiah exhorted the exiles to seek the *shalom* of the Babylonian cities in which they were deported (Jer. 29:4-7), years later Ezra the priest issued a “cultural abstinence” command to those who returned to the land (Ezra 9:12). Ezra’s words effectively stood Jeremiah’s command on its head.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Bavinck, *Biblical and Religious Psychology*, 38-39.

¹⁶³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “More on Vocation: A Reply to Eller,” *The Reformed Journal* Vol. 29 Is. 5 (May 1979), 22.

¹⁶⁴ The term cultural “abstinence” was developed by Klaas Schilder in *Christ and Culture* (trans. G. van Rongen and W. Helder, 1977). Richard J. Mouw has offered a thorough analysis of Schilder’s *ad*

The discussion of the relationship between the people of God and the common good is an important resource for discerning when and how Christians should seek to reform social structures that compose our “places of responsibility.”

4. *Spirituality & Ecclesiology*: A problematic trend in theology of work and vocation texts is the lack of attention to local ecclesial communities.¹⁶⁵ The implicit and (undefended) assumption seems to be that theological study can arise from an engagement with biblical texts and scholarly literature about work without any grounding in qualitative research. If we are to follow Pope John Paul II’s assertion that it is the church’s duty, “*to form a spirituality of work* which will help people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer,”¹⁶⁶ then we will need to keep the life and practices of local congregations in view in our theological inquiry. Schuurman’s discussion of spiritual disciplines moves towards this rapprochement of spirituality and theology. This is an important albeit partial attempt to urge local churches to engage in forging modes of discipleship that foster a Christian spirituality fit for cultural work.

Discerning the Triune God’s presence in the world and the place of culture-making vocations within His purposes requires: 1. A broader understanding of God’s ongoing purposes and activity in the world (Chapter 4); 2. A methodology for integrating qualitative research into the development of a theology of work (Chapter 5); and 3. Congregational practices that cultivate dynamic rhythms of work and worship within the community of

hoc, provisional approach to cultural engagement in his book *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays In the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 135-38.

¹⁶⁵ Several recent texts give special attention to local ecclesial communities (See for example Joshua Sweeden’s *The Church and Work*, Esther Reed’s *Good Work*, and David Jensen’s *Responsive Labor*). This is a promising trend that counters the imbalanced scholastic text-based approach of much of the prior theologies of work.

¹⁶⁶ *Laborem Exercens*, pp. 56-7. (Italics appear in *LE*).

believers (Chapter 7). The dynamic relationship between God's presence in church and in the world enables a two-way enrichment of the people of God gathered and scattered. Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that the metaphor of the diastolic and systolic rhythm of the heart offers a helpful framework for understanding the relationship between the gathering and sending rhythms of church. This provides a helpful way into exploring the relationship between liturgical worship and the *shalom*-seeking mission of the church in society as well as the relationship between church as *organism* and the church as *institution*.¹⁶⁷ Chapter 7 will explore implications of this ecclesiology for congregational practices.

¹⁶⁷ Wolterstorff, "Trumpets, Ashes and Tears," *The Reformed Journal* (February 1986): 17-22; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Volume IV: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 326-332; Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiology: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986).

Chapter 4: A Biblical and Theological Grounding of the Manifold Mission of the Triune God.

“The freedom of the children of God—dominion over the world, the grateful enjoyment of every good gift given by the Father of all light, the faithful exercise of the earthly calling, the open eye, the broad view, the spacious heart—none of these came to fruition [in Christian asceticism]. The Christian life was often seen to be alongside, sometimes above, and occasionally even at enmity with human life.”¹⁶⁸

~ Herman Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*

“Poets or painters who are *artists by the grace of God* are those who write verse because they can’t stop themselves and who create paintings because it is their passion. And although this holds especially for artists, it is no less true of our artisans. A mason, a carpenter, a house painter, an upholsterer, if they think only of their weekly pay and derive no pleasure from making things beautiful, from building and upholstering, are not held in high regard by their bosses or their co-workers. Even the farmhand that plows and sows, disks or harrows, should find his enjoyment and passion in the work itself, or his boss will not take him seriously. Small wonder, then, that a real student does not make any progress until the study itself gives him pleasure.”¹⁶⁹

~ Abraham Kuyper, “Scholarship: Two Convocation Addresses on University Life”

“A preaching of the gospel that calls men and women to accept Jesus as Savior but does not make it clear that discipleship means commitment to a vision of society radically different from that which controls our public life today must be condemned as false.”¹⁷⁰

~ Lesslie Newbigin

¹⁶⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith* (Ontario: Paideia Press, 1980. Originally published in 1901), 48-49. For similar comments see Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” 246, 248; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 2*, 412-414; and Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 16-17.

¹⁶⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Scholarship: Two Convocation Addresses on University Life*, d. H. Van Dyke; trans. N. D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, Christian Library Press, 2014), 27.

¹⁷⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel in Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 132.

Biblical Foundations for a Theology of Work: Manifold Mission, Cosmic Gospel & Holistic Witness

Having addressed an important methodological need identified in Chapter 3 for conducting a theology of work, this chapter takes up the task of providing a biblical theology of the *missio Dei* and explores its relevance for holding together multiple loci for theological reflection on human work and for understanding the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the church and world. This will provide a foundation for thinking about discipling efforts of local churches.

Introduction

In Chapter 1, mention was made of Steven Garber's poignant phrase, "vocation is integral, not incidental, to the *missio Dei*."¹⁷¹ In this chapter we return to this idea and explore a biblical and theological framework to ground this perspective on vocation and human work. Garber draws on the work of the late John Stott and his understanding of mission for the theological foundation of vocation. While Stott's work provides a helpful starting point for vocation and the *missio Dei*, more work needs to be done to ground this framework in a broader account of Scripture. This chapter begins with an evaluation of Stott's engagement in the larger debate over the definition of the *missio Dei* as a preliminary step to examining of Scripture's teachings on God's purposes for creation and humanity. The argument of this chapter is that human work should be interpreted in light of the *manifold purposes* in the mission of the Triune God and his dynamic presence in creation. This normative account of work can illuminate a diversity of human experiences

¹⁷¹ Garber, Introduction to a reprinting of John Stott's, "Mission: Rethinking Vocation," from his *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (MJ Murdock Charitable Trust Leadership Conversations (2010), vi).

of work by offering a theological vision of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of human pursuits of the good life through their vocational activities. In the conclusion, theological resources from Herman Bavinck and Lesslie Newbigin are put forward to help Christians uphold a commitment to the authority of Scripture, the uniqueness of the person and work of Jesus Christ and the special role of the Church in the *missio Dei*.

John Stott on Christian Mission and the *Missio Dei*

At the outset of his book, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, John Stott notes the importance of the doctrine of creation and the cultural mandate for a theology of mission and vocation. Unfortunately he then proceeds to devote the chapter exclusively to God's redemptive work as the central focus of his argument.¹⁷² In this way Stott's theology holds to the importance of the cultural mandate on matters of theological anthropology, but sees no connection between creation theology and the *missio Dei*. This undermines a holistic understanding of discipleship and everyday work.

The two interlocutors for Stott are the more conservative traditionalist missiologists on the one hand (such as R. N. Cust), and the Protestant liberals on the other (many of whom were involved in discussions on mission and evangelism convened by the World Council of Churches). Stott argued that the traditionalists held to a strict, narrow view of mission, which pertained exclusively to evangelism,¹⁷³ while the latter group gave

¹⁷² John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 16-17.

¹⁷³ This perspective was defended in subsequent publications by David Hesselgrave and Arthur Johnston. David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Church Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980); Arthur Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1979); C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 92-93.

prominence to the Old Testament concept of *shalom* in defining the *missio Dei*.

Over against the view of the traditionalists, Stott argued convincingly that in light of the doctrine of creation, social action and evangelism are two legs of the one mission of God. In critique of the Protestant Liberal view, Stott argued that the ministry of Jesus ushered in much more than simply the *evolutionary progress* of social harmony described by the Old Testament prophets. On this account Stott expressed concern that the mission of God was seen to be taking place in the social renewal of society apart from the preaching of the gospel and the involvement of the church. He found it especially troubling that liberal Protestants would cease to believe that God's in-breaking kingdom and redemptive work in the world would begin with the Church and spill over into the world.¹⁷⁴ The proper ordering, Stott insisted, is that "the kingdom remains distinct from godless society, and *actual entry into it depends on spiritual rebirth.*"¹⁷⁵ Stott's underlying concern here is that compromising on these matters jeopardizes the means of salvation and the special role of the church.

Stott begins his theology of the *missio Dei* with the nature of God's own being. God is himself a sending God "always reaching out after others in self-giving service."¹⁷⁶ John 20 and Genesis 12 are Stott's starting points for understanding the *missio Dei*. These texts form the basis for his exclusively *redemptive* view of the Church's participation in God's mission. Stott makes the bold claim that "mission" *does not encompass* all that God does in the world (thus the *missio Dei* has nothing to do with God's original purposes for

¹⁷⁴ Stott, *Christian Mission*, 17-19.

¹⁷⁵ Stott, *Christian Mission*, 19 [emphasis mine].

¹⁷⁶ Stott, *Christian Mission*, 21; 22. Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4-5.

creation), nor does it serve to exhaust all that the church does (thus corporate worship is also separate from the *missio Dei*). Stott writes, “For God the Creator is constantly active in his world in providence, in common grace and in judgment, *quite apart from the purposes for which he has sent his Son, his Spirit and his church into the world.*”¹⁷⁷ Mission, when referring to the church, “concerns his [God’s] redeemed people and what he sends *them* into the world to do”, namely, to be salt and light in a depraved world.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, Stott’s understanding of the *missio Dei* leaves something wanting, because his view of mission focuses on God’s redemptive work to the neglect of God’s purposes for creation.

This raises the question that we will return to shortly: what is the relationship between God’s work in the world and in the Church? Stott defines the mission of the church and its implications for relating the evangelistic and social responsibilities of the people of God without connecting these redemptive tasks to the cultural and dominion mandates.¹⁷⁹ Stott steers a middle path between the narrow confines of the traditionalist view of mission as evangelism, and the Protestant liberal view that seems to leave out the unique role of the redemption accomplished by Jesus in their views of the *missio Dei*. Nevertheless more needs to be done to connect God’s redemptive work to the cultural development that God commissioned Adam and Eve to do.

What Stott’s Theology Teaches Us

Stott’s theology of mission provides an important advancement in how we think

¹⁷⁷ Stott, *Christian Mission*, 30 [emphasis mine]

¹⁷⁸ Stott, *Christian Mission*, 19; 30-31.

¹⁷⁹ Stott, *Christian Mission*, 19-20.

about the interdependent relationship between evangelism and social action.¹⁸⁰ In terms of the Christian doctrine of vocation, his redemptive schema of the mission of God provides a theological map for understanding that Christian discipleship includes every sphere of human life. The gospel of Jesus and his commission to his disciples encompasses evangelism with the hope of spiritual rebirth as well as social action with the desire of embodying a self-giving love for God through service to our neighbors.¹⁸¹

Although there is much to Stott's work that is biblically sound and helpful to Christian discipleship, we see that the dilemma of how to relate God's work in the world and the Church remains unresolved. God's redemptive work is primarily within the church through the preaching of the gospel, leaving the value of human vocations limited strictly to their redemptive value.¹⁸² From this it is hard to see how Stott's discussion of mission provides a sufficient theological basis for substantiating Garber's axiomatic phrase, "vocation is integral, not incidental, to the *missio Dei*." Stott himself ends his chapter with an exhortation for Christians to see all spheres of society as places of "Christian vocation, [and] as the way Christ has called them to spend their lives in his service." He goes on to

¹⁸⁰ See the International Consultation of the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR) report from Grand Rapids, MI in 1982 called: "Evangelism and Social Concern" as well as Lausanne's "Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment" for further elaboration on this topic.

¹⁸¹ Stott, *Christian Mission*, 25-28.

¹⁸² This tension in Stott's theology surfaces again when he looks to Jesus' own incarnation and ministry as a model for the mission of the Church (Stott, *Christian Mission*, 22-25). After arguing convincingly that the chasm between evangelism and social action is to be found in the servant role of Jesus where we see his love is displayed in both word and deed, Stott argues that the Great Commission should really be seen as a specification of the two Greatest Commandments rather than a minimizing of them (Ibid., 29-30). Social action is a partner of evangelism and both legs are needed for Christian witness to walk in the paths of the Lord (Ibid., 27). But how are we to understand Jesus's redemptive mission to God's cultural mandate to humanity in Genesis 1? What is the relationship to the good news of Jesus to what it means to be human? Does the gospel help make sense of our humanness or is it limited to repairing the damaged relationships to God, ourselves, and our fellow humanity? Again how we construe God's work in the world in relation to his work in the Church is fundamental to how we define the mission of God.

argue that Christians should interpret this vocational work as “divine callings” and their way of participating in God’s *redemptive* mission as they act like salt and light “seek[ing] to maintain Christ’s standards of justice, righteousness, honesty, human dignity and compassion in a society which no longer accepts them.”¹⁸³ But on this account, the motivation and value of vocational work is *solely derived* from its contribution to redemption.

The shortcoming of Stott’s theology lies in the gap between the questions he raises and the answers he gives: what is the relationship between God’s work in the world and his work in the Church? How are we to understand the unity of God’s works in creation and redemption? What does the marrying of the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment have to do with the cultural and dominion mandates given to humanity at creation? Although Stott’s theology of mission provides a theological map to help Christians navigate life in society, it fails to provide theological resources for making sense of many of our “indigenous human desires” to form and cultivate the natural creation, or for upholding the unity of God as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer and Perfector.¹⁸⁴ As I discussed in Chapter 3, Miroslav Volf’s view of God’s work in the world runs the opposite danger to Stott’s theology by threatening to blur the line between God’s work in the world and the church. More work is needed to offer ways of viewing the relationships between the cultural mandate, redemption and the *missio Dei*.

The importance of these theological matters is evident when we pose the following

¹⁸³ Stott, *Christian Mission*, 31-32.

¹⁸⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “More On Vocation: A reply to Eller,” *The Reformed Journal* Volume 29, Issue 5 (May 1979), 22. Richard J. Mouw expressed similar concerns over Stott’s discussion of the relationship between evangelism and social ethics back in 1981 (see “Evangelism and Social Ethics” *Perkins Journal* 35 (Autumn 1981): 12-17).

pastoral questions: what does it mean for an artist to understand her vocation in terms of being salt and light? Does the limiting of her vocation to those two (redemptive) metaphors mean that her work must be evangelistic and healing to others?

It is apparent from this discussion that more work is needed in addressing these foundational biblical and theological issues embedded in our assumptions about the *missio Dei*. I will argue that vocation should be located in the *missio Dei* as Garber and Stott argue. But I will also argue that the *missio Dei* begins with creation, and not as Stott argues with redemption. As I do, I will bear in mind Stott's concerns about the safeguarding of the Church's role as a herald of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ alone, and attempt to build on his work by providing a broader biblical and theological basis for interpreting Garber's axiom.

The Biblical Narrative and God's Mission

In the latter half of the twentieth century the debate surrounding the *missio Dei* raised questions over how we understand human work in relationship to the Church's identity and vocation and participation in God's ongoing work in the world. Barth, and those following his lead, insisted on a Trinitarian foundation of mission rooted in God's own being.¹⁸⁵ This

¹⁸⁵ The theological discussion surrounding the *missio Dei* seems to have arisen in response to Karl Barth's paper at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932 (see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 389). It is since that time that salvation has featured so predominantly in subsequent debates among evangelical scholars. While holding to a cosmic, holistic understanding of salvation, many scholars nevertheless leave aside the discussion of whether the *missio Dei* is composed of multiple purposes of God.

Although the supra/infralapsarian debate is certainly related to our present discussion, it lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say here, Bavinck's discussion in *Reformed Dogmatics Volume II: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004, 388-392), offers a way through the theological impasse. Instead of choosing between the horizontal/historical/causal (infralapsarian) perspective and the vertical/eternal/teleological (supralapsarian) perspective, Bavinck uses the "council of God" as a governing concept and places predestination as an important motif but not the "one all-encompassing decree of God.

starting point effectively captured the ways in which the God revealed in the Old and New Testaments chooses specific people (Israel and the Church) to play a special role in his redemptive work in the world. What remains to be done is to develop Stott's theology of mission by connecting the church's redemptive vocation with the cultural mandate. Too often scholars have focused on salvation and redemption to the neglect of creation.¹⁸⁶ A failure to locate human participation in the creating and redeeming activities of the *missio Dei* will inhibit the ability to provide a holistic approach to discipleship that Garber and Stott promote. A solely redemptive understanding of the *missio Dei* does not do the work that Garber and Stott want it to do. I argue that we must attend to Scripture's presentation of the manifold purposes and presence of God in the world, because this provides the necessary backdrop for understanding the importance of human work as "integral, not incidental, to the *missio Dei*."

What follows is an examination of the Old Testament's teachings of the purposes of God in the world and His dynamic presence with humanity and the nonhuman creation. It is within this framework that Scripture reveals to us a God who is Creator and Redeemer,

While it is an utterly significant part of the counsel of God, it does not coincide with it" (Ibid., 392). He goes on to say that: "In short, the counsel of God and the cosmic history that corresponds to it must not be pictured exclusively—as infra- and supralapsarianism did—as a single straight line describing relations only of before and after, cause and effect, means and end; instead, it should also be viewed as a systematic whole in which things occur side by side in coordinate relations and cooperate in the furthering of what always was, is, and will be the deepest ground of all existence: the glorification of God." (Ibid., 392) With supralapsarianism, Bavineck affirms that the Fall did not take God by surprise. With infralapsarianism, he maintains that the glorification of God involves the fulfillment of a diversity of His decrees/purposes (cf. Ibid., 390).

¹⁸⁶ See for example: Stott, *Christian Mission*, 31-32; Tormud Engelsviken, "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of the theological concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 92 No. 367 (October, 2003); Darrell L. Guder (ed.), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). At the outset of the book, Guder et. al. assert that "God's mission began with the call of Israel to receive God's blessings in order to be a blessing to the nations" (Ibid., 4). The purported view of the *missio Dei* by these authors is thoroughly Trinitarian (see Ibid., 5) and cosmic including all of creation in its scope (see Ibid., 90-91), nonetheless the purposes of this mission are limited to the *healing and redemptive* purposes of God.

Sustainer and Perfector. It is within this creation to new creation narrative that we can better grasp human vocation of culture making in relationship to the manifold mission of the Triune God.

Creation and Redemption: What Therefore God hath joined together Let No Theologian Put Asunder

Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright provides a helpful synthesis of the biblical teaching concerning the *missio Dei*. Wright explains:

The Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation. The Bible is the drama of this God of purpose engaged in the mission of achieving that purpose universally, embracing past, present and future, Israel and the nations, "life, the universe and everything," and with its center, focus, climax and completion in Jesus Christ. Mission is not just one of a list of things that the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that much-abused phrase, "what it's all about."¹⁸⁷

Wright's argument is that God is a God of mission and Scripture itself is a missionary document. But should we follow Stott in limiting the purposes of God's mission to redemption alone? Is this the necessary outcome when we begin our thinking with the

¹⁸⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 22. Wright argues, "Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation... Our mission flows from and participates in the mission of God" (Ibid., 22-23). Wright's early definition of the mission of God as being redemptive needs to be amended in light of latter chapters where he discusses the Old Testament wisdom literature and creation theologies. Similarly, Guder's summary of Karl Barth's theology and the *missio Dei* focuses on the Trinitarian and missionary nature of God himself as the basis for the church's mission/vocation. Here too Guder focuses primarily on the soteriological (redemptive) purposes of God's mission (Darrell L. Guder, "Mission" in *The Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth*, ed. Richard E. Burnett (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2013), 150-151).

ministry of Jesus? Or on the other extreme, should we follow Volf and merge all distinctions between God's work in the world and church into one eschatological schema (recall the discussion in Chapter 3)? What Wright points us to here, and what has been insisted by many other theologians such as Abraham Kuypers, Herman Bavinck, and Lesslie Newbigin, is that the earthly ministry of Jesus must be set within the unfolding narrative of God's work in the world that began at creation. This narrative approach provides for a better grasp on the ways in which Scripture speaks about the purposes of God and His presence in this world and of the significance of the work of Jesus and the Spirit.

Terrence Fretheim demonstrates the importance of how the biblical narrative unfolds for how we go about constructing our theology. He writes:

That the Bible begins with Genesis, not Exodus, with creation, not redemption, is of immeasurable importance for understanding all that follows. At least from the perspective of the present shape of the biblical witness, creation is as basic and integral to Israelite faith and its confession as is the first article of the creed to Christians.¹⁸⁸

In the Old Testament, the relationship between creation and redemption is properly understood when we see God's redemptive work taking place within His prior creative activity. As such, redemption serves the life-giving purposes of God so that humans are freed up "to be what they were created to be, the effect of which is named salvation."¹⁸⁹ In both creation and redemption God intends to bring life and flourishing to humanity and

¹⁸⁸ Terrence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), xiv; cf. 113.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10; cf. 12.

creation. Creation and redemption are not at odds with each other because “redemption is a means to a new creation, and salvation will be the key characteristic of that new reality.”¹⁹⁰

As we consider our cultural work as Christians, we need to bear in mind God’s mandate for humanity to cultivate creation and, after the fall, his commission to his chosen people to participate in bringing redemption and healing to humanity and creation. We must navigate the difficult theological issues surrounding how to hold together the commission for the people of God to embody distinctive lives in the world, while not undermining the significant areas of commonness with our fellow humans given our rootedness in creation.¹⁹¹

Genesis 1-11: The Creator God On the Move

The opening chapters of Genesis show us a God on the move, active in creating the world and enlisting his creatures in this creation project. This offers us an important framework that reveals the dynamic relationship between God and creation with all its rich diversity. While it is important to get beyond these texts and listen to what the entire Bible has to say about God and creation, we must *pass through* these chapters and not around them.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹¹ At times the Christian community may need to undergo “cultural abstinence” concerning their involvement in certain spheres of society (cf. Klaas Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, trans. G. van Rongen and W. Helder, 1977), yet such abstentions must not undercut the shared vocation that God has given to humanity concerning His creational purposes. Neither should it overlook or downplay God’s work outside of the believing community through natural law, general revelation, or the contributions that non-believers make to the health and proper functioning of society.

¹⁹² See also Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 16-19.

Genesis 1-11 is a story of beginnings of humanity and the world. It provides a foundational paradigm for understanding relationships between God, humanity, and the nonhuman creation.¹⁹³ These texts provide pictures of God relating to the community of creation that are paradigmatic for how the Old Testament can be read.¹⁹⁴ Terence Fretheim explains: “God is the God of the entire cosmos; God has to do with every creature, and every creature has to do with God, whether they recognize it or not. God’s work in the world must be viewed in and through a *universal frame of reference*.”¹⁹⁵ The universal reference conveyed through these narratives speak to some basic human questions concerning human origins, identity, purpose, and destiny.¹⁹⁶

These early chapters of Genesis, John Goldingay argues, invite us to use our imaginations to simultaneously inhabit the world of the text in order that we might properly inhabit the contemporary world we find ourselves in.¹⁹⁷ There are two features of these narratives that help us understand how Scripture reveals the multiple purposes of the *missio Dei* which can be used to frame Christian participation in God’s works of creation and redemption: the first is the portrayal of the relational God who brings the creation

¹⁹³ Fretheim, *God and World*, 34. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics For the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17-20, 26-7.

¹⁹⁴ John Goldingay, review of Fretheim’s “God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation” in *Theology* 109, no. 852 (2006), 453-4; Fretheim, *God and World*, xvii; 34.

¹⁹⁵ Fretheim, *God and World*, xiv; cf. 113.

¹⁹⁶ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 17-18. William P. Brown offers a helpful explanation of how these creation narratives shape human perception and moral imagination: “the creation account plays an indisputable role in moral formation, since it defines how the community is appropriately to discern its environment and thereby act within it.... One’s perception of the world has everything to do with how one engages the world and acts in it.... As the foundation of any moral worldview or ethos, perception constitutes the nexus between the human subject and the environment (William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 18-19).

¹⁹⁷ John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 36-39.

community into being, and the second is his commission to each part of the creation community to participate in his creation project.¹⁹⁸ Taken together, these narratives provide a theological understanding of what it means to be human and how the work of redemption brings back together what sin has torn apart.

Introducing the Relational Creator and the Creation Community He Brought Into Being

Woven into the ethical vision of Genesis 1-11 are multiple pictures of the close relationships that exist between God, humanity and the nonhuman creation. God clearly stands at the head of this vision as the main actor, but not in a way that eclipses the significance of humanity, the sea and land creatures, and the inanimate creation. While it would be a mistake to read into the words “let us make” (Gen. 1:26) a fully developed Trinitarian theology, it is important to notice that the Creator God is shown to be conversing with others (presumably in the heavenly courts) as He sets about forming the cosmos. These stories show us a speaking God creating and making room for each part of the members of creation to inhabit. In fact, the more God acts (speaks), the more room is created for others to live and to move and to have their own creative being. We see that the *'eretz* (land/soil) is called upon to produce vegetation and creatures (1:11-12, 24); the waters are commanded to bring forth swarms of creatures (1:20); and birds, sea and land animals, and humans are commanded to “be fruitful and multiply” (1:22; 28).

An essential part of God’s making room involves forming and separating (setting boundaries) for each part of the cosmos in order that the creation community can exist in

¹⁹⁸ By beginning with God and God’s design for the proper relationality between God, humans and the nonhuman creation, we can see how sin distorts and affects these relationships and how God sets about redeeming all of creation and completing His purposes for them.

dependence, independence and interdependence with each other.¹⁹⁹ There are several ways in which we see the act of formation and separation makes room for a diverse community to flourish. The light of the sun belongs within the bounds of the daytime, and the light of the moon and stars are to govern the night (Gen. 1:3-5, 13-4). The waters in the sky are separated from the water of the seas (1:6-10). The proper domain for the sea is established by setting boundaries so that it does not invade the domain of land (Gen. 1:7-10).

These boundaries between the members of the creation community enable the proper functioning of the specific vocations assigned to each part of creation. The sun, moon, and stars are set in the heavens and are uniquely tasked with being daylight and nightlights for the earth, marking the seasons, and governing the day and the night (1:14-9; cf. Jer. 31:31-7). Similarly the boundaries of the sea allow the *'eretz* to produce a variety of vegetation (1:9-13), provided that the skies fulfill their role of pouring down rain and the subterranean waters spring up to water the ground (2:5-6). In each of these ways we see that the ordering of the cosmos through these boundaries and tasks enables each part of creation to be what they were created to be and do in relation to God and the rest of cosmos. When each part of the creation community functions within their proper boundaries and fulfills their assigned tasks, the relational God achieves the vibrant creation He desires.

¹⁹⁹ William Brown explains: “A stable creative order prevails in this cosmos, accomplished not through conflict and combat but by coordination and enlistment. Each domain, along with its respective inhabitants, is the result of a productive collaboration between Creator and creation. The final product is a filled formfulness. Form is achieved through differentiation, the mark of goodness. While differentiating the various cosmic components, the process of separation, paradoxically, serves to hold the cosmic order together. Creation’s “filledness” is achieved by the production of life. From firmaments to land, boundaries maintain the integrity of each domain as well as provide the cement that binds the cosmos as a whole. God’s activity is predominantly one of both separating and binding together. This double movement of creation is best described as differentiation, a kind of separation that also establishes a level of interdependence. In short, creation is characterized by *boundedness* and *boundness*.” (Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 50-51).

The Community has a Project: Introducing the Purposes of God and the participation of the human and nonhuman creation in His creation project.

The second way Genesis 1-11 frames the *missio Dei* and human involvement is in the unfolding potential that is described in these texts. “Creation is a project not a finished product” is an oft-used phrase of Fretheim to capture the ways in which Genesis 1 and 2 describe the latent potential in creation that awaits tending and development.²⁰⁰ What is often overlooked by scholars is that *the entirety of the creation community* is commissioned to participate in this creation project. God commands the land to bring forth vegetation (1:11-3) and creeping things (1:24-5), and the waters to bring forth swarms of creatures (1:20). Similarly, in what is often thought of as an exclusively human commission, God commands the creatures of the sea, land, and air to “multiply and fill” their domains of habitation (1:22). Later, God adds to this procreation mandate additional commands for humanity to subdue the earth and to have dominion over the creatures of the sea, land and air (1:28).

Given our focus on human vocation in the *missio Dei* it is necessary that we place this vision of humanity’s unique calling to have dominion over the creation community (Gen. 1:28) alongside of Genesis 2:15 where the words to “serve” or “till” the earth are used to describe aspects of humanity’s vocation.²⁰¹ Richard Bauckham downplays the vision of human vocation in Genesis 1 of subduing and having dominion in favor of Genesis 2, in order to compensate for the environmental abuses of humanity in recent

²⁰⁰ Fretheim, *God and World*, xiv; 20; 36; 1-2; 4-5; 124-6; 69; 5-10.

²⁰¹ Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 64-65.

centuries.²⁰² While this may be a needed prophetic corrective given contemporary ecological crises, we would do well not to overlook the unique role and proper authority given to humanity, even as we attempt to protest these reckless abuses. In fact, situating the dominion mandate within human moral responsibility to God for care of the larger creation community might serve to undermine the very ideology that perpetuates these abuses.²⁰³ To gloss over the unique vocation and authority given to humanity in Genesis 1 runs the danger of overlooking the diversity of roles that God intends for the benefit of the entire creation community.

In the cultural milieu in which this text was written and redacted, the royal imagery conveys a strong subversive intent whose potency is of enduring value for today. The distribution of the vocation of image bearing is spread out liberally to all of humanity; it is not isolated to simply the king.²⁰⁴ This revolutionary, egalitarian claim also has profound implications for humanity's responsibility to, and dependence on, all parts of the creation community performing their God-given vocations. Overstepping the boundary of human vocation not only impedes the diverse works of the rest of creation, it also is an affront to God's command to bear his image by imitating his own liberating use of power. In ignoring this vision of human vocation in Genesis 1 we undercut the basis for this subversive power.

²⁰² Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 11-12. Bauckham comes up short in that his theological argument is built on the need to remedy the past (and present) sins of modern Western nations who used the "dominion" mandate of Genesis 1 to justify domination and exploitation of the environment. For that reason, he argues, "strong medicine" is needed to put humans back within their proper place in the created order (*The Bible and Ecology*, 37-38). While it is important to get beyond Genesis 1 and the dominion mandate we must do so by going *through* it and not *around* it.

²⁰³ See Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 43-4 and Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 113-4. Although Brown's use of the idea of democratizing the *imago Dei* imports modern categories into the text. A better term would be communalize as I will discuss below.

²⁰⁴ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 55, 111-20.

Finding a corrective to the abuses of creation by modern nations demands *a recovery* not an *abandonment* of cultural mandate theology that can ground the exercise of human dominion on an imitation of the Creator God's own life-giving use of power. As Steven Bouma-Prediger puts it, the Christian gospel follows along Scripture's repeated concern for our embodied life in creation. Beginning in Genesis 1 the Creator God demonstrates thoughtful care and attentiveness for the nonhuman creation and his commission to humanity is to bear his image by imitating this same type of passionate concern.²⁰⁵

The description of the God on mission in these opening chapters of Genesis includes a clear vision of His intentions for all creation. God's creative actions open up human freedom for imaginative participation in his creation project.²⁰⁶ Freedom and creativity always require a framework, and these words and actions of God simultaneously frame and open up new possibilities for humanity and nonhuman creatures to participate in God's purposes for the cosmos. For example, God's command and commission to humanity to cultivate and to have a liberating dominion over creation (Gen. 1:27-28) does not preclude God's eagerness to see how Adam will exercise his imagination in naming the animals and in his reception of Eve as his wife and helpmate (Gen. 2:19-25). Similarly, God's repeated command to be fruitful and multiply (1:28; 9:1, 7) is fulfilled in the genealogies of Genesis 5, 9 and 10 (cf. 6:1). The content of God's commands, commissions, promises, and blessings, as well as His punishments, wed together the present and future

²⁰⁵ Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 170-171.

²⁰⁶ Fretheim writes: "That God in creating gives space to the creatures to be what they were created to be means that, in some sense, God moves over and makes room for the Other. The result is an ordered freedom in the creation, a degree of openness and unpredictability wherein God leaves room for the nonhuman creatures to develop in less than fully determined ways and for genuine decisions on the part of human beings as they exercise their God-given power" (Fretheim, *God and World*, 272).

well being of humanity with the entire creation (Gen. 2:15-16; 2:18-25; 3:14-19; 4:11-14; 5:28-29; 6:7, 13, 17-22; 7:1-3, 15-24; 8:21-2; 11:5-9). It is within this interconnected world that we can better grasp God's dynamic presence among the creation community with its rich diversity of vocations and the moral quality of dominion that humans are commissioned to exercise.

God's Ongoing Mission and Dynamic Presence in Creation

Thus far this chapter has focused primarily upon the opening passages of Scripture. This methodological choice was defended as part of the decision to pursue theological reflection based upon the broader narrative of Scripture that begins in Genesis. This study has evinced a symbiotic relationship between creation and redemption as fundamental to a holistic view of the *missio Dei*.

However, in employing this method we should not assume that creation theology is found in Genesis alone. Fretheim argues that the study of creation in the Old Testament should not be limited to those texts which explicitly use creation words or which make reference to the creation accounts. The Old Testament's teaching on creation is complex and involved at least eleven different words for creation (with God as the subject) and twenty metaphors that depict God as Creator (A sample of these include: *internal* metaphors such as birthing, potter, botanical; and *external* metaphors such as builder and artisan). This expansive view of creation includes but goes beyond a focus on origins of the natural world.

In the Old Testament, "the creative activity of God includes the work of *originating* (*ex nihilo* [cf. Pss. 33; 104; Heb. 11:3] and ordering [cf. Gen. 1-2]), *continuing* (sustaining

care and ongoing development of embedded potential), and *completing* creation (eschaton).²⁰⁷ It is in the descriptions of continuing care and cultivation of creation that the Old Testament reveals some of the most compelling revelations of God's dynamic activity within the creation community. Such passages set human vocation not only within the context of the original cultural mandate of Genesis 1, but also within the reality of God's active presence to bring about the fulfillment of His creation project (see for example, Isaiah 2, 60 and 65).

Numerous passages could be cited, but a representative sample will be given here to show how the human tasks of serving, tilling, guarding, subduing, and having dominion over creation should aim at imitating God's use of power for the well being of the rest of creation. These texts form an important part of the Old Testament's teaching on God's purposes within which we understand His active presence in creation and the cultural activities of humanity.

Job 38-39: God's Personal Care for the Nonhuman Creation

One of the most profound disclosures of God's care for the nonhuman creation is found within the Old Testament's most concentrated text on human suffering.²⁰⁸ God's words to Job in chapters 38-39 focus surprisingly on God's ongoing involvement, care and

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁸ Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology Volume 3: Israel's Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 682-4. Richard Bauckham includes Job's (and human) hubris as the context for God's response (Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 38-9). This passage does indeed engender awe and wonder which counters human pride, but it is significant that the aim of the book of Job is not to silence suffering people! In the end, Job is commended for speaking truthfully about God (42:7). A characteristic aspect of this book is its dialogical form that refuses to offer explanations for suffering but instead invites those who suffer to speak to God and others. Significantly, the starting point for Job was his suffering and through this he (and us readers) is drawn into dialogue with God and his friends that ushers Job into a new view of God and the entire cosmos. It is the articulated view of God's relationship with the cosmos portrayed in this passage that are significant to our current study.

delight in the non-human members of creation. Chapter 38 describes how the inanimate creation of stars, skies, seas, land and vegetation were not simply created by God but are also maintained by His ongoing involvement in the regular cycles of the dawning of each day (38:12-15), the confining of the seas within its limits (38:8-11), the changing weather patterns (38:22-30), and the course of the stars in the sky (38:31-3). He even oversees something as mundane as the turning of dust into mud clods (38:38) and carefully tends to those places that are uninhabitable by humans and domestic animals (38:25-7).

At the end of chapter 38, attention is turned to God's knowledge and care of animals through a rich array of metaphors. God is the *chef* who provides food for such animals as lions and ravens, and tends to their proper development of their young (38:39-41). He is the *midwife* during birthing and nursing and the *nanny* as the young move through the maturation process (39:1-4). He is the *landlord* seeing to it that there are proper places of habitation for mountain goats, wild donkeys, and other non-domestic animals (39:5-8, 9-12). The recording of odd animal behaviors reinforces the view of God's careful observation of each animal (39:13-8), and his ongoing involvement in their life (39:19-25). All of these are part of the creation community to whom God relates on an ongoing basis.²⁰⁹

Psalm 104: God's Active Presence & Delight in Creation

Psalm 104 offers the most extensive discussion of the relationship between God and creation outside of Genesis. As Genesis 1 and 2 unfolds the initial scenes of God and His creation community, the poetry of Psalm 104 teaches us to pray in such a way that enables us to inhabit this story in a God-honoring way. God is the main actor of the creation

²⁰⁹ Fretheim, *God and World*, 1-3; 165; 219-35.

story and this psalm orients us to life in this world through our praise to Him.²¹⁰ James Mays suggests that this psalm is a poetic take on the repeated refrain of Genesis 1, “And God saw that it was good.”²¹¹ As we will see, this “goodness” clearly is focused on the creation community as a whole and not simply on humans.

Unlike the Genesis account (and Pss. 8 and 148), humanity is given no special authority over the rest of the creation in this psalm. In fact, humans are seldom mentioned (the exceptions being verses 14-15 and 23). The focus of this psalm is on God’s originating and ongoing activity with all of creation of which humanity is only one part. Against the view that God initiated creation and turned it over to humanity in a “hands off” approach to governing, this psalm shows that God’s work of creating extends beyond the first week of creation.²¹² Attention is given to both animate and inanimate creatures. God is continually involved in providing energy, breath (v. 29-30), and tangible provisions of food (104:10-5, 27), water (104:10-1, 13, 16), and habitat (104:12, 17-8) for members of the nonhuman creation. Most striking in this regard is the twist in verses 29-30 on the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:22-27, where the blessing of God’s face and Spirit are said here to

²¹⁰ The practice of comparing biblical texts with other Ancient Near Eastern texts of similar genres can be helpful in highlighting the message and nature of a particular biblical passage. Given that the interest of this paper is not on the origins and development of Scripture, comparisons will be limited to the Old Testament itself.

²¹¹ John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3: 90-150* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 196-7, 182; Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 55-8; James L. Mays, *Psalms: Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 331. Levenson dates Psalm 104 prior to the writing of Genesis 1 & 2.

²¹² “The LORD reigns” connotes the kingship of Yhwh and is connected to the reality that “the earth is secure.” Kingship is related to security. This means that the rule of God permits the existence of reliable and stable world that includes consistent seasons and productivity. Yhwh’s ongoing control produces order and function as well as bounds and limitations between the forces within creation. “The bound are set against the chaotic waters (v. 9), but the limits hold because the LORD reigns. Life in the world depends on the reign of God” (Mays, *Psalms*, 333). “Order is now a matter of the maintenance of boundaries, and even when the forces of chaos pose not threat to the creator, they still persist, and their persistence qualifies—and defines—his world mastery” (Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 65).

“renew the *face of the ground*.” Speaking of the relationship between God and the land in this way connotes care and value for this part of creation. Without blurring the Creator-creation ontological distinction, God’s immanence and intimate relationship with the nonhuman creation are portrayed again and again throughout this psalm.²¹³

Finally, the vision of mutual delight between creation and God is striking. God’s intimate knowledge and care consistently expressed in this psalm erupts in delight and joy at several points. We see this in the petition in verse 31 for God to take joy and delight in his creation, “He [the psalmist] wishes that the LORD himself will rejoice in his works (v. 31b) so that his own lifelong praise will be in concert with the divine joy.”²¹⁴ There is no indication that such a petition is alien to God’s disposition. In fact we detect an element of play that God has intended for creation when the psalmist says that Leviathan was “formed to frolic” in the sea (v. 26). Some interpreters pick up on an ambiguity in the text and speculate that God himself plays with Leviathan.²¹⁵ The generosity of God demonstrated in his care for creation is an indication of his underlying benevolent disposition towards what he has created. In the words of John Goldingay, “It is God’s smiling that issues in the

²¹³ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 181-2, 197-9; Mays, *Psalms*, 333, 335. God’s continued involvement and rule over the processes of weather and seasons sustains life and engenders a sense of security in a world of reliable seasons and ecological cycles. God’s ongoing control produces order and function between the differentiated parts of creation and upholds the limitations and tasks that permit the interdependent relationships to exist within the creation community. What are commonly called “secondary causes” are seen to involve manifestations of God’s unseen work in the course of “natural cycles.” For example, Psalm 104:10-11, 14-15 says that God causes the ground and animals to be watered and He causes grasses and plants to grow. On the topic of dual agency, see Fretheim’s discussion on God sharing creative powers with creation (Fretheim, *God and World*, 280-1). Cf. Hag. 1:10-1; Job 37:6; Deut. 28:4; Ps. 65:9-13. The vision of God’s work as gardener (Deuteronomy 11:11-12) providing the yearly flow of milk and honey in the Promised Land, finds its counterpart in what Psalm 104 says of God’s work throughout the entire world and the entire creation community.

²¹⁴ Mays, *Psalms*, 335. “The psalm is so full of wonder and joy at what God has made—the joy of the psalmist and the joy of God” (Ibid., 331).

²¹⁵ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 192.

generosity [verse] 28 described.”²¹⁶ The picture of living before God alongside other members of creation suggests that the God who created in the beginning, who continues to provide for and cultivate what he has made, who renews and upholds life and breath of all that live, is the same God who delights in each member of the creation community. This delight is a foretaste of the coming eschatological kingdom.

Isaiah 60: Culture In His Sites and In His Future Kingdom

Alongside of God’s originating and ongoing creative activity, the Old Testament also speaks of God’s work to bring the creation project to completion in the eschaton. The anticipation of God looking on “to see what [Adam] would name [the animals]” (Gen. 2:19) is an early indication of God’s emotional investment in the cultural activities of humanity. This theme gets picked up in some of the prophetic books, especially in Isaiah 60. The ships of Tarshish, the kings of the earth and the milk of the nations are a succession of metaphors that offer insights into the enduring purposes of God that extend from culture making efforts in this present age into the new creation (Isa. 60:9, 11, 16). The ships of the pagan nation Tarshish, which in their present form evince rebellion against God (Isa. 2:16; 60:9), symbolize a purifying judgment that will transpire on human endeavors in every sphere of life before entering the Eschaton.²¹⁷ Similarly it is the role of the kings of the earth, as the figureheads of political and cultural systems, to bring the vast array of the

²¹⁶ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 193; 198, 192.

²¹⁷ Richard Mouw discusses the tension between the judgment on the ships of Tarshish described in Isaiah 2 with the presence of these ships in the eschatological vision of Isaiah 60. He writes: “It is not, then, the ships as such that will be destroyed; it is their former function that will perish. It is worth noting that it was a ship from Tarshish that Jonah boarded to flee from the call of the Lord (Jon. 1:3). This incident aptly suggests the ships’ pagan function, because they are means of rebellion against God. They are vessels used to flee from his presence, instruments designed to thwart his will” (Richard J. Mouw, *When The Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 31).

choicest fruits of their culture's endeavors before the throne of God. These cultural fruits are the "milk of the nations" which will be used to nourish the people of God in the new creation.

There is ambiguity in these texts to be sure, for no straight line of continuity exists from this present age to the coming kingdom. Richard Mouw captures this ambivalence in God's attitude towards sin-laden cultural goods when he writes, "As tools of human rebellion and objects of idolatrous trust, he hates them ... because of their present uses. And his hatred will lead him to transform them into proper instruments of service."²¹⁸ The Apostle John in Revelation draws on these Isaianic passages in his concluding visions of the New Jerusalem. In that final city the Creating, Redeeming, and Perfecting God is seen to purify creation, humanity and cultural goods as integral parts of bringing glory to His name ("the wealth of the nations" in Isa. 60:5 and "the glory and the honor of the nations" in Rev. 21:26).²¹⁹ The God who began the good work of his creation project with the cultural mandate will be faithful to complete it through His sustaining and perfecting power when He makes "all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

These pictures of God's dynamic presence in the creation community from Job, Psalms and Isaiah invite us to inhabit a world in which God is active and His care and delight are experienced by all of the community of creation. It is within this vision that we can better understand the unique vocation and mandates given by God to humanity.

²¹⁸ Mouw, *When the Kings*, 32.

²¹⁹ Mouw discusses at length the ships of Tarshish and the purifying judgment of God in chapter 1, the multiple purposes of God's creation project and its continuity with the new creation in chapter 2 and the discussion of the kings of the earth, and the multi-cultural and ethnic blessings for human flourishing in a discussion of the milk of the nations in chapter 3 (Mouw, *When the Kings*, 17-42; 43-70; 71-98).

*Human Vocation Amidst the Creation Community: Imago Dei through Imitatio Dei*²²⁰

What do we see when we locate human vocation within the biblical accounts of the relational God bringing forth the creation community and their participation in His mission? Humanity's role in God's purposes involves a vocation with many tasks as it pertains to the rest of creation. Underneath the Divine Lordship and land-lordship of God, humanity is called to subdue and have dominion over the land and to cultivate its fruits as *gifts* (notice these are not called "resources").²²¹ Mindful of the boundaries and diverse tasks of each of these parts of creation, humans are commanded to serve, cultivate, subdue, and exercise dominion in ways that reflect God's own life-giving care for the well-being of the entire creation community.

The term *imago Dei* is an important part of the ethical vision of humanity in Genesis 1-11. However, what this imaging entails is not explicitly stated in Scripture. Instead the text invites us to consider the commissions and commands of God, and to intuit the ethical implications from His own creative actions. If we do not confine ourselves to prescriptive

²²⁰ Rabbi Abraham Cohen argues that the doctrine of the image of God is central to Rabbinic teaching concerning humanity, and the doctrine of the imitation of God is the central motivation of Jewish life (Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages*, reprint (Schocken, 1995), 67; 212).

²²¹ Israel's similar task with the Promise Land of Canaan, according to Deuteronomy, is both under Divine ownership and a gift to Israel. Theologically related to this is the use of the language "fruits" to describe those aspects of the nonhuman creation that are produced in the Promise Land. Deuteronomy 28 in particular uses the word *peri* (fruit) fourteen times to describe a holistic fertility that involves both the human and nonhuman inhabitants of the land, "the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your livestock (28:4, 11, 18 (x2), 33, 40, 42, 51 (x2), 53. Cf. Deut. 7:12-3 (3 times); 30:9 (3 times); 1:25; 26:2). The Promise Land's description as a "land flowing with milk and honey" (e.g. Deut. 11:9) is the result of the fact that Yhwh Himself is the one who tends to it as a gardener and oversees and ensures its fruitfulness (11:11-2). 11:8-17 picks up with the promise of blessing in connection with Israel's obedience, and warns that disobedience will lead to unfruitfulness described in Exodus 15:25-7. To worship other gods (11:16) is to attribute them the fruits and fertility of the land. The backdrop to this command is a warning against the temptations to worship the Canaanite god, Baal, who was said to be "the lord of rain, fertility, and fecundity" (Christopher J.H. Wright, *Deuteronomy: New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 155). Obedience to Yhwh will result in consistent experience of blessing their labors in the land, whereas disobedience will bring about infertility and unfruitfulness.

statements for human behavior (though there are some, e.g. 2:24-5; cf. 9:5-6), then these texts offer plenty of instructive material to guide our thinking. Perhaps most central to imaging God in light of the above discussion involves relating to God, fellow humans, and nonhuman creation in ways that bring about the growth of all members of the community. Humanity's special role in developing the embedded potentialities of the physical world and nonhuman creatures should imitate this type of power. But this responsibility does not displace God's direct relationship with these members of creation nor does it terminate their own God-given vocation in the creation project. As God spends his power for the well-being and development of creation, so humanity is called to mimic this type of display of creative and benevolent power.²²²

In the ethical vision of Genesis, the nonhuman creation is not simply a stage, but also an actor in history. A fundamental tension must remain at the heart of our understanding of human vocation: humanity and the natural world with its creatures are called to further God's creation project.²²³ Yet, as Christopher Wright argues, while the earth has been given to humans it is through their role as servant-kings they might properly exercise this authority who themselves will be judged by God for how they use (or misuse)

²²² Fretheim employs the language of "democratization" to temper interpretations of the royal authority imparted to humanity in their vocation of image bearing, which entails subduing and having dominion over the nonhuman creation. While this attempt to undermine the use of such royal imagery to support environmental exploitation is admirable, his purposes would be better served by using the word "communalize" than "democratize" because the former does not suggest a leveling of roles that violates inbuilt distinctions between various members of the community. The story of Noah is a powerful example of the proper use of humanity's role as God's "plenipotentiary," displaying a care for animals and creatures that concludes with a picture of collaboration between Noah and a dove (8:8-11). (Fretheim, *God and World*, 47; Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 44-5; William P. Brown, book review of "God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation," in *Interpretation*, 454-6; Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 113-4).

²²³ Willam A. Dyrness, *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 38; Fretheim, *God and World*, 273.

this delegated power.²²⁴ Human authority over creation is not without limitations, nor is it an unqualified license to wield its authority beyond the proper bounds established by God.

Some scholars balk at his use of royal imagery in light of contemporary abuses of the environment.²²⁵ Yet when the paradigm of divine ownership is used to compliment the cultural and dominion mandates, Wright's comments are not without merit. Modern Western societies have certainly abused this authority for self-interested pursuits. However, the task should be to properly align the use of this authority with God's intended purposes rather than to remove it completely. "As bearers of God's image," writes William Brown, "human beings embody God's creative way in the world, one that enlists and harnesses, rather than subjugates and conquers, the elements of earth and water to realize their life-productive, sustaining potentials."²²⁶ Just as the sun is called to shed light on the earth during the day and the moon at night, humans are commissioned and accountable to God for how they exercise their real but limited dominion over creation.²²⁷ If the metaphor of

²²⁴ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 116-29; 103, 106.

²²⁵ It is important to note that partnership should not be interpreted as equivalence between members of the creation community nor violate their created distinctiveness. Boundaries and distinctions between vocations help mitigate against collapsing the animate into the inanimate or of isolating one from the other. No member can live apart from others and no vocation exists in a relational void. All vocations share the *telos* of obedience to God and His life-giving purposes. Each member of the creation community is called to a mutual and yet differing service as well as an alternating submission based on vocation. The word submission is preferred to subordination in this regard as the latter involves a hierarchy and does not capture the interdependence God designed within the creation community. When submission is held together with metaphor of servant then human vocation can be understood as both a form of submission to God as well as service to others. (*Service* speaks to human posture towards God expressed in giving to others. *Submission* captures the posture of yielding to God and His laws, and to receive the service that other members of creation give to humanity).

²²⁶ William P. Brown, "The Moral Cosmologies of Creation," in *Character Ethics in the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, eds. M. Daniel Carroll R. & Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 13. Fretheim points out that human beings are the only member of creation that have been given the role of guarding against the misuse of other members of the creation community (*God and World*, 275).

²²⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 16.

servant-kings is to be employed as Wright suggests, Noah is perhaps the best human example of the proper use of this dominion, power, and fulfillment of human vocation that relates directly to the nonhuman creation.²²⁸ God's redemptive work for creation through Noah provides a kind of "salvation" that *carries forth* the creation project. Human vocations should also evidence such creative and life-giving effects.

Towards a Definition of the Missio Dei

Theological exegesis of Scripture should aim at laying out the diversity of voices without silencing or harmonizing them. This chapter has attempted to examine a variety of Old Testament texts and to unpack their significance for understanding how the human vocation of dominion and culture making is conveyed to us in the context of God's manifold purposes for this world. In light of this we can assert the following: *the missio Dei is properly understood as the manifold works of the Triune God to glorify his name by carrying forth his creation project and by bringing his people and the world into their eschatological perfection.* This complex definition requires explanation.

The *missio Dei* involves unity in diversity. *Unity* is seen in the fact that it is the one Triune God whose glory is the chief end of humanity and the cosmos. *Diversity* in this unity is seen in two ways that deserve mention. First, the *missio Dei* involves the multiple purposes that the Triune God has for humanity and the world. Scripture reveals these multiple purposes to us by describing God's creation project in Genesis 1-2 (procreation, cultural and dominion mandates), as well as revealing his resolute commitment to redeem

²²⁸ Bauckham writes, "Genesis does not represent the animals as created for the sake of humanity, but it does place them under the responsible and benevolent authority of humanity, to whom, as the dominant species on earth, God has delegated a measure of his own authority on earth" (Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*, 135-6. See also, Richard Bauckham, "First Steps to a Theology of Nature," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 58 (1986), 234).

humanity and the cosmos from the effects of sin and death. The *missio Dei* encompasses God's purposes of creation and redemption for both are necessary to glorifying him.

Second, the diversity in the unity of the *missio Dei* can be seen in each member of the Godhead's involvement in the manifold works of creating, sustaining, redeeming and perfecting creation and humanity. The *missio Dei* begins with the Triune God and proceeds to follow his work of creation and of commissioning humanity to participate in his creation project. After sin and death entered the world God's *hesed* is seen in his commitment to provide for the redemption of his people through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and his world so that both can be brought into eschatological glory when God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). In this way God's work of redemption builds upon his work of creation, as both are essential parts of the *missio Dei* whose fulfillment will result in the glory of God covering the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14).

This theological understanding of the *missio Dei* provides a biblical framework for understanding the Holy Spirit's ambidextrous presence and activity in the world and the church. Similarly, this view of the *missio Dei* is foundational for a theology of work. Human vocation is located within the *missio Dei* and aims at the glory of God by participating in the carrying forth of his creation project and by being agents of his redemptive work in the world. But what happened to the cultural mandate when sin entered the world? How are we to understand redemption in relation to the creation project? And how are we to understand the vocation of God's people in light of God's purposes of creation and redemption? We now turn to these questions.

Creation, Sin & Toil, Redemption and the People of God

Herman Bavinck on the Manifold Purposes of the Triune God

Herman Bavinck's understanding of the manifold purposes of God brings together the biblical themes of creation, fall, redemption and restoration, thus providing a compelling synthesis of the biblical teachings on the *missio Dei*.²²⁹ In his words, the gospel reveals the cosmic scope of God's mission: "The Gospel is a good message not only for a few individuals but also for humanity, for families and society and the state, for the arts and sciences, for the whole cosmos, for all of creation that sighs."²³⁰ The reason this is good news for the cosmos and not simply for redeemed humanity is that, "[God] had and, after the fall, *continued to have* a purpose for his creation...."²³¹ Sin introduced an element of toil into all human work (Gen. 3:17-18) and ushered in evil that perverts human endeavors and tears apart the good creation,²³² but sin cannot thwart the sovereign purposes of God.

In an illuminating passage from *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck expounds on this

²²⁹ This view of the *missio Dei* provides a foundation for Bavinck's development of the dialogical relationship between Christians and the cultures in which they live.

²³⁰ Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Culture [*sic*]," 224. Quoted in George Harinck, "Something That Must Remain, If the Truth Is to Be Sweet and Precious to Us': The Reformed Spirituality of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003), 257. John Bolt's translation renders this passage, "The Gospel is a joyful tidings, not only for the individual person but also for humanity, for the family, for society, for the state, for art and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation." *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, 2 (November 1992), 224.

²³¹ Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989), 51. [emphasis mine]

²³² The focus of the present chapter is providing a biblical and theological framework for the *missio Dei*, this in turn will serve as the basis for understanding the human vocation of culture-making. A full-fledged biblical theology of vocation will also need to attend to the stream of thought throughout the biblical witnesses that speak to the dynamics of toil in human work (For example Genesis 3:17, Ecclesiastes 2:12-26, and Psalms 127:2). These texts speak not only to the challenges and frustrations introduced to human work because of sin, but also of human mortality and finitude. Death's looming reality casts a shadow over life and cultural endeavors.

idea of the Triune God’s resolve to fulfill His original purpose for creation amidst the forces of sin and evil:

In his works God acts as Creator, Redeemer, and Perfecter. He is “the efficient and exemplary Cause of things through creation, their renewing Principle through redemption, and their perfective Principle in restoration” (Bonaventure)... [T]he essence of the Christian religion consists in the reality that the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God and re-created by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God. Dogmatics shows us how God, who is all-sufficient in himself, nevertheless glorifies himself in his creation, which, even when it is torn apart by sin, is gathered up again in Christ (Eph. 1:10). It describes for us God, always God, from beginning to end—God in his being, God in his creation, God against sin, God in Christ, God breaking down all resistance through the Holy Spirit and *guiding the whole of creation back to the objective decreed for it: the glory of his name.*²³³ [Emphasis mine]

The effects of sin on cultural activities of humanity are described as a mixture of sin and grace beginning in Genesis 4. The cultural mandate goes forward east of Eden, but the amalgam of sin and grace is readily apparent as the narrative moves towards the episode of the tower of Babel in chapter 11—city building, animal husbandry, musical instruments, fashioning of metal tools, and poetry are contributions to the creation projects, but as the story unfolds they come from the line of Cain! The work of Christ to “gather up” these cultural endeavors, says Bavinck, is part of God’s objective for the world. All of God’s

²³³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1: Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 112; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 2*, 329-330.

works are essential components of His one mission with its manifold purposes (decrees) as displayed in His commitment to create, redeem and perfect humanity and the cosmos. All of these purposes are essential to glorifying His name and therefore essential to the *missio Dei*.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this unity in Colossians 1:15-20: the redemption accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus builds upon the works of God that began at creation. Elsewhere Paul's revision of the *Shema* brings together the work of God the Father with Jesus in this cosmic mission of creation and reconciliation: "'There is no God but one.' . . . yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:4-6, NIV).²³⁴ The mission of the one God—Father, Son and Spirit—involves the defeat of the power of sin and death in the work of the Son, bringing the creation project to its fruition and glorifying the name of God through the work of the Spirit (Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:3-14).

Bavinck's view of God's eternal purposes reveals a unity and harmony between God's works throughout history. This is seen in the narrative that begins with creation and finds its completion in the full realization of the kingdom of God in the *eschaton*. At every stage of the story, the Triune God is seen as the main actor. Each person of the Trinity is vitally involved in the indivisible works of the Godhead in the world, yet each has a unique role in leading the dance at specific stages of the drama: the Father in Creation (causation),

²³⁴ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 97-104; N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 661-670. I am grateful for Wil Rogan's essay, "Cruciform Poiesis to the Glory of God: A Paradigm for a Christian Understanding of Work" (unpublished paper) for pointing me to these scholarly treatments on Paul's use of the *Shema*.

the Son in redemption (renewing), and the Holy Spirit in restoration (perfecting) of the cosmos.²³⁵

For Bavinck, as well as Fretheim and Wright, the biblical narrative itself operates as the central organizing element of the framework. “Certainly the creation of the world did not just occur to make room for the event of the fall,” writes Bavinck, “but resulted in something that will continue even in the state of glory.”²³⁶ Each chapter in the biblical narrative assumes and indeed builds upon God’s prior work in creation and humanity.

From these discussions we can rightly argue that the intrusion of sin into the world has introduced elements of both sin and toil into the human vocation of culture making. And yet God’s purpose of redemption takes up this sin-stained and toilsome creation project and in so doing comes alongside of the cultural mandate in the *missio Dei*. We can now add the following to our earlier definition: the *missio Dei* is properly understood as the manifold works of the Triune God to glorify his name by carrying forth his creation project and by bringing his people and the world to their eschatological perfection *through the cross and resurrection* of Jesus Christ. It is against this biblical view of the multiple purposes of the *missio Dei* that we can better understand the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in the world.

²³⁵ I am indebted to Robert S. Covolo for this phrasing of the economic Trinity.

²³⁶ Bavinck explains that each historical stage does not erase God’s prior work and purposes: “We must never lose sight of the fact that the decrees (of God) are as abundantly rich in content as the entire history of the world, for the latter is the total unfolding of the former. Who could possibly sum up world history in a logical outline of just a few terms? Creation, fall, sin, Christ, faith, unbelief, and so forth, are certainly not just related to each other as means, so that a preceding one can fall away the moment the next one has been reached. As Twisse already noted: ‘These elements are not just subordinated to each other, but are also related coordinately.’ Certainly the creation of the world did not just occur to make room for the event of the fall, but resulted in something that will continue even in the state of glory” (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 2*, 390).

The Ambidextrous Presence of the Holy Spirit

Concerning God's work outside the church, our earlier discussions of Miroslav Volf and John Stott are relevant here. Volf is correct in emphasizing how God's presence in the world shapes how we think about the *missio Dei* (an area in Stott's theology that needed more attention). But caution should be taken to not blur the distinctions in the diverse modes of His presence in the world (originating, sustaining, redeeming, perfecting), as Volf's theology threatens to do. Where Stott excludes the broader work of God as irrelevant to *missio Dei*, Volf threatens to collapse the work of the Spirit into a monolithic form that does not uphold distinctions between the modes of God's presence in the Church and world.

Here Bavinck's discussion of the Holy Spirit is helpful. The Holy Spirit is the expressed presence of God, Bavinck writes, "[who] gives existence and life to all creatures, in nature as well as in grace, in re-creation just as well as in creation." There is *unity* in that the Spirit is the Author of all kinds of gifts and powers, and yet there is a *distinction* between the gifts given to humanity at large and "that other group of gifts and powers of the Spirit which belong more clearly to the realm of particular revelation... [where] the work of the Spirit appears indeed stronger and richer."²³⁷ The Spirit of God "penetrates into the innermost being of every creature" and "forms it from inside out, inspires, adorns it, in the natural as well as in the spiritual sphere." In the natural sphere this includes humanity as well as animate and inanimate creatures, for He is the Author of the diversity and splendor of all creatures. This work in the creation community is complimented by the

²³⁷ Bavinck, *Biblical and Religious Psychology*, trans. Herman Hanko (Grand Rapids: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Church, 1974), 38-39.

Spirit's unique work in the life of the believing community. "He is the Author of man and then particularly of his higher gifts of the spirit," writes Bavinck, for "He is the Author of the new, spiritual life which, with all kinds of gifts of salvation, is distributed to all believers." And it is within this community that the Spirit has set apart those particular "external gifts and powers which are communicated to each in the congregation."²³⁸

This ambidextrous work of the Holy Spirit in creation and the Church must be upheld in a theology of work and vocation and humanity's role in the *missio Dei*. In contrast to Stott, Scripture teaches a unity between the works of God in the Church and the world. And yet this unity, in contrast to Volf, also contains distinctions in the modes of the Spirit's presence.

The People of God and the Missio Dei

The creation theology of the Old Testament offers a holistic view of God's mission, as we have seen, and the implications of this for the vocation of God's chosen people are profound. The unique identity and vocation of Israel in relation to the other nations is a paradigm for us on this matter, especially in terms of their involvement in the creating and redeeming purposes of God (Matt. 5:14-16; Luke 4:18-19). Genesis 12:1-3 describes the call of Abram by God to be a blessing to other nations. After their deliverance from Egypt this identity and vocation was imparted to the nation of Israel as they were to be a "nation of priests" and a living example of justice to the on-looking nations (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 4:5-8; see also 1 Pet. 2:9-10). This was not to lead to a sense of ethnic superiority (Deut. 7:7-8) but rather of a resolute commitment to use this special role and authority to promote the

²³⁸ Ibid., 39.

shalom of society. Israel's vocation of being a "blessing," "priestly nation," and living example of justice and righteousness to the nations was part of their worship of God and to be seen in their cultivation of creation and culture.

This symbiotic relationship between Israel's life with God and their life in the land is seen especially in Deuteronomy and Hosea. The ongoing fruitfulness and fertility of the land is connected with Israel's obedience to the worship of God alone and to His commandments.²³⁹ William Dyrness explains this theme, "In the Old Testament generally, blessing and peace are tied to fertility and the goodness of the earth, and this comes to be supremely symbolized in the land God gives to Israel." The worship ritual of offering their first fruits reflected the "recognition that all the blessing of the earth comes from God."²⁴⁰

The connection between worship and land fertility was important as Israel faced the ongoing temptation to attribute to Baal, and not God, the annual cycle of fruitfulness. God had warned them of this temptation in Deuteronomy 26:5-11, as this was the very basis of Hosea's accusation of Israel "playing the whore" with other gods (Hos. 2:5, 8).²⁴¹ The desire to control and ensure the continued fertility of the land altered Israel's orientation to God and to the earth. Instead of loyalty, infidelity ensued. And instead of receiving the fruits of the land as "gifts" from the divine gardener, they attempted to control fertility through their religious rituals. Hosea's judgments reveal that the false loves of the Canaanite Baal cult were "not merely religious errors but threaten the creation itself" (Hos.

²³⁹ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 155.

²⁴⁰ William A. Dyrness, "Environmental Ethics and the Covenant of Hosea 2," in *Studies in Old Testament Theology*, eds. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Robert K. Johnston, Robert P. Meye (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 266, cf. 266-8, 271.

²⁴¹ Dyrness, "Environmental Ethics," 265, 267.

2:9-12).²⁴² These examples are just a sampling of passages that specify the ways in which Israel's special vocation vis-à-vis other nations encompassed fidelity to God in worship as well as in their fulfillment of the cultural mandate in the Promised Land. Israel's identity and vocation holds together these themes of creation and redemption and provides a model for understanding the Church's involvement in the *missio Dei*.

In *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Lesslie Newbigin expressed a similar concern to Stott, namely that the uniqueness of Jesus' death and resurrection be brought to bear on contemporary Christian discipleship for all of life (including human vocations) in light of the mission of God.²⁴³ As with Stott, Newbigin looked to Jesus's sending of his disciples in John 20 as an illuminating text for theological reflection on the nature of the Church and the role of human vocations in God's mission.²⁴⁴

Yet Newbigin's theology goes beyond that of Stott and holds together God's work of creation and redemption in the *missio Dei*. It is insufficient to interpret the cross (redemption) of Jesus, Newbigin argues, apart from the context of the biblical narrative as a whole and from the Trinitarian doctrine of God. Whereas Stott's framework begins with John 20 and focuses on the redemptive vocation of the people of God beginning with Abram and Israel, Newbigin's approach draws liberally on the *entirety of the book of John*

²⁴² Dyrness, "Environmental Ethics," 265.

²⁴³ Like Stott, Newbigin believed that a "declericalized, lay theology" is essential for Christian discipleship that participates in God's mission. Church leaders need to be equipped to offer moral pronouncements on the political and economic issues that workers face every day, but to do so in such a way that they function as servants to Christian workers (Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 142-44). Furthermore, he recommended that laypeople have times and spaces to share their work experiences with peers and "seek illumination from the gospel for their daily secular duty" (Ibid., 143). In the very next paragraph Newbigin cites Dutch theologians as providing necessary theological resources for cultural discipleship based on a theology that includes both God's creation and redemption purposes.

²⁴⁴ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 124.

(as well as creation themes from Genesis 1-11), holding together the biblical testimony of Jesus the Redeemer and the Creator king of the world. To exclude God's wider work outside the Church is, for Newbigin, to submit the holistic nature of the Christian gospel to the dominant ideologies in Western societies that perpetuate a dichotomy between public and private life.²⁴⁵ He writes, "A preaching of the gospel that calls men and women to accept Jesus as Savior but does not make it clear that discipleship means commitment to a vision of society radically different from that which controls our public life today must be condemned as false."²⁴⁶

Limiting the *missio Dei* exclusively to redemption provides an insufficient theology for holding together what Western societies rend asunder: public and private life, as well as the earthly and spiritual. The Gospel of Jesus is good news about redemption and creation, about our salvation from sin and our recovery of our humanness, and about church life and our vocations in society. Newbigin's framework for Christian discipleship takes forward Stott's project of rooting vocation in the *missio Dei* by basing his theology on the *manifold mission of the Triune God* and a holistic (embodied) witness in light of the cosmic gospel of Jesus Christ.

We would do well, however, to not pass too quickly over some of Stott's expressed concern to come to terms with the disruptive newness that took place in the death and resurrection of Jesus and protect the Church's unique role in the *missio Dei*. This requires

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 126; 132.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 132. The focal questions for Newbigin are these: "How, in practice, is the church to challenge our culture in its public as well as private aspects in the name of Christ? What kind of churchmanship will enable us to preach the gospel that men and women are called to be disciples in the fullest sense—men and women and children whose personal and corporate life is a sign, instrument and foretaste of God's kingly rule over all creation and all nations?" (Ibid., 133).

guarding against what Stott saw as a conflating of the work of Jesus with the evolutionary progress of society into the kingdom of God.

The Cross, Resurrection and Eschaton

We might summarize the defects of the Protestant Liberal view of social progress and renewal (which Stott rejected), as resulting from an anemic hamartiology and an over-realized eschatology. Along with Stott, Newbigin was also critical of such theologies and looked to the cross, resurrection and Eschaton for correctives to such views.²⁴⁷

Newbigin argued that Western ideologies are in fact correct in asserting that there is a deep dichotomy between our private spiritual lives and our public cultural activities—death interposes a break in the continuity of experience between this life and the afterlife. The remedy, Newbigin argues, is not to be found in either the Liberal doctrine of social progress, nor in the inward turn to the pilgrimage of the immortal soul, but rather to face the fact that death is the wage paid out to all for sin. There is nothing in our world that is “fit for God’s perfect kingdom,” he wrote, for there is “no straight road from this life to the goal that alone gives it meaning.”²⁴⁸ It is against this tragic news that we understand just how good the news of the Gospel of Jesus truly is. Newbigin writes:

The gospel is good news at this point because Christ has overcome the power of sin and death. Entering completely into our shared humanity with all its burden of sin, he has gone down into the darkness of death and judgment for us, and, in his resurrection, given us a sign and foretaste of total victory. As united with him we are

²⁴⁷ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 134-5.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

enabled to follow the same way.²⁴⁹

The resurrection of Jesus is not the *reversal* of death but a *proclamation of the victory* of its defeat. The only bridge that unites our embodied existence in creation and community when this life and the next is being united with Jesus. But stopping here would mean only good news for our personal lives and not for the entirety of our shared cultural life to which Isaiah 2, 60 and Revelation 21-22 speak. Newbigin argues that here too the pathway from death to life through the death and resurrection of Jesus holds significance for our cultural activities. He writes:

Following that way, we can commit ourselves without reserve to all the secular work our shared humanity requires of us, knowing that nothing we do in itself is good enough to form part of that city's building, knowing that everything—from our most secret prayers to our most public political acts—is part of that sin-stained human nature that must go down into the valley of death and judgment, and yet knowing that as we offer it up to the Father in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit, it is safe with him and—purged in fire—it will find its place in the holy city at the end (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15). This faith heals the split between the public and the private.²⁵⁰

Bavinck's theology can help us think systematically about what Newbigin is arguing here: God's works in redemption and the *eschaton* represent significant developments in

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 136.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 136. Bavinck writes along similar lines: "A new song will be sung in heaven (Rev. 5:9, 10), but the original order of creation will remain, at least to the extent that all distinctions of nature and grace will once and for all be done away with. Dualism will cease. Grace does not remain outside or above or beside nature but rather permeates and wholly renews it. And thus nature, reborn by grace, will be brought to its highest revelation. That situation will again return in which we serve God freely and happily without compulsion or fear, simply out of love, and in harmony with our true nature" (Bavinck, "Common Grace," 59-60).

the created order as the Holy Spirit moves history towards its eschatological end. Yet maintaining, extending, and fulfilling the established creation purposes of God is vital for upholding the continuity and unity within the *missio Dei*. Grace restores nature by cultivating the potential embedded by God in creation—it does not add something new or alien on top of our humanity or the created order.²⁵¹ Bavinck explains how this view of nature and grace points to the unity and continuity of God’s purposes that will reach their culmination in the Eschaton:

When the kingdom has fully come, Christ will hand it over to God the Father. The original order will be restored. But not naturally, as if nothing had ever happened, as if sin had never existed and the revelation of God’s grace in Christ had never occurred. Christ gives more than sin stole; grace was made much more to abound. He does not simply restore us to the *status integritatis* (state of righteousness) of Adam; he makes us, by faith, participants of the *non posse peccare* (being unable to sin) (1 John 3:9) and of the *non posse mori* (being unable to die) (John 11:25).²⁵²

There is, as Stott insists, MORE to Christ’s work than enabling an evolutionary development of social renewal in society. The new creation will not emerge from immanent processes growing out of history and human effort. Rather it will only arrive as a gift from God. The victory of the cross provides no return to Eden or a repristination of the Garden into which sin intruded. God’s creation project has endured under the ongoing presence of

²⁵¹ For Bavinck’s discussion on the continuity of the image of God in the works of creation and new creation see *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 2*, 531-2. For a discussion of the embedded potential and need for development of the image in humanity see *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 2*, 577. For a discussion of grace penetrating and permeating the human person and not being an alien imposition added on top of nature see *Reformed Dogmatics Volume 3: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 583, 577.

²⁵² Bavinck, “Common Grace,” 59.

the Holy Spirit in spite of the mixture of sin and grace of all human efforts. To insist on the newness that the cross of Christ accomplished by taking us beyond the reaches of the reign of sin and death, is more than social progress doctrines can dream up. But this does not require a complete discontinuity of God's creating and redeeming purposes nor a truncation in our theology of the *missio Dei*.

Newbigin and Bavinck assert that not only is the original creation "restored" in the sense of healing and maintaining its ontological goodness and integrity, grace also permeates, renews and perfects the entire cosmos. Such liberation brings to fruition the development and freedom intended for it by God from the beginning of time.²⁵³ Out of this view of nature and grace flows an understanding that the Christian is an embodied human person embedded in culture and commissioned to be both an agent of God's redemptive message in Christ and a culture maker. The Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28 did not set aside God's original commission to humanity to be covenant participants tasked with stewarding creation and culture to the glory of God. This understanding of the nature-grace relationship also paints a broad understanding of the *missio Dei* in which we see the cosmic reconciliation in the cross of the Creator and Redeemer, Jesus, and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Both theologians are also in agreement that redemption serves to fulfill God's purposes for creating humanity and does not seek to remove a person from their cultural situation and vocation. A holistic understanding of the *missio Dei* must take into account the Triune God's works in creation, redemption and perfection. A theology of work and human vocation should draw from God's purposes for creation and not simply redemption.

²⁵³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 4*, 717, 720; Bavinck, "Common Grace," 61.

What it means to be Christian must heal, restore and fulfill what God has purposed for humanity. Likewise, our understanding of the uniquely Christian vocation of participating in God's redeeming work must fulfill and extend the mandate God has given to humanity to be stewards of creation by cultivating culture and embodying life-giving dominion of the natural world (Gen. 1:28).²⁵⁴

I will now explore the implications of this theological discussion.

Implications for Human Work and Vocation

Work East of Eden

The foregoing discussion of the *missio Dei* captures a broad range of the biblical witnesses concerning the unity of the Triune God and of His manifold mission in the world. This framework holds together God's multiple purposes of creation, redemption and perfection, the Spirit's dynamic presence in the world, and the Church's commission to embody what it means to be truly human through Christian discipleship in our already-but-not-yet world. Stott's concern to safeguard the uniqueness and significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus and special vocation of the Church in God's mission has been addressed by locating the cross in context of the larger narrative of creation, fall, redemption and new creation in Scripture. This provides a more biblical account of the relationship between creation and redemption and theological support for Garber's claim that "vocation is integral, not incidental, to the *missio Dei*."

²⁵⁴ Cf. Jan Veenhof, "Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck," trans. Albert M. Wolters (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2006), 27-32. Newbigin seeks to answer this question, "what the conditions are for the recovery by the church of its proper distinction from, and its proper responsibility for, this secular culture that we have shared so comfortably and so long with [non-Christians]" (Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 134).

Since creation work has played a fundamental part of God's purpose for humanity and as such it forms a central part of the experience of being human. While we should not go so far as to say that work is a means by which a person achieves their humanity (as *Laborem Exercens* asserts), this sentiment does rightly point out the latent potential in our creatureliness that comes to light in and through our cultural activities. Work touches upon all relationships of human life: through work we bear God's image and commune with him; through work we contribute to God's creation project and live in dynamic interdependence with the rest of the creation community; through work we tread an important path for knowing ourselves, God and the world as we attempt to make sense of life; and through work we provide for the material well-being of ourselves, our family and community. As the unemployed, elderly or retired, victims of employment discrimination, and those for whom physical or mental disabilities prevent them from undertaking work can attest, the loss of work significantly impacts *our experience of being human* (yet, as Volf reminds us, without jeopardizing our human dignity). Work is one of the most basic ways in which we bear God's image, imitate him and follow the leading of the Spirit in and through our everyday work. To be deprived of such vocational work, no matter what socio-cultural forces in our specific context are to blame,²⁵⁵ is nothing less than a tragedy.

Sounding this high note on the value of work is not to diminish the very real effects of toil and pain that sin has ushered into human experience. Precisely because of work's created goodness and potential for gracing life, the devastation of its abuses, alienation,

²⁵⁵ Just as it would be wrong to ignore the plight of the poor and their *struggle for survival* in the development of our theology of work, so too it is misguided to disregard the struggles of the middle-class as they attempt to find *meaningful work that fits their desires and giftings*. A theology of work should heighten our sensitivities to the lived experiences of a broad range of cultural and socio-economic contexts.

and corruption are exponential. The losses of a musician's hearing, a day laborer's use of their hands, a teacher's faculty of speech, or an entrepreneur's mental acumen, ripple out to all parts of a person's identity and experience of being human. In such cases examining work through the lens of a personal sin, pride or idolatry may be helpful but is most certainly insufficient in the face of such losses to such fundamental part of human life.²⁵⁶ The process of finding a new normal in their post-loss life will entail not only an experience of self-worth and identity "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3-10), but also of finding new ways of expressing their gifts as a means of imaging God and contributing to the flourishing of their community through the good works that God has formed them to undertake (Eph. 2:10).²⁵⁷ But ascertaining this will require that our theology examine work in the context of a person's entire life including their relationship to God and their pursuit of a meaningful life.

Work, Common Grace and the Pursuit of Human Flourishing

Since humanity's expulsion from Eden, God continues to be at work amidst the sin-laden, toilsome work of humanity down to the present day. As God gives rain to the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45), so also we see the Spirit's work of common grace even among those who reject God's claim upon their life as they receive "natural blessings" including

²⁵⁶ Chapter eight of Timothy Keller's, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012), offers a helpful discussion of idolatry and work. The problem is not with examining work through the lens of idolatry but rather with making this the exclusive or even primary lens of our analysis.

²⁵⁷ Jean Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche communities for adults with physical and mental disabilities, basis his model of doing life in community on this basic principle that each person is a gift (not a tragedy) with special talents that others need to benefit from. Therefore everyone in a L'Arche community is given particular tasks that benefit others based upon their unique abilities and gifts (Interview with Jean Vanier in the film documentary, *The Heart Has Its Reasons: The Story of Jean Vanier and the L'Arche Community for Men and Women With Mental Handicaps*, produced by Martin Doblmeier, Journey Films (www.journeyfilms.com)).

the leavening experience of work in their lives. Work plays a foundational role in what it means to be human and its contribution to satisfaction and happiness was not eradicated by the fall. Indeed part of the thesis of this dissertation is that *work need not be experienced solely as a toilsome curse but can be embraced as a poetic practice in pursuit of a satisfying and God-honoring life*. The role that work plays in a person's pursuit of joy and a God-honoring life should not be dismissed as completely misguided given its inextricable connection to image bearing and the development of human potential.

Discussions of common grace often take place within the context of discerning God's broader work in the world in light of His enduring and manifold purposes. Often in these discussions Christians are urged to discern areas of commonness with non-Christians and not to disdain the truth, beauty, justice and goodness found outside the church.²⁵⁸ For all of these phenomena play a part in upholding human well-being and societies in a fallen world. Building on this conversation it is also important to look for the ways in which God's common grace includes experiences of each person's vocational work and the life-giving elements that work provides. On this topic Kuyper offers the following comment:

Poets or painters who are *artists by the grace of God* are those who write verse because they can't stop themselves and who create paintings because it is their passion. And although this holds especially for artists, it is no less true of our artisans.

²⁵⁸ Richard Mouw, *He Shines* (5-10), and Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace" trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 1 (1992), 60. For example, Bavinck writes: "While it is true that the world has been corrupted by sin, it nevertheless remains the work of the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth. Of his own will he maintains it by his covenant, and by his *gratia communis* he powerfully opposes the destructive might of sin. He fills the hearts of men with nourishment and joy and does not leave himself without a witness among them. He pours out upon them numberless gifts and benefits. Families, races, and peoples he binds together with natural love and affection. He allows societies and states to spring up that the citizens might live in peace and security. Wealth and well-being he grants them that the arts and sciences can prosper. And by his revelation in nature and history he ties their hearts and consciences to the invisible, suprasensible world and awakens in them a sense of worship and virtue" (Bavinck, "Common Grace," 60).

A mason, a carpenter, a house painter, an upholsterer, if they think only of their weekly pay and derive no pleasure from making things beautiful, from building and upholstering, are not held in high regard by their bosses or their co-workers... When we lost the luxuriance of paradise and were burdened with eating bread by the sweat of our brow, it was a blessing that along with that burden we were given pleasure in work as a spur for that work... To have to till the ground in order to have bread and to plough and sow not slavishly but with joy—that is *grace*. Without passion for work, all that work would debase us.²⁵⁹

Here Kuyper is taking the elevated view of work from the cultural elites in ancient Greco-Roman culture and applying this also to masons, builders, and field workers of his day. This egalitarian development is to be affirmed and taken even further. Given Kuyper's starting point is the work experience of the aristocracy of antiquity his thinking focuses on incorporating the working classes into a similar experience of work. While this is helpful an even more aggressively egalitarian development would be to begin with a particular person's view of the good life and then seek to understand the role that work plays in the pursuit of human flourishing. As Darrell Cosden reminds us, work consists of “dynamically interrelated instrumental, relational, and ontological dimensions.”²⁶⁰ It is the job of a theologian to be alert to the various configurations of these dimensions present in society. For some, like the artists and poets that Kuyper referenced, this may entail ecstatic experiences of joy in the work itself. For others, like Faramarz the Iranian immigrant whose

²⁵⁹ Kuyper, *Scholarship*, 28.

²⁶⁰ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 178-79.

story I will tell in Chapter 5, happiness is derived not in the work itself but in what his work makes possible for his family and their future.

God's work of redemption is not only cosmic in scope (as Stott and Guder point out), but it takes up His original creation purposes, including the role of human work and vocation (as Bavinck and Newbigin make clear). The reconciliation effected by the cross and resurrection of Jesus and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit encompasses the human vocation of culture-making, incorporating human work as integral to the *missio Dei* and basic to Christian witness to the world.

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to respond to Stott's concerns to safeguard the significant role of the Church and authority of Scripture while in relationship to God's wider work in the world. In order to accomplish this, a theological framework will be outlined for discerning God's presence in the world. This framework will be used to interpret the vernacular theologies found among the congregations in which qualitative research was conducted (see Chapter 6), and to offer suggestions for using liturgy as a means of equipping Christians spiritually and theologically to discern God's active presence in their work (see Chapter 7).

The Church's Relationship to Society and Human Work

*Epistemic Humility*²⁶¹

Given the foregoing formulation of the manifold mission of the Triune God and his

²⁶¹ The phrase "epistemic humility" comes from Arthur Holmes and refers to the truth that God alone has perfect knowledge of everything. See Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 128; see also Richard J. Mouw, *Called to the Life of the Mind: Some Advice for Evangelical Scholars* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 26-27; 71-72. and David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 195-194.

dynamic presence in the world, what can be done to develop a theology that spiritually attunes Christians to discern the Holy Spirit's activity in their work? Related to this is the question raised in the previous chapter: what does God's active, ambidextrous presence in the world and Church mean for the theological task of attending to both Scripture as well as vernacular theologies and cultural wisdom? Here again Bavinck and Newbigin provide theological resources for discerning God's active presence in the world that are sensitive to Stott's concerns to uphold the centrality of the work of Jesus and the church's unique task of bearing witness to His gospel. We now turn to their dynamic understanding of God's active revelation in light of the Church's participation in the *missio Dei*.

For both theologians, the Church stands as a witness to the world and offers a message of grace in Christ that heals and enables humanity to be truly human. At the same time, with Scripture in hand, the Church stands with openness, expectancy and eagerness to learn from God's wider revelation manifest through common grace in creation and humanity.²⁶² Bavinck argued that the Christian should be firmly committed to Scripture, and yet should also actively look to the emerging sciences of his time to learn from God's broader revelation. Here is how he explained the dynamic relationship between special and

²⁶² Bavinck, "Common Grace," 40-42; 50-52; 62-63; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 2*, 320-322; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1*, 318; Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 57-64. Cornelius van der Kooi takes issue with the categories of "general" and "special" revelation arguing that this inculcates a mere passive work of God and a static notion of revelation. "[R]evelation is a wondrous gift," he writes, "and grace is never self-evident" (Cornelius van der Kooi, "Herman Bavinck and Karl Barth on Christian Faith and Culture," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 72-78). Such criticisms are noted and the use of Bavinck here is to note simply the distinctive locations of God's revelation: Scripture and creation. What is important to note given this active work of God in revelation is that there is a dynamic relationship between these two locations. Jewish scholars sometimes speak of the unity and diversity of God's revelation as "one voice heard in two places" (Rabbi David Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22-44; Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), xi-xii). This, I would argue, brings together a key element of van der Kooi's criticisms of the terms "general" and "special" revelation while acknowledging the distinct ways in which we gain access to this revelation of God.

general revelation:

Now special revelation has recognized and valued general revelation, has taken it over and, as it were assimilated it. And this is also what the Christian does, as do the theologians. They position themselves in the Christian faith, in special revelation, and from there look out upon nature and history. And now they discover there as well the traces of the God whom they learned to know in Christ as their Father. Precisely as Christians, by faith, they see the revelation of God in nature much better and more clearly than before.... But Christians, equipped with the spectacles of Scripture, see God in everything and everything in God.... Christians find themselves at home also in the world. They are not strangers there and see the God who rules creation as none other than the one they address as Father in Christ. As a result of this general revelation, they feel at home in the world; it is God's fatherly hand from which they receive all things also in the context of nature... General revelation is the foundation on which special revelation builds itself up.²⁶³

Newbigin, for his part offers a similar view of revelation. He interprets Jesus' words that the Holy Spirit will "guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16:12-15) to mean that Christians should have a confident and convicted expectancy to learn from God's work outside the Church as they go about their mission in the world. He writes:

This promise is being fulfilled as the church goes on its missionary journey to the ends of the earth and the end of time, entering into dialogue with new cultures and being itself changed as new things that are part of the Father's world are brought

²⁶³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1*, 321-322; cf. 87. For a brief and simplified application of his view of general and special revelation read Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 14-17; 51-64.

though the Spirit into Christ's treasury. In this missionary dialogue the church both learns new things and provides the place where witness is borne to Christ as head of the human race... Thus a true understanding of the gospel itself ought to enable Christians to be firm in their allegiance to Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, and also to be ready to enter into a genuine listening dialogue with those who do not give this allegiance but from whom they know that they have to be ready to learn. The mind that is firmly anchored in Christ—knowing that Christ is much greater than the limited understanding of him each of us has—is at the same time able to enter freely into the kind of missionary dialogue I have described. This is the foundation on which true tolerance, not indifference to the truth, can be founded. True dialogue is as far as possible from neutrality or indifference. Its basis is the shared conviction that there is truth to be known and that we must both bear witness to the truth given to us and also listen to the witness of others.²⁶⁴

Epistemologically, the claims of both Bavinck and Newbigin are based upon the belief that the realities of sin, human finitude and cultural limitations, prevent Christians from having an apprehension of all truth. Furthermore, Scripture is not a compendium of truth but more of a touchstone by which we test other truth claims and a narrative

²⁶⁴ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 139-40. Michael Goheen has argued that Lesslie Newbigin's Trinitarian theology of the mission of God is underdeveloped and that various strands of thought in his writings were not drawn together during his lifetime. Goheen sees this as an important area for future scholarship. Goheen writes, "Newbigin's own theological reflection on the work of the Father and the Spirit [in the world] remains underdeveloped... [Specifically Newbigin's] doctrine of creation and the work of God in world history" (Michael W. Goheen's dissertation, "As the Father Sent Me, I am Sending You": J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology," (PhD Diss., Universiteit Utrecht, 2000), 160). Goheen goes on to point to potential dialogue partners for amending Newbigin's theology, "Theologians within the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions have developed the Bible's teaching on creation without moving from a Christocentrism. Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology would be enriched by a fuller appropriation of these traditions on the doctrine of creation" (Goheen, *Ibid.*, 161). This chapter takes up Goheen's invitation and seeks to contribute to this theological development.

framework for integrating them.²⁶⁵ There is much to be learned from God's active revelation in creation and cultures, and Scripture provides the spectacles that help us to identify and apprehend this revelation.²⁶⁶ Along with these assumptions is the conviction that God is actively involved in creation and cultures through the Holy Spirit to bring life, knowledge and health to humanity and societies (in the forms of beauty, truth, justice, and goodness).²⁶⁷ At times, this work of the Spirit through common grace involves stemming the rising tide of sin, and at other times it manifests itself in the positive developments in science, art and politics.²⁶⁸

The implications of this epistemic humility for human work should inspire Christians to engage in their particular cultural vocations confident that the Spirit of God is active in every sphere of creation.²⁶⁹ Discernment of the Spirit's activity and leading must be a

²⁶⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1*, 77-89; Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 219.

²⁶⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of Religion*, I.VII.

²⁶⁷ Those elements of truth derived from sciences and cultural and religious worldviews must be configured into our theology in light of the teachings of Scripture (*Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, eds. Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiéno (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 41-43). Our theology, in turn, is subjected to testing in light of God's active revelation in the world and divergent interpretations of Scripture.

²⁶⁸ In his essay, "Common Grace," Bavinck explains God's common grace as an active, supernatural work of God in society: "There is thus a rich revelation of God even among the heathen—not only in nature but also in their heart and conscience, in their life and history, among their statesmen and artists, their philosophers and reformers. There exists no reason at all to denigrate or diminish this divine revelation. Or is it to be limited to a so-called natural revelation. The traditions of paradise, the life of Cain and his descendants, and the covenant with Noah have a special, supernatural origin. The working of supernatural forces in the world of the heathen is neither impossible nor improbable. Furthermore, the revelation of God in nature and history is never a mere passive pouring forth of God's virtues but is always a positive act on the part of God. The Father of Jesus works always (John 5:17). His providence is a divine, eternal, omnipresent power."(41).

²⁶⁹ Lesslie Newbigin advocated for a "humble boldness" in his article, "The Basis, Purpose, and Manner of Inter-Faith Dialogue," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30, 3. Richard J. Mouw advanced his development of Martin Marty's term "convicted civility," in his book, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

primary duty of the Church to “... *to form a spirituality of work* which will help people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer...”²⁷⁰ This spirituality for everyday work is an essential counterpart to the theological framework of the manifold mission of the Triune God discussed in this chapter. These theological resources, along with the task of spiritual formation, are needed to equip Christians to pursue their vocational work as an integral part of the *missio Dei* with the conviction that while laden with the effects of toil and sin, their vocational work can be embraced as a poetic practice in pursuit of a God-honoring life that brings joy.

Liturgy as the Fulcrum between Corporate Worship and Everyday Work

This biblical theology of the *missio Dei* helps us situate the role of corporate liturgical worship in the mission of the church in a more satisfactory way than as originally posited by Stott. The *missio Dei* helps us understand the ways in which Scripture portrays human work at world formation (culture making) as “integral not incidental to the *missio Dei*.”²⁷¹ This line of thought on the critical role of cultural vocations reaches back to the mid 20th century writings that emerged from the laity movement, and in particular to missionary theologians like Hendrik Kraemer. In his book, *The Theology of the Laity*, Kraemer argues that the laity in their daily work occupy critical outposts in the mission of God. In Kraemer’s terms the laity in their daily work in society are the “spearhead” not the

²⁷⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Labor* (trans. Vatican; Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1981), 56-57.

²⁷¹ Steven Garber, “Introduction” to a reprinting of John Stott’s, “Mission: Rethinking Vocation,” from his *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (MJ Murdock Charitable Trust Leadership Conversations (2010), vi).

“rearguard” of the church’s encounter with the world. It is here that the church displays “Christ’s relevance, to the whole range of human life.”²⁷²

It was Lesslie Newbigin who later took up this topic of the laity’s theology in light of the larger mission of God. Instead of viewing lay members as “passengers” who “sit quietly and be taken to their destination in heaven,”²⁷³ Michael Goheen has demonstrated how Newbigin’s missional ecclesiology picks up on Kraemer’s emphasis on the cultural vocations of individual Christians as central to the “church’s missionary encounter with culture.” The implications of this view of the mission of God and ecclesiology shapes Newbigin’s understanding of the nature of the pastor’s role in equipping the laity for “their various [and scattered] callings” in the public square.²⁷⁴ “One half of our work is to gather people together for [corporate/liturgical] worship,” writes Newbigin, “[t]he other half is to send them back to their daily tasks equipped to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. If we forget this second part, the other can be positively dangerous.”²⁷⁵

Newbigin’s final warning highlights the important *telos* of corporate liturgical worship in light of God’s mission in the world. This forms a second theological assumption

²⁷² Kraemer, *Ibid.*, 114; 118. Kraemer writes, “[there is a need to] impress upon the laity and upon the institutional Church the idea that the laity is, notwithstanding the semblance to the contrary, the spearhead of the Church in the world.” (Kraemer, 42; see also *Ibid.*, 37-38, 40-41).

²⁷³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today’s World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 75.

²⁷⁴ Michael Goheen, “The Missional Calling of Believers in the World: Lesslie Newbigin’s Contribution,” in Thomas F. Foust, George R. Hunsberger, J. Andrew Kirk, and Werner Ustorf, eds., *A Scandalous prophet: The Way of Mission After Newbigin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 40. Goheen’s summary of Newbigin’s Lay theology centers upon eschatology (foretastes/proleptic signs), soteriology (salvation is holistic/comprehensive in scope encompassing the whole of human life), and Christology (the lordship of Christ over all Christians and all creation and public life. “The church is the provisional incorporation of mankind [sic] into Jesus Christ,” Newbigin “The Form and Structure of the Visible Unity of the Church,” *National Christian Council Review* 92 (1972): 444-51; 93; quoted in Goheen, *Ibid.*, 41).

²⁷⁵ Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd*, 79-80; cf. Goheen, *Ibid.*, 53).

undergirding my research: liturgical worship is a vital part of equipping Christians for engaging in the *missio Dei* through their vocations. The gathering of the people of God for participation in the liturgy is to prepare them and resend them back into their public life in society. Liturgical worship is the necessary fulcrum connecting the rhythms of gathering and sending of the church. It is an essential part of how the clergy equips Christians to confidently pursue their daily work as an integral part of their participation through the Spirit of God in this work in the world.

A central commitment of those within the Neo-Calvinist tradition (as well as those who pay homage to this tradition's theological resources for cultural discipleship) is that *the Lordship of Jesus Christ extends to every sphere of public life.*²⁷⁶ Yet the relationship between liturgy and labor, or work and (corporate) worship, is not self-evident to all. James K. A. Smith's work on theological anthropology is an important corrective to many dominant strands of evangelical thinking (i.e. "humans first lovers before thinkers and believers") by placing a central emphasis on the formative power of liturgies and practices on human desires and imaginations.²⁷⁷ He points to this relationship between daily life and

²⁷⁶ Abraham Kuyper famously wrote: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" (Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488).

²⁷⁷ In his books, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), and *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), James K. A. Smith argues that evangelical approaches to cultural exegesis have placed too much emphasis on cognitive analyses of worldviews and propositional truths. This "intellectualist" approach has led evangelicals to overlook the ways in which cultural practices instill a distorted view of the kingdom of God (or the good life) and misshape human desires away from the worship of God. Smith's argument is that attempting to counter the power of these cultural practices through the formation of the intellect alone is ill-conceived and betrays a skewed anthropology that privileges the mind over affect (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 18, 23-24; *Imagining the Kingdom*, 6-10; 12-13). "To be human is to be just such a lover," Smith writes, "a creature whose orientation and form of life is most primordially shaped by what one loves as ultimate, which constitutes an affective, gut-like orientation to the world that is prior to reflection and even eludes conceptual articulation" (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 51). The rational mind needs to be situated in the landscape of the foundational human imagination and desires.

corporate worship when he says, “If all of life is going to be worship, the sanctuary is the place where we learn how.”²⁷⁸

The reciprocal relationship between God’s presence in worship and in the world enables a two-way enrichment of the people of God gathered and scattered. Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that the metaphor of the *systolic and diastolic* rhythm of the heart offers a helpful framework for understanding the relationship between the gathering and sending rhythms of church. This helps us understand the relationship between liturgical worship and the *shalom*-seeking mission of the Christians in society.²⁷⁹

In the gathering of the people of God for corporate worship, we bring our “trumpets, ashes, tears” and petitions from our weekly activities in society. There, in the liturgy we rehearse who God is, what he has done, is doing and will yet do. We then respond to God in praise (trumpets), confession (ashes), lament (tears) and petitions that arise from our life

²⁷⁸ James K. A. Smith, “Sanctification for Ordinary Life,” *Reformed Worship* 103: 19. Smith’s comment (and larger body of recent work) is helpful, but the implications of how this insight should be worked out are counterintuitive. If human beings are primarily lovers who are formed by their desire-forming embodied practices (which come pre-loaded with an embedded view of the good life), then the largely worldview formation approach to discipleship in many churches should be seen as *necessary but insufficient*. This worldview approach, for example, is seen in the sub-title of Tom Nelson’s (otherwise fine) book on vocational discipleship, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011). Here the privileging of Sunday Worship and the one-direction of formation from worship to work (which many evangelical Christians read as “Connecting Sunday Sermon to Monday Work”) is misleading because it misconstrues the dynamic interchange between cultural work and Christian liturgy. Without negating the importance of sound doctrine and teaching, Smith’s work opens our eyes to see the more powerful, embodied ways in which human desires and imaginations are formed in and through Christian liturgies.

²⁷⁹ Wolterstorff, “Trumpets, Ashes and Tears,” *The Reformed Journal* (February 1986): 17-22; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Volume IV: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 326-332; John Bolt’s writes this about Kuyper’s ecclesiology in the introduction to Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics Volume IV*: “In this regard Kuyper clearly distinguished two different understandings of the church: the church as institution gathered around the Word and sacraments, and the church as organism diversely spread out in the manifold vocations of life. It is not explicitly as members of the institutional church but as members of the body of Christ, organized in Christian communal activity (schools, political parties, labor unions, institutions of mercy) that believers live out their earthly vocations” (Ibid., 22).

and work in the world.²⁸⁰ Through these embodied acts of liturgical worship we place our lives (what Paul Ricoeur calls “*emplotment*”) in the story of God’s work in this world.²⁸¹ Through our embodied participation in the rehearsing and responding rhythm of the liturgy we are re-centered and refreshed by God and sent by him back into the specific geographic locations, social relationships and work contexts which he has prepared for us.²⁸²

It is with this theology of the *missio Dei* in place that we now turn to the task of

²⁸⁰ Wolterstorff writes, “The liturgy of the Christian church, then, is for blowing the trumpets of joy over our experience of the world as gift and glorious work of God. It is for rubbing on the ashes of repentance over our experience of the world as disobedient to God. And, yes, the liturgy is for crying the tears of lament and intercession over our experience of the world as the suffering of God over the suffering of the world. We do each of these in its own place in the liturgy. In Holy Communion, mysteriously, we do them all together. Praise, confession, lament, adoration, repentance, intercession. In entering the assembly we do not obliterate the world from our mind but carry along with us our experience of the world as a three-fold epiphany of God and our response to that experience. In the liturgy, while ‘holding in remembrance’ what we have experienced of God, we give voice to our response. For that we need trumpets and ashes and tears” (“Trumpets, Ashes, and Tears,” 22).

²⁸¹ William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), xi; 23. Dyrness is drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s creative synthesis of Aristotle’s work on *poesis* and St. Augustine’s reflections on *distentio animae*. In his book, *Time and Narrative Volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Paul Ricoeur puts Aristotle and Augustine in dialogue on the topics of *poesis* and *distentio animae*. Augustine’s discussion of the restless soul (*distentio animae*) involved the tension of experienced time in which conflicting desires arise between expectation, memory, and attention. Resolution was to be found in the intention of the soul as it becomes one with God. Here Ricoeur looks to Aristotle’s discussion of dramatic narrative that enables discordant and concordant elements to resolve as the viewer/listener derive a sense of satisfaction when this resolution resonates with what they perceive as right and possible. This is what Ricoeur calls *emplotment* which is the process by which the viewer puts the disparate stories and events of their life into a larger narrative whole. For Ricoeur *emplotment* is the poetic activity of making a figural whole out of the fragmented events of one’s life. It describes the process of putting the disparate stories and events of our lives into a narrative order by reframing them within a larger story (Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 84-85). Kevin Vanhoozer’s distillation of Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics provides a way to analyze “the discourse in the [cultural] work” and the meaning making that occurs in a person’s encounter with the cultural text (Vanhoozer, “What is Everyday Theology?,” 45). The goal here is to analyze what a particular cultural text “means” but also what it “does” to those who interact with it. Ricoeur’s hermeneutic allows us to interpret a particular cultural text on its own terms without neglecting the world from which the text emerged (the world behind the text); it also considers what a person brings with them to their engagement with the text (the world in front of the text). The meaning making process involves the convergence of the culturally conditioned ways of seeing, acting, and expecting with the story that a cultural practice entices us to enter into. Those who engage the cultural text—whether it be a cultural practice or product—are faced with the decision of whether they will enter into this story and allow it to influence how they inhabit the world. Through inquiry into the fresh mingling of the worlds *behind, of, and in front of* the text a fuller account of the meaning-making process is possible.

²⁸² Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Trumpets, Ashes and Tears,” 18-19.

articulating a theoretical framework and methodology for integrating ethnographic research on the experiences of work and Christian discipleship into the development of a theology of work.

Chapter 5: An Interdisciplinary Methodology for Cultural Hermeneutics

The Need for an Updated Methodology for a Theology of Work

At the end of Chapter 3 I argued that a new approach to developing a theology of work must be pursued that deviates from traditional methods in systematic theology. If a theology of work is to attend to both Scripture and contemporary worker experiences, then it must find a method for incorporating insights from social science research into the task of theological development. This chapter provides a theoretical framework and methodology for this way of doing a theology of work.

Thus far in this dissertation I have employed a variety of methodological tools including an analysis of the historical development of Catholic and Protestant approaches to theologies of work (Chapter 2), literary analysis of leading contemporary theologies of work (Chapter 3), and a biblical analysis of Scripture's teachings on the role that human work is intended to play in God's manifold mission (Chapter 4). The task of this chapter is to construct a theoretical framework that draws on ethnography and grounded theory for a methodology of surfacing the theologies embedded in the ordinary practices of Christians in their work. This contextual grounding in the experiences of workers is an integral part of theology of work for the 21st Century. Theology should assist the formation of a faithful community of Jesus disciples in local churches. The theologian's work must attend both to the theological heritage of the Christian faith as well as the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the lived experiences of Christians as they endeavor to live faithfully to God in their given contexts.

Since all theology is contextual, this approach to theological inquiry requires an awareness of the lived needs that the Christian faith must address if it is to "come alive" in the particular circumstances of believers. Theological reflection on work should involve

an analysis of the embodiment of the Christian faith to consider the dynamic interchange between formal theology taught in churches and the vernacular theology observed in the words and practices of Christians.²⁸³ The place to begin is with an inquiry into the (often implicit) theological reflection is already taking place in the everyday life of Christians. The method of inquiry I employ is drawn from ethnography and grounded theory.

Four critical questions need to be addressed before outlining the methodology for integrating qualitative research into a theology of work. First, how are we to understand God's purposes as it pertains to human cultural activities? Second, what is needed to move beyond a worldview analysis of explicit messages and interpret everyday practices associated with these cultural activities? Third, what social science tools are useful for unearthing the (sometimes) implicit theologies embedded in these cultural practices of work? Fourth, how might a theology of work be enhanced by incorporating theological reflection on qualitative research? Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of the methodology used in the ethnographic research conducted in three congregations.

Locating Work Within the Life-Context of a Person

In Chapter 3 I argued that the construction of a theology of work must include the work experiences of ordinary Christians because the Christian community in all times and places finds itself living between the authoritative texts of Scripture and the particular socio-historical cultural context in which God has placed them. Subjective work

²⁸³ The term "vernacular theology" is borrowed from William A. Dyrness, *Invitation to Cross-Cultural Theology: Case Studies in Vernacular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). I find a complimentary idea in Ann Swidler's discussion of "cultural toolkits" in her article, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April 1986), 273-286.

experiences, then, should play an integral part in theological reflection even as they are interpreted in light of fresh exegesis of Scripture. In order to attend to the empirical realities of work a methodology is needed to give an account of the role that work plays in a person's life. Here I find Nicholas Wolterstorff's discussion of the Aristotelian idea of *eudaimonia*, "the good life," helpful.

Wolterstorff argues that the *eudaimonist* tradition holds that the "good life is the life that is lived well."²⁸⁴ This well-lived life, in turn, is characterized by "happiness" that is derived from this way of living. To be sure, Wolterstorff writes, there are disagreements about what "happiness" entails, but these "are to be understood as disagreements over the content of the well-lived life, *not over whether or not to aim at living one's life well.*"²⁸⁵ This teleological framework is a helpful framework for understanding a variety of ways that work can be configured in different people's pursuit of a well-lived life.

Although experiences of work vary between people, there are three broad categories that are a useful heuristic tool for understanding the role that work plays in a person's life and for discerning their view of the good life. These categories are: instrumental (work is a means to a greater end, whether it be financial or vocational, for oneself or another person/group), relational (work provides a means of relational fulfillment and/or influence), and ontological/aesthetic (work is pursued for its own intrinsic value and benefit).²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God's Power and Human Flourishing," unpublished paper presented at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture's consultation on "God and Human Flourishing," May 23-24, 2008, 8.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 8-9.

²⁸⁶ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 178-79.

These accounts of the role that work plays in a person's pursuit of the good life will be evaluated in light of biblical vision of work and human flourishing. The term "vernacular theology" denotes the theology "in use" in a person's discussion of their work. (As discussed in Chapter 1, the use of the term vernacular theology is preferable to that of "implicit theology" given that it is presumptuous to label the theology evidenced in the lives of Christians as simply implicit or intuitive and that professional scholars alone can engage in formal theology). This vernacular theology is then placed in conversation with the explicit (formal) theology of the local congregation. Thus the analysis considers both an insider's perspective on how their work experiences relate to their church's teaching, as well an outsider's (researcher) perspective on the appropriation of this teaching in the lives of congregants.

In the next section I tell several stories that illustrate a variety of roles that work can play in a person's life and how this in turn offers a window into how their faith impacts their work and life pursuits. These stories provide an illustration of the importance of grounding a theology of work in lived experiences of Christians.

Conversations About Work

Damaris is an artist at heart who works the front desk at a self-storage business making just above minimum wage. At one time she had aspirations of being a missionary overseas but recently she has found her niche as an aspiring spoken word performer and play-write. She strives to find scraps of joy in her job that she says simply "pays the rent and bills and has no correlation to her creative pursuits." She had hoped that this job would at least give her time to pursue things she loves, but the monotony and boredom of her day job weighs her down. Her job is a source of daily toil for Damaris. A place of struggle that

tests the bounds of her spirituality as she strives to preserve a fragment of her limited energies for her creative projects.

Susana is an accomplished lawyer in her mid-forties. She is respected in her work and in the church as someone who is intelligent and compassionate. In terms of her Christian faith, Susana is a mature believer who has offered legal counsel to the church in times of duress. Yet when it comes to her work as a lawyer Susana is perplexed. “Sometimes I wonder,” she says, “if my calling is to make money as a lawyer so that I can give money to the church and missionaries.” For Susana, work provides the resources for her to give generously to ministries that glorify God.

Brian is a financial analyst and manager for an aerospace company. He says that it is strange but he actually likes working with numbers and playing with spreadsheets. It is something that he is good at and it gives him pleasure to play a supporting role at the company. Brian and his wife play a valuable role in supporting the high school ministry at the church by hosting gatherings, cooking for events, and building relationships with students, volunteers, and the pastor’s family. When asked about what the value of his work has he said, “I know I can have a positive influence on those in my department by the way I do my job and the way I treat them.” Brian sees his work as a means of providing for his family and their future and it is a context where his Christian values can be seen by his co-workers.

Noel is a social worker running support groups for patients at a local hospital. Her work is rewarding but demands a lot from her emotionally. But these challenges are leading to growth for Noel, “My job has given me a context where I am free to develop parts of me that I never have before,” she says. It “has given me opportunities to discover who I am in

ways that not even the church community has afforded me.” Work plays a humanizing and developmental role in Noel’s life by allowing her gifts and passions to emerge and to be cultivated.

Faramarz is an Iranian immigrant who moved his wife and two young daughters to America in 1987. In Iran Faramarz was an engineer with a master’s degree, but as common with many immigrants, his degree and trade were not recognized in the U.S. and therefore did not prevent him from having to switch professions in the new country. In order to survive and support his family Faramarz began working at El Pollo Loco, often working double shifts and weekends. Eventually he was able to set aside enough money to start his own plumbing business out of his garage. Today over 20 years later it has grown to the point that it provides a comfortable life for his family and has enabled both of his daughters to graduate from two top U.S. universities, Yale and Berkeley. What gives him joy in his work is that it has enabled him to provide a better future for his family.²⁸⁷ For Faramarz, his work as a plumber has opened up doors to a better life for his family’s future.

Bill is an entrepreneur at heart. Those who work with him are apt to describe him as an innovative connector of people, projects, and ideas through print media. Walking into his office one’s attention is drawn to the stacks of books on the shelves and coffee table—each one a work of art in its own right, collectively embodying an aesthetic vision that connects stories and people. Bill grew up overseas as a missionary kid. He reflects on this experience growing up positively even though it has raised tensions over the joy he finds in his own work as a printer. “I know my parents were called to be missionaries and that

²⁸⁷ Faramarz’s story can be found on the NPR website: <http://www.npr.org/2011/06/14/137174965/iranian-immigrant-makes-us-new-home-for-his-family> (accessed 12/10/14).

there is value in their work,” Bill says, “but what about my job—is there redemptive value in print production?” For Bill his work is creative and life-giving, but he wrestles with how to find lasting value with the actual goods he produces.

Jim is a motivational speaker and teacher who sees his work as an extension of his very identity. “My work,” he says, “is like breathing. It is a natural expression of who I am and how I live. This is not something that I can just ‘set aside’ or ‘turn off’ in my daily life.” Jim uses the language of “aesthetic” and “utilitarian” to distinguish the role that work plays in his life: the latter is an act of heartless, emotionally flat completion of a duty without personal attachment to it. The former can only occur when you give your own self over to the passionate undertaking of the work for its intrinsic, life-giving joy and value.

Reflections on the Role of Work in Pursuit of Human Flourishing

How does work become satisfying and life-giving? And how do the teachings and traditions of a religious community make their way into the lives of practitioners? In each of the preceding narratives work plays a unique role within the larger pursuit of a flourishing life, what Aristotle called *eudaimonia* or the good life.²⁸⁸ Drawing one or more resources—whether they are cultural, familial, or religious—every person orients their life towards some ultimate and satisfying end and then organizes their energies, relationships, and work towards achieving this good life. With this *telos* in mind, we can organize the stories above into a taxonomy of possible roles that work can play in a person’s pursuit of a flourishing life: instrumental, relational, and ontological/aesthetic.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Aristotle discusses the *eudaimonia* in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

²⁸⁹ Darell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 10-13.

Although their visions of the good life are substantially different, for Susana and Faramarz work primarily plays an *instrumental role* in their life by providing the financial means necessary to construct the good life. For Susana the good life is found in leveraging her law practice to make money to give to what matters to God. And for Faramarz, his plumbing business is a means of achieving the good life of providing for the wellbeing of his family's future. In contrast to this, it is the *relational role* of work that has value for Brian. For him the good life involves building relationships at work so that his life can be a positive influence on co-workers and witnesses to his Christian faith. It is work that gives Brian this context for relational and moral influence. Work plays an *ontological/aesthetic role* in the lives of Noel and Jim. For Noel work is part of her development as a human being. It is the humanizing role of work that she highlights more than its sanctifying role. Related and yet different to this experience, Jim sees his work as an aesthetic expression of who he was created to be—like breathing or perhaps even praying.

In spite of the differing visions of the good life between these people—as important as that discussion is—we should not overlook the significant role that work plays in human lives. These firsthand accounts of work give us a window into what the actual paths to survival, meaning and satisfaction these individuals are pursuing. Interpreting work experiences in light of a person's particular story helps us understand the guiding vision of the good life that they are pursuing and the role that work plays in this quest.²⁹⁰ But how

²⁹⁰ In recent years Charles Taylor has developed the term social imaginary as a more fruitful means of examining culture than the older paradigm of worldview. Whereas the language of worldview tended to be bound up with cognitive categories of ideas, beliefs, and ideologies, social imaginary points to the affective components of humanity, particularly the pre-cognitive imagination that governs the ways in which we inhabit the world. Resources that feed the social imaginary include stories, pictures, narratives, and in particular, embodied rituals. Each of these elements seeds the lining of a culture's collective imagination (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171-76; James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 65-68).

do we understand their experiences in light of Scripture? What does the variety of roles that work can have in a person's life reveal about the purposes of God and the enduring influence that work can have in human lives? Is there any way to interpret the work experiences and practices of people like this theologically and identify evidences of God's presence in their life? And what bearing do these firsthand accounts have on a development of a theology of work? Answering these questions will help provide a framework for interpreting the qualitative research presented in the next chapter.

The Dialectic Between Vernacular and Formal Theologies

As was discussed in Chapter 3, most approaches to theology of work begin with analyses of Scripture and theological texts before moving to practical implications for daily life. In privileging formal theology and authoritative teachings the lived experience of everyday worklife is often treated either as secondary importance or neglected altogether. Missed in this theory-to-practice hierarchical view of formation are the creative insights that emerge when the normative teachings of Scripture are used to address the needs and questions arising from Christians in their specific work contexts.²⁹¹ The purpose of theology is to help foster obedient discipleship to Jesus. In order for this to take place, the Christian faith must find expression in specific cultural contexts and address the concrete needs common to human life. This is not to say that the truth of the gospel is a subservient to human whims, but rather to acknowledge that the good news of Jesus always addresses

²⁹¹ Another missing piece that a theology of work should explore is how work influences the non-work life of Christians, especially their experience of corporate worship. We will take up this question in the final chapter.

concrete human needs and does not leave a person without hope and help in times of crisis.²⁹²

In light of this, the object of theological reflection should not end with theological texts but also encompass the forms of Christian practice already present in work contexts. Christians draw on their religious community's teachings and practices as a "toolkit" as they construct an indigenous theology that addresses the toils, hardships and joys of their work.²⁹³ As sociologists of religion David Hall and Robert Orsi point out, theologizing is an inevitable part of every Christian as they interact with their physical environment. This is not to overemphasize human agency but rather to acknowledge the complexity of how people make something (meanings and material artifacts) out of the worlds they have been thrown into.²⁹⁴ Such lived experiences are essential for gaining a holistic understanding of the ways in which people encounter God and bring their faith to bear on their everyday work places.

The work of trained theologians is important to the life of faith for the Christian community, but theologians do not have a monopoly on wisdom and obedience. The work of the theologian is to make available theological resources from Scripture and tradition as

²⁹² "Modern theology, whose achievements we must not underestimate, did not flounder because of the scientific acumen of its enemies. Its impotence became evident in practice. It lost in the pulpit and in family visiting because it had no comfort to offer for either life or death. Not the school but the church, not the seminary but the pulpit, not apologetics but the sickbed and deathbed showed up its poverty. History and experience show us every day what is most expected from theology: it must nurture our certainty of faith. Otherwise, rather than seek help from an established science that can wax eloquent about illness but which cannot heal, the sick will turn to the first quack who comes along." (Herman Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harry der Nederlanden (St. Catherines: Paideia Press, 1980), 19).

²⁹³ For more on Ann Swidler's concept of a cultural "toolkit" see my discussion below.

²⁹⁴ Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8-9; David D. Hall, "Introduction," *Ibid.*, viii-xii.

well as theological resources for discernment on present cultural activities in light of God's purposes and presence. God is at work in his world and not only in his Word. As John Calvin argued, Scripture functions like a pair of spectacles that help us discern God's work in the world.²⁹⁵ These insights need to then be integrated into the normative framework of Scripture. It is not wise to engage in theological reflection in isolation from reflection on cultural activities. For theology that aims at strengthening Christian discipleship needs to hold together reflection on Scripture and cultural experience.

An integration of tools from the social sciences is needed to help hold together theory and practice, belief and ritual, and (from a Christian perspective) the confession that God reveals himself through Scripture and nature.²⁹⁶ Special revelation should instill humility in the believing community as it sets about the task of cultural discernment. Social sciences, at their best, are adept at illuminating specific aspects of empirical realities of live religion that contribute to a full-orbed picture of the complexities of humanity and culture. And theology, at its best, orients Christians to discern God's active presence in Scripture

²⁹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book I, Chapter 6.

²⁹⁶ Unsatisfied with the lack of the ecclesiological commitments in sociological approaches to the study of religion, Pete Ward and Christian Scharen have convened a group of theologians and social scientists to ground the integration of ethnography and theology in a clear ecclesiology. In the introduction of the edited volume, *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), Scharen argues that for too long theology has asked normative questions but has neglected the empirical realities of lived religion of adherents (Ibid., 2). Striking a similar chord with a different emphasis, James K. A. Smith and Mark T. Mulder warn scholars that inquiries into religion within social sciences have tended to examine participants' perspectives but have not owned up to the implicit theological anthropology that inform their orientations and frameworks for inquiry. Smith and Mulder call for fresh approaches to ethnographic research that are self-consciously committed to a Christian philosophical anthropology ("Understanding Religion Takes Practice: Anti-Urban Bias, Geographical Habits, and Theological Influences," in Ibid., 109-10. See also Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012)). Smith's antithetical critique of social sciences is an important warning to heed as we appropriate methods and theories from social sciences, but this should not prevent theologians from appreciating important insights into empirical realities of religious experience and culture that have come from scholars committed whose ideological basis is at odds with Christian doctrine.

and the world as well as to point us to God's normative intensions for humanity and culture.²⁹⁷

Towards a Method of Exegeting the Experiences of Everyday Work

The theological method employed in this dissertation draws insights from Richard Mouw, William Dyrness, Jamie Smith, and Kevin Vanhoozer to assist in the task of interpreting cultural practices. The work of these four theologians have been selected because of they all self-identify as Reformed and evangelical and each in their own way has pursued a project of developing a framework of cultural exegesis for their community. My approach to cultural hermeneutics picks up on key points about the interpretation of cultural practices and artifacts from these four authors, and integrates tools from social scientists for conducting empirical research.

The stories about work described above reinforce the point that a theological reflection on the topic of work must find a way to take into account firsthand experiences and the (vernacular) theologies-in-use contained in the habits and practices of Christians in their everyday work. This dual focus on vernacular and formal theologies places the realities of work and the teachings of Scripture in dialogue with each other. By paying attention to the stories that people tell and the work practices that they construct we can begin to “find our feet”²⁹⁸ in their social imaginary and begin to grasp the ways in which they bring their faith to bear on their everyday life. This means that the field of inquiry for

²⁹⁷ John D. Witvliet, “For Our Own Purposes: The Appropriation of the Social Sciences in Liturgical Studies,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, eds. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 26-40.

²⁹⁸ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 7.

theological reflection is composed of Scripture and lived experience because God is actively present in His world and His Word. We now turn our attention to the four methodological questions posed at the outset of this chapter that I will use to incorporate insights from qualitative research into a theology of work.

1. How are we to understand God's purposes and presence in culture and cultural activities?

Creation and Culture in God's Manifold Purposes and Passions

A theological framework for interpreting cultural practices and artifacts and their importance to God should begin with a discussion of God and His purposes for humanity. Richard Mouw asserts that a normative theology of culture must address whether God has one or multiple ruling passions and purposes for humanity and creation.²⁹⁹ Creation is portrayed in Scripture as the theater of God's glory, the arena in which his presence is actively working.³⁰⁰ The biblical visions of humanity and culture in creation passages (Genesis 1-2), the Psalms (104, 8, 24), wisdom literature (Proverbs 3:19-20; 8:22-31), and eschatological texts (Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21-22) all show us a God who created humans to be culture-makers and reflect his image through the artifacts, practices, and meanings that they make from creation.³⁰¹ Culture is inseparable from the God-given creation gifts. God's commission to humanity to be culture-makers means that we have the privilege of attending to the embedded potential of creation gifts and to develop beautiful

²⁹⁹ Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 50-51.

³⁰⁰ William A. Dyrness, *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 116; Susan E. Schriener, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 65-66.

³⁰¹ Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 41-42.

cultural artifacts.³⁰² In this way human work was intended to play a part in furthering God’s creation project (Chapter 4).

Any normative vision of what it means to be human must give proper attention to the ways in which God’s multiple passions and purposes give shape to the relationships that compose human life—God, the self, the created order, and fellow humans. These purposes of God provide clues for identifying the diverse ways in which the Holy Spirit is actively working to create, sustain, redeem and ultimately perfect culture and humanity.³⁰³ The doctrine of common grace is a helpful tool for cultural hermeneutics that ensures that anything true, good, and beautiful in culture is attributed to God. The categories of natural blessings, civic acts of righteousness, and restraint of evil are helpful lenses that illuminate purposes that God is passionate about and enable us to look for the Spirit’s work in those areas.³⁰⁴ Common grace also calls the Christian community to imitate God’s empathy towards cultural activities expressed in the diverse modes of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the world.³⁰⁵

Common Grace, the Holy Spirit, and Cultural Discernment

When it comes to Christian discernment and presence in culture the doctrine of common grace leads us to ask questions of Divine empathy and not simply Divine favor.

³⁰² Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 34-36.

³⁰³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1: Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 112; cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 2*, 329-330.

³⁰⁴ Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines In All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 9-10; Christian Reformed Church in North America. “Common Grace.” http://www.crcna.org/pages/positions_common_grace.cfm (Accessed May 15, 2015).

³⁰⁵ Mouw, *He Shines*, 39-42; 79-82.

Since God had purposes for creation that existed before the fall we should not limit our understanding of his active presence in the world strictly to soteriological aims. If our cultural analysis is preoccupied with the “salvific merit” of a particular cultural practice we may miss the ways in which God might take a degree of delight in this activity. In this we miss the ways in which the Holy Spirit is already at work in their lives amidst their cultural pursuits, an essential mode of inquiry for a missionary posture towards culture.³⁰⁶

The creation and eschatological texts in Scripture show the continuity and discontinuity of cultural products and projects with God’s new creation. These texts should inform a theological imagination for culture-making. Within Scripture’s creation to new creation narrative, the wisdom literature provides invaluable resources for cultivating an imagination that invites the Christian community to discern the Holy Spirit’s active presence in the cultural wisdoms of the world.³⁰⁷ That this interpretive task involves the Christian *community’s* discernment is an important assumption given the mixture of sin and grace in the cultural activities of humanity.

God’s purpose for human beings is not merely that they would acquire knowledge but more importantly that they would walk before him in obedience. A cultural hermeneutic should enable an interpretation of cultural practices as well as truth claims.

³⁰⁶ Mouw, *He Shines*, 32-33, 39-42; William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 5-6.

³⁰⁷ Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 37-38, 51, 72-73.

2. How can we move beyond worldview analysis of explicit messages and interpret cultural practices?

Culture and the Polyvalent Nature of Cultural Texts

Defining culture is fraught with difficulties. Yet a provisional understanding of how culture works is essential to cultural hermeneutics. For cultural sociologists and anthropologists, studying culture is fundamentally about analyzing processes of meaning-making.³⁰⁸ Culture includes all those artifacts, rituals, symbols, stories, and meanings that humans as embodied, relational, volitional, intelligent, and desiring creatures *make* out of God's creation. As Paul Ricoeur has argued, each of these can be viewed as "texts" of symbolic discourse in culture to be interpreted and responded to.³⁰⁹ Because God has chosen to reveal himself in Scripture and in creation—the latter being one of the sources of knowledge for the cultural wisdoms of the world—Christians need a biblically grounded hermeneutic for discernment of cultural "texts" of practices, artifacts, and related activities. This requires us to be aware of how culture functions and the polyvalence of cultural texts.

A cultural hermeneutic must be attuned to the dynamic ways culture functions. Kevin Vanhoozer provides a helpful synopsis of what culture is and what it does when he writes that culture texts are "works and worlds of meaning" that humans develop as they make the world their home.³¹⁰ The works and worlds of these cultural texts do many things such as communicate, orient, reproduce, and cultivate the ideas, values, tastes, and

³⁰⁸ Lyn Spillman, ed., "Introduction: Culture and Cultural Sociology," in *Cultural Sociology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 1-5.

³⁰⁹ Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," *New Literary History*, Vol. 5, No 1, (Autumn, 1973), pp. 91-117. For a helpful discussion of Ricoeur see, William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 80-81.

³¹⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology?: How and Why Christians Should Read Culture," in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 21, 26.

practices of the larger culture. This polyvalent nature of cultural texts sheds light on the overt messages as well as the covert influence cultural texts have on desires, moods, and imagination of those who engage with them. For example, a cultural work such as a Christmas advertisement might *communicate* an explicit message about what is “in” regarding the latest winter fashion styles while simultaneously (covertly) *orienting* the viewer to approach the holiday season primarily as a consumer. Or a cultural text, such as John Steinbeck’s novel *East of Eden*, might *cultivate* an imagination in the reader to see the world shot through with a mixture of beauty and brutality and subtly *reproduce* the desire for grace to invade this world’s brokenness.

In a way cultural texts offer case studies that provide windows into the larger social imaginary of the culture.³¹¹ Given the symbolic nature of their discourse, cultural texts offer a way of understanding the social imaginary that often eludes older methods of worldview analyses of explicit messages. A cultural hermeneutic needs to find ways of understanding the symbolic discourse operative in cultural texts. Our interest here is in developing a method for interpreting cultural practices and rituals as “texts.”

Cultural Texts and the Surplus of Meaning

What has been argued so far is that cultural practices can be seen as “texts” of symbolic action which when interpreted correctly shed light on the larger social imaginary. But understanding the meaning of particular cultural practice requires more than interpreting the creator’s intent, it involves attending to the various ways a given cultural text is engaged and the meaning-making process of those who participate in its use. This

³¹¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171-76; James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 65-68.

approach to culture as a hermeneutical project requires nuanced ways of interpreting rituals that guard against assuming univocal meaning of symbolic actions. Explicating the meaning of symbolic action is no easy task in part because identifying the place where meaning resides is so illusive. In fact, to assume that there is only one meaning that can be associated with a cultural ritual or product overlooks the public and dialogical nature of culture. When it comes to the exegesis of a cultural practice it is proper to first ask, “to whose meaning are we referring?”

Ritual studies scholar Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman points out that cultural rituals construct webs of meanings that often go unnoticed. As more people engage with these rituals, layers of meaning develop over time including *official meanings* (from those in personal or institutional authority), *public meanings* (generally agreed upon by a significant segment of society), and private *personal meanings*. Hoffman points out that official meanings are not necessarily the most formative for participants of the ritual as human agency makes it possible for public and personal meanings to alter or even subvert official meanings. The fact that a religious institution *generates* a ritual and intends a particular meaning does not mean this ritual becomes *efficacious* for a person or group. The creator’s intent and meaning of the cultural ritual is not immutable.³¹²

How a cultural ritual becomes authorized and efficacious in a group or culture is a complex process. Empirical research is needed to identify how a ritual forms human values and guides their embodied existence in culture beyond the ritual itself—what Hoffman

³¹² Lawrence Hoffman, “How Ritual Means: Ritual Circumcision in Rabbinic Culture and Today.” *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993), . See also Ronald Grimes, “Liturgical Supinity, Liturgical Erectitude: On The Embodiment of Ritual Authority.” *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993), pp. 51-69.

calls *normative meaning*.³¹³ Hoffman offers a map of the surplus of meanings at work in symbolic actions, but a cultural hermeneutic must go further and explore the processes by which meanings are constructed in the encounter between a person and the “text” of the cultural practice. For this we must draw on applications of Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics by other scholars.

Understanding the Meaning-Making Process

Kevin Vanhoozer’s distillation of Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics provides a way to analyze “the discourse in the [cultural] work” and the meaning making that occurs in a person’s encounter with the cultural text.³¹⁴ The goal here is to analyze what a particular cultural text “means” but also what it “does” to those who interact with it. Ricoeur’s hermeneutic allows us to interpret a particular cultural text on its own terms without neglecting the world from which the text emerged (the world behind the text); it also considers what a person brings with them to their engagement with the text (the world in front of the text). The meaning making process involves the convergence of the culturally conditioned ways of seeing, acting, and expecting with the story that a cultural practice entices us to enter into. Those who engage the cultural text—in the form of a cultural practice or product—are faced with the decision of whether they will enter into this story and allow it to influence how they inhabit the world.³¹⁵ Through inquiry into the fresh

³¹³ Hoffman, “How Ritual Means,” 82-84.

³¹⁴ Vanhoozer, “What is Everyday Theology?,” 45.

³¹⁵ For more discussion of this prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration process, see Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 86-88.

mingling of the worlds *behind, of, and in front of* the text a fuller account of the meaning-making process is possible.

This approach to cultural hermeneutics opens up the field of inquiry to include three areas: the author's intentions and the social imaginary from which it arises, the ways in which the text invites us to enter its guiding story or vision, and the impact this experience has on those who engage with the text. It holds together the interplay between all three of these worlds in an attempt to understand what happens in the meaning making process. Incorporating Ricoeur's hermeneutic gives a method of interpreting the symbolic discourse surrounding cultural practices and allows us to move beyond the traditional worldview analysis of verbal texts and explicit messages. It also resists reifying the meaning of cultural texts by attuning our cultural analysis to the diverse meanings that emerge through the ongoing encounters between participants and the world of the text.

But how do we gain access to this encounter of the participant with the world of the text?

Accessing the Meaning-Making Process

At the outset of empirical research a decision needs to be made about the fundamental posture of inquiry—will inquiry be from the perspective of a Martian (“neutral” outsider) or as a convert? That is, given the impossibility of pure disinterested objectivity, will one employ foreign categories for their inquiry or will they endeavor to become deeply familiar with the feelings, dispositions, and actions of the people living in that culture?³¹⁶ Here I find Clifford Geertz's notion of an “interested (in both senses of that

³¹⁶ John Lofland, David A. Snow, Leon Anderson, and Lyn H. Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2006), 22; 15.

word) sojourner” to be a helpful metaphor for the ethnographer’s role in relationship to the culture under study.³¹⁷ The challenge then becomes: How does the interested sojourner find their way into the social imaginary of a culture?

Clifford Geertz was a pioneer of the ethnographic approach to cultural analysis. For Geertz ethnography was a hermeneutical project that attempts to interpret culture as a “text” of social discourse.³¹⁸ Geertz viewed culture as “symbolic action” or an “acted and public document” to be interpreted in order to identify the “socially established structures of meaning” operative within a particular culture.³¹⁹ The first step of ethnographic research is to explicate the meaning of the symbolic actions that occur in society. In order to understand culture at this level requires ditching the traditional outsider (objective) mode of scientific inquiry and taking the posture of an interested sojourner who attempts to “find their feet” with those native to that culture.³²⁰

The second step attempts to organize these descriptions in ways that clearly connect the theoretical formulations and descriptive interpretations. Ethnographers have the task of

³¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, ed., “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 20.

³¹⁸ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22.

³¹⁹ Geertz, “Thick Description,” 5. For Geertz, “Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “constructing a reading of”) a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior.” (Ibid., 5)

³²⁰ Geertz, “Thick Description,” 20. Practically speaking, the ethnographer’s aim is to help cultural outsiders to overcome the “lack of familiarity with the imaginative universe [of another culture] within which their acts are signs.” (Geertz, “Thick Description,” 7; 8.) Geertz saw ethnographic research as a way to overcome this lack of familiarity through “the enlargement of the universe of human discourse” made possible by describing the interconnected systems of signs within people live, create, and communicate with others. For Geertz, “The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is... to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them.” (Geertz, “Thick Description,” 14).

interpreting the layers of meaning operating simultaneously as people engage the worlds of the text and behind the text.³²¹ As the ethnographer attempts to find their feet in a new culture, their aim is to describe the structures of meaning underlying symbolic actions from a cultural insider's point of view.³²² Developing an insider account requires offering a "thick description" of a cultural activity that recognizes the difference, for example, between a wink and an eye twitch.³²³

Drawing on Geertz's ethnographic method offers us a way to explore the personal, public, and official meanings operating in culture (Hoffman) through a combination of participant observation of cultural activities and personal conversations with cultural inhabitants. It allows for a triangulation of data derived from firsthand observation of peoples' participation in a cultural practice (the interaction between the world in front of text and the world of the text, à la Ricoeur), with testimonial accounts of their experience. Theological reflection on thick descriptions of cultural practices has the advantage of evaluating cultural activities in light of insider accounts while not neglecting the connection between these practices and larger community in which they take place.

³²¹ Geertz, "Thick Description," 2; 17.

³²² Ludwig Wittgenstein had pointed out that mastery of another person's language alone may *not* help us "find our feet with them."

³²³ Geertz, "Thick Description," 3. Such understanding of culture requires more than a thin description of phenomenological observation—such as, "the man in a coffee shop rapidly contracted his right eyelid"—by attempting to discern the various ways that the winking person is communicating to others. A thick description of what the man is doing would explore ways in which he might be flirting, teasing, or deceiving another person. Talal Asad critiques Geertz's study of religions as symbolic systems leads him to focus on "meaning" to the neglect of the inherently formative nature of the embodied practices of religious traditions. Thus while Geertz attempts to "find his feet" in the cultural worlds of others his assumptions about what constitutes a religion imposes a notion of Western liberalism onto others thus ignoring the socio-cultural and historical particularities. See Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 306, and *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity (Cultural Memory in the Present)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

As we attempt to find our feet more in that social imaginary through ethnographic study of cultural practices Geertz helps us explore the multiple meanings at work in symbolic actions as well as the processes by which people sort through the repertoire of values, behaviors, rituals, and stories of their culture as they construct their way of inhabiting the world.³²⁴ Participant observation and insider accounts must also be coordinated with an awareness of the socializing effects of cultural rituals and practices that occur in covert ways.

This leads us to the third question our cultural hermeneutic will attempt to address: what social science tools are useful for unearthing the implicit theologies embedded in these cultural practices of work?

Grounded Theory: Keeping our Theories “Grounded” in Ethnographic findings

Clifford Geertz’s semiotic approach to ethnography assumes that the movement from empirical research to social theory is an ongoing process. Once social discourse has been *thickly described* in writing, it can be revisited and refined in light of further interactions and descriptions.³²⁵ In Geertz’s methodology, cultural theory is inseparable from thick descriptions of cultural life. In his words, “The task [of ethnography] is to generalize within cases, an act of clinical inference.”³²⁶ Theory, when working well,

³²⁴ See the discussion about Ann Swidler’s notion of “cultural toolkits” below for more details.

³²⁵ Paul Ricoeur’s work is drawn on here to point out that what is recorded is not the event of speaking itself, but the said of speaking—“that intentional exteriorization constitutive of the aim of discourse thanks to which the... saying... wants to become the... enunciated... It is the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event.” (Geertz, 11)

³²⁶ Geertz, “Thick Description,” 15.

provides the vocabulary for understanding what symbolic action has to say about the “role of culture in human life.”³²⁷

While Geertz’s semiotic approach to culture has its limitations, it offers a theoretical framework for gaining access to indigenous cultural experiences by studying their symbolic discourse. The benefits of Geertz’s approach for this research project are many. First, analysis of symbolic discourse goes beyond the explicit values and beliefs of culture and makes forays into the social imaginary of a culture. Second, by beginning with local concrete contexts instead of universal ideas, the thick description approach guards against the dangers of reification, reduction, and relativizing of culture. Third, by viewing culture as a semiotic text of social discourse, cultural practices and rituals find their place alongside of written and spoken words as part of the hermeneutical project. As everyday speech and rituals come under analysis new insights emerge on the various explicit and implicit theologies that are operative in culture.³²⁸ But how can we understand these insights in a systematic way?

Grounded theory is a method of collecting and analyzing qualitative data that seeks to construct theories that are “grounded” in empirical data rather than imposing it from outside. In the process of coding, grouping according to concepts, categorizing, and finally theorizing, levels of abstraction are built from the data itself. It should be noted that grounded theory is more a collection of principles and practices than prescriptions. These principles operate like heuristic devices that help us to explain what people say and do. At the inception of grounded theory, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss broke from

³²⁷ Geertz, “Thick Description,” 15-6; 10; 14.

³²⁸ Geertz, “Thick Description,” 6.

positivistic science that had come to dominate sociology and had produced armchair theorists who began with pre-established theories with little attention to empirical realities.³²⁹ Whereas Glaser and Strauss believed that theory is discovered from data independent of the researcher, more recently Kathy Charmaz has adopted a “symbolic interactionist” approach to grounded theory. I favor Charmaz’s framework in that attention is given to the ways in which the researcher is part of the empirical world they are studying. In this schema, theories are constructed by making use of the researcher’s involvement with people, perspectives, and research practices.³³⁰

3. What are some ways of unearthing the implicit theologies carried in cultural practices and of understanding their formative influence on people?

Cultural Texts and the Socialization Process

In his work on cultural hermeneutics Vanhoozer describes the largely implicit ways in which cultural texts influence human affect. He writes, “cultural texts convey their propositions—their proposals about what it means to be human—not by offering explicit arguments but rather by displaying them in concrete forms.”³³¹ James Smith’s work provides helpful resources for the task of analyzing these types of socializing influences of culture. Smith argues that evangelicals need to consider more than worldviews in their interpretation of culture. Humans are creatures of desire who interact with the world primarily through their affect and bodies. Given this embodied existence habits, imaginations, and affections are formed through bodily engagement in cultural rituals.

³²⁹ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2-3; 9-10; 4-6.

³³⁰ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 10.

³³¹ Vanhoozer, “What is Everyday Theology?,” 51.

Smith argues that cultural rituals and practices often have embedded visions of the good life that do not conform perfectly to the biblical descriptions of the kingdom of God. Given their liturgical nature, over time cultural rituals shape our posture towards the world as they train us to imitate the *telos* of the good life embedded in them.

Cultural exegesis must consider the vision of the good life that a cultural practice is enticing us to embrace. Smith argues that it is a grave mistake to assume that cultural activities are benign and that we are immune to the enticement of our desires and imaginations in our interaction with the cultural practice. Just as it is mistaken to assume that official meanings are always the most formative it is also naïve to assume that personal meanings provide an impenetrable buffer against the socializing processes of culture.³³² As Smith argues, it is important to ask ourselves, what a cultural text is shaping us to desire? And what sort of person we will eventually become after being immersed in this cultural liturgy? Questions like these sensitize us to the socializing influence of cultural texts.

Smith's framework of cultural liturgies may be helpful in dispelling the assumption that cultural practices are benign, but it should not lead us into a posture of liturgical "erectitude" that reifies a cultural practice and its influence.³³³ Smith is right to focus on a phenomenological analysis of cultural practices as this illuminates the socializing influences in the interplay between the world in front of the text and the world of the text. His approach does come with the danger of privileging the world behind the text (the author's intent and implicit social imaginary) in terms of its formative effects on

³³² Ann Swidler's concept of a "cultural toolkit" holds these two phenomena (socializing and personalizing) together in dynamic tension ("Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, 1986, Vol. 51 (April 1986): 273-286). See my discussion of her article below in the next section.

³³³ Grimes, "Liturgical Supinity, Liturgical Erectitude," 57-63.

participants. Every cultural hermeneutic is guided by particular normative assumptions of the human person. It is important that our hermeneutic enable rather than inhibit “finding our feet” alongside others in their cultural activities. Smith’s phenomenological account is a helpful commentary on the socializing processes found in culture. However Smith’s account needs to be supplemented with ethnographic research that makes use of both “sensitizing” and “indigenous” concepts to more fully understand the polyvalence of cultural texts and the interplay between the three worlds of the text in the meaning making process.³³⁴

Cultural Toolkits as an Alternative to Deterministic Views of Socialization

Sociologist Ann Swidler offers a less deterministic take on socialization processes. In her article, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” Swidler challenges the view that “values are the central causal element of culture,”³³⁵ arguing instead that culture influences action by making available a toolkit of habits, skills, stories, rituals, and worldviews out of which people selectively construct “strategies of action” to address their needs or problems. By analyzing these tacit strategies of action it is possible to identify the patterns of how action is ordered in a particular culture. These strategies of action become inscribed in the body and patterns of thought and exert influence often unnoticed by those in the culture.³³⁶

³³⁴ Smith’s approach runs the danger of offering an outsider’s (etic perspective) reified phenomenological interpretation of ritual formation that fails to give an insider’s account of lived experience (emic perspective) and human agency. For more on etic and emic perspectives on culture see:

Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 73-75.

³³⁵ Swidler, “Culture in Action,” 273.

³³⁶ Swidler, “Culture in Action,” 275-6.

The difference between the cultural analysis of Swidler and Smith is that Swidler emphasizes the point that these cultural patterns cannot be identified apart from empirical research into the insider's perspective and what transpires between the world of the text and the world of the interpreter. There is a messiness of everyday life and religion that demands we give careful attention to the ambivalence and contradiction that recur in the *realm of meaning* of a particular group. Human freedom can be expressed in the re-narration of the purpose and meaning of a particular ritual, act, or symbol that differs from the creator.³³⁷ Human agency should be factored into the socialization process if we want to understand what cultural rituals and texts do to those who engage them.

Ethnographic fieldwork is needed to develop thick descriptions of symbolic practices and strategies of action operating within a given culture. These strategies help acquaint ethnographers with the ways the cultural texts influence action. This approach helps guard against reifying one causal model of influence by attuning the researcher to reoccurring patterns of behavior found in a culture. Swidler's cultural toolkit paradigm allows us to grasp the ways in which a culture's stockpile of tradition, symbols, and rituals socialize individuals in complex ways.³³⁸

Cultural Practices as Poetic Acts Aimed at the Good Life

What has been argued thus far is that cultural practices can be seen as texts of symbolic discourse that can be instruments of socialization as well as expressions of personal meaning. A cultural hermeneutic must hold together these socializing and

³³⁷ David Hall and Robert Orsi, *Lived Religion in America*, 8-9; viii-xii; 14; 10-13.

³³⁸ For an excellent synthesis of these two components of a tradition's formation and individual appropriation, see William A. Dyrness, *Senses of Devotion: Interfaith Aesthetics in Buddhist and Muslim Communities* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 3-5.

personalizing aspects. We must take into account all three worlds of the text (in front of, of, behind) as we consider how the values of the larger culture shapes our behavior and how particular cultural practices become meaningful to us as we participate in them. The meaning and significance of cultural practices are sometimes more but never less than the person's conscious intention. We now turn our attention to understanding how particular practices become poetic acts that people construct in order to find comfort amidst suffering and joy through their work.

In his book, *Poetic Theology*, William Dyrness puts forward poetic practices as a tool for interpreting the deep-seated human desires that take shape in embodied forms of culture. By poetic he means more than poetry and refers to a broader set of “symbolic objects and practices—those projects that embody the desires and dreams around which people orient their lives.”³³⁹ It is through these poetic practices that humans seek to achieve a beautiful life by making beautiful artifacts and objects of this world.³⁴⁰ In culture-making activities people seek to reach beyond themselves and “emplot” themselves in a compelling narrative that will lend order, meaning, and beauty to the fragmented events of their lives. It is important to note that the poetic practices people undertake to achieve “the good life” also help people deal with the suffering and toil that is part-and-parcel to work in our East of Eden existence. Analyzing poetic practices gives us unique insight into the visions of the good life and happiness that captivate the imaginations and desires of those with whom

³³⁹ Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, x. Poetic practices are symbolic culture-making practices that embody the life-orienting desires at the core of human lives by which humans seek to achieve a beautiful and happy life.

³⁴⁰ Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, XI; 23. Dyrness argues that drives this symbolic activity is the ontological goodness and beauty of creation as well as its capacity to be an arena of God's presence. Both of these characteristics elicit human desire and creative response.

we are seeking to sojourn.³⁴¹ This enables everyday poetic practices to be seen as symbolic pointers to a larger story without presuming upon them worship intent. A cautionary word is needed here: inquiry into poetic practices demands a commitment to discover the processes at work within a particular context.

A Cultural Hermeneutic for the Poetics of Everyday Work life

Theological inquiry into poetic practices must be “grounded” in the particular vernacular of a social group and context.³⁴² What is needed here is what Paul Willis terms a “grounded aesthetic” that traces the dynamics of symbolic activity and transformation at work among a specific group of people within particular contexts. This involves the selection, authorization, and generation of meanings as well as the attribution of these meanings to symbols and practices. Of particular interest is the “dramaturgy and poetics of everyday life” that can be seen in the entire process of cultural life as people seek to understand and change their world as they personalize the world and make it human to

³⁴¹ Dyrness is drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s creative synthesis of Aristotle’s work on *poesis* and St. Augustine’s reflections on *distentio animae*. In his book, *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur puts Aristotle and St. Augustine in dialogue on the topics of *poesis* and *distentio animae*. Augustine’s discussion of the restless soul (*distentio animae*) involved the tension of experienced time in which conflicting desires arise between expectation, memory, and attention. Resolution was to be found in the intention of the soul as it becomes one with God. Here Ricoeur looks to Aristotle’s discussion of dramatic narrative that enables discordant and concordant elements to resolve as the viewer/listener derives a sense of satisfaction when this resolution resonates with what they perceive as right and possible. This is what Ricoeur calls *emplotment* which is the process by which the viewer puts the disparate stories and events of their life into a larger narrative whole. For Ricoeur *emplotment* is the poetic activity of making a figural whole out of the fragmented events of one’s life. It describes the process of putting the disparate stories and events of our lives into a narrative order by reframing them within a larger story (Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 84-85). Dyrness builds on Ricoeur and argues that our cultural artifacts and practices are attempts at making (*poesis*) a beautiful and flourishing life that is part of that bigger story. Human beings are fundamentally lovers who express and seek to fulfill their desire to fashion a beautiful life through culture-making.

³⁴² Vernacular theology consists of tacit knowledge and implicit theology bound up in cultural practices and rituals. Very often this tacit knowledge is unconscious and escapes explicit articulation by cultural insiders. The construction of vernacular theologies occurs communally and often through imitation rather than by cognitive/rational analysis.

them.³⁴³ For example, in the earlier vignette about Susana the lawyer her community offers her values and language for finding value in her work for the role it plays in helping her participate in a larger community project—contributing to the ministries of the church locally and globally. At the same time Susana’s view of her work does not coincide completely with what is officially taught at her church about the value of her work as a lawyer to contribute to a healthy and just society. She has latched onto aspects of the formal teaching of her church community, ascribing personal meaning to it as a way of connecting her work to a larger story of God’s work in the world.

Of interest in this dissertation is the discovery of the poetic practices of everyday work life for Christians in three American evangelical congregations. This requires interviews with congregants to discover accounts of their experiences of work and discipleship formation. These firsthand reflections were supplemented with participant observation of each congregation’s community gatherings. Theological reflection was done on both the explicit teaching and communal practices of each congregation in order to understand the ways in which the religious tradition of the community is brought to bear on the vocational life of these Christians.

Thus far in this chapter we have discussed a theological framework for interpreting poetic practices as cultural texts. This helps us push beyond a textual analysis of sermons and educational materials of the community. The next section involves a theoretical discussion of how the qualitative research on work experiences can be incorporated into a formal theology of work.

³⁴³ Paul Willis, *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990), 22; 21.

4. Why should a cultural hermeneutic entail a dialectic between vernacular and formal theologies?

God's Purposes, Presence, & Revelation Require A Dialogical Approach to Vernacular and Formal Theologies

The very nature of the Christian faith requires that the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ be made concrete in the specific contexts of Christians—this is true of cultural as well as work contexts. The diversity of texts within Scripture are culturally embedded and pastorally aimed. This must be the case, for in God's gracious condescension to communicate to his people he entered into their languages and cultural contexts. As Scripture addresses every aspect of human and cultural life so too Christian discipleship must be equally holistic leaving nothing untouched by the claims of the lordship of Jesus. The implication for theological reflection is that attention must be made to Scripture as well as the lived experiences, practices, and challenges of everyday discipleship.

Turning our attention to culture we find that this too is the domain of God's active presence and revelation. As Creator, Sustainer, and Perfector, God has imparted to creation the capacity to reflect his glory and he has embedded in it traces of his intentions for humanity (Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-16). More than this, God is actively present in the person of the Holy Spirit upholding creation and pursuing his creating purposes through the everyday work of Christians. Theological reflection on cultural activities is needed to discern the areas in which the Holy Spirit is actively present pursuing God's manifold purposes.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ The challenges and benefits of approaching cultural hermeneutics as a dialectic between vernacular and formal theologies are closely related. Pursuing a dialectical approach between vernacular and formal theologies will likely result in the following: 1) Clearer identification of the specific contextual circumstances to which the gospel must be contextualized; 2) Identification of new insights and virtues in cultural wisdoms discerned from creation and human experience that can be repurposed; and 3) Greater

In light of God's common grace that upholds His purposes for humanity's involvement in His creation project, it is incumbent upon theologians to find a method for doing theological reflection on empirical research and to integrate insights from this into their theology. I will now conclude this chapter with an overview of the methodology used in my ethnographic research.

Ethnographic Research Methodology

Recently, growing attention in theology of work texts is being given to matters of ecclesiology with special attention on local congregations and their liturgies.³⁴⁵ But what do these theologies look like in embodied form in congregations? And why is it that despite these excellent theological treatises on work, many American evangelical churches offer little guidance to their parishioners on how to connect their faith with their work?³⁴⁶ These questions must be explored if a theology of work is to equip local congregations to engage in vocational discipleship. To date, there remains a glaring absence of qualitative research on the lived experience of Christians in their work in these theologies of work (as discussed

awareness of our own cultural embeddedness as new questions are presented for reflection based on different contextual assumptions and experiences.

³⁴⁵ Esther R. Reed, *Good Work: Christian Ethics in the Workplace* (Baylor University Press, 2010), chapter 3; Joshua R. Sweeden, *The Church and Work: The Ecclesiological Grounding of Good Work* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), chapter 5; David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

³⁴⁶ Barna Group found that although 86% of evangelical pastors surveyed reported preaching sermons in the past year on work, 70% of Christians polled said they cannot envision how the work they do serves God (see the article published by the *Center for Faith and Work*, "Is the Gap Between Pulpit and Pew Narrowing," *Patheos*, (February 22, 2015), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/missionwork/2015/02/is-the-gap-between-pulpit-and-pew-narrowing-read-the-latest-research/>, accessed: 3/15/15). See also: Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 20-21.

in Chapter 3).³⁴⁷ A theology of work should use qualitative research to explore worker experiences as a way into understanding the vernacular, theologies-in-use of Christians in a specific context.³⁴⁸

In order to take the theology of work conversation forward, I examine the lived realities of contemporary Christians in their work contexts and identify the influence their religious tradition has on their experience of work. In so doing, I attempt to describe the type of theological reflection operative in the everyday work experiences of Christians by incorporating qualitative research tools to analyze their experiences of work, rather than relying solely on the espoused theologies found in the public teachings and documents of their church. This research on lived religion can then be a context in which the normative theology presented in Chapter 4 can be explored in the patterns of congregational life, as well as inform the questions underlying the development of future theologies of work.

³⁴⁷ One exception to this is John Knapp's *How the Church is Failing Businesspeople (And What Can be Done About it)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 166. Unfortunately, Knapp's research lacks methodological rigor, requiring further qualitative research be undertaken to provide ways of assessing the more intuitive modes in which a person's faith is played out in the everyday work practices. Knapp's mode of inquiry is one-dimensional and uses straightforward questions concerning ethical dilemmas Christians face at work and whether or not their church has been helpful in addressing these concerns. While interesting, these responses reveal more about the participants' ability to give a theoretical account of how their church provides direct answers to their ethical problems.

³⁴⁸ For example, Smith and Denton write the following about religiously serious American teenagers: "religious practices appear to play an important role in their faith lives... [for them faith] is also activated, practiced, and formed through specific religious and spiritual practices... faith involves their intentionally engaging in regularly enacted religious habits and works that have theological, spiritual, or moral meanings that form their lives, such as habitually worshiping with other believers, reading scriptures, praying regularly, practicing confession and forgiveness and reconciliation, engaging in service to others..." (Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27).

Research Purpose and Thesis

The purpose of this qualitative research is to describe how Christians make use of their Christian faith as they engage in their work. Of particular interest are the processes by which church communities attempt to form Christians, and how in turn Christians draw on (or don't) the resources of their religious tradition as they undertake their work.³⁴⁹ A core assumption of my methodology is as follows: *the kind of theological reflection needed to sustain a faithful Christian presence in contemporary work contexts can only be forged by attending to the authoritative texts of Scripture as well as the theology constructed by Christians as they draw on the materials at hand (ideas, beliefs, practices) in their religion, culture, and community.* Work experiences are strategic loci for theological inquiry into lived religion. This study offers windows into the work experiences of Christians as well as the discipleship practices of their church communities.

Inquiries into the *intended formation* (espoused theology) of congregations focus on how church leadership attempts to equip their congregants for everyday work. My interviews with pastoral staff and analysis of discipleship materials allowed me to identify the espoused pedagogical and theological paradigms for discipleship in each congregation. Participant observation gave me exposure to the implicit theologies-in-use embodied in the congregations' practices, symbols, and speech observed in the weekly routines of church

³⁴⁹ The guiding research questions of this study were: How do Christians understand and describe how their daily work becomes satisfying and life giving? To what degree does an experience of God's presence in a person's work factor into their experience of satisfaction and suffering? Finally, how do Christians understand and describe the role that their congregation's teachings and practices play in helping them find meaning and satisfaction in their work? How do the church leaders and pastors understand and describe the processes by which parishioners grow in vocational discipleship?

life.³⁵⁰ In order to access the *processes of appropriation* of the tradition, I sought first to identify the role work plays in a person's life and then to discover the processes by which work becomes satisfying and life giving. Here attention was also given to the vernacular theologies contained within the practices of Christians as they undertake their daily work. This chapter explores the relationship between the espoused theologies of congregations and the vernacular theologies of congregants as important sources for developing a theology of work. The goal is to forge a dialectic hermeneutic that allows us to see the relationship between the faith tradition of the church and the practices of the congregation.³⁵¹

Overview of Qualitative Research

From March to August 2014 I engaged in ethnographic research in three congregations, administered online surveys and conducted face-to-face interviews with 77 congregants (Redemption Church Tempe, 27; City Church San Francisco, 23; Grace Brethren Church of Long Beach, 27). Working in concert with gatekeepers³⁵² in each church, I attempted to identify a representative pool of interview participants *that reflected the congregation's diversity* in terms of gender, age, vocational area, socio-economic status and ethnicity.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ (Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 9)).

³⁵¹ Schreiter, "Theology in the Congregation," 30-31, 37.

³⁵² For a definition of "gatekeeper" see: <http://sociologydictionary.org/gatekeeping/> (accessed 6/23/15).

³⁵³ The demographic information of these interview participants can be found in **Appendix A**.

The pre-interview online survey consisted of 30 multiple choice and short answer questions enabling a basic assessment of each subject's demographic information, work history and contexts, experiences of work satisfaction and frustration, prayer frequency concerning work, length of time and frequency of involvement in the church community, and perceived strengths and values of the congregation.³⁵⁴ This survey streamlined much of the demographic data gathering of participants and gave an initial sense of potential topics of inquiry to be explored later in the face-to-face interviews. The average face-to-face interview lasted one hour and was conducted most often in public spaces (coffee shops and restaurants), occasionally in a church office, and in a few cases, in the participant's place of employment or home. Interviews drew on information taken from the online survey and covered three areas: experiences of work, spirituality and encounters with God at work, and involvement in the church community.³⁵⁵

To develop a grounded theory based on my ethnographic research I used an inductive coding scheme that draws on "sensitizing concepts" (themes, terms, and symbols used from theoretical and historical research) and "indigenous concepts" (themes, terms and symbols that emerged from the data) will be employed in order to maintain construct feedback loop for the constant refinement of theory in light of empirical research.³⁵⁶

Field Sites and Fieldwork experiences

Local congregations are strategic sites for theological inquiry for it is within these communities that discipleship formation takes place. Nancy Ammerman and her

³⁵⁴ See **Appendix B** for the pre-interview online survey.

³⁵⁵ See **Appendix C** for the interview schedule and complete list of interview questions.

³⁵⁶ See Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 11 and Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions*, 17.

colleagues explain the theological nature of congregations and argue that mutual enrichment can take place between scholars and local churches. They write:

What happens in congregations is theological. People of faith, gathered in congregations, work every day to make sense of their lives and to devise ways of relating to the divine powers that lie within and beyond them. That work deserves to be taken into account in the thinking of theologians whose primary community is the academy. Theologians who come to the study of congregations will do so with their own methods and disciplines, but by taking seriously the everyday work of congregations, their work can be enhanced.³⁵⁷

It is in the routine practices of worship, service, outreach and evangelism, and fellowship gatherings that the work experiences of parishioners and the teachings of Scripture and tradition coalesce as the community engages in the work of Christian discipleship. A theology of work that seeks to resource church discipleship efforts must itself be rooted in the formational practices of local congregations. For this reason I undertook qualitative research in one congregation in each of the three cities: Tempe, San Francisco and Long Beach.

In each of the three congregations I secured buy-in from the top leaders and official channels of authority. I also attempted to identify gatekeepers within the community as well as non-official leaders who can offer insights into the social dynamics of the community culture.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 9.

³⁵⁸ Schreiter, "Theology in the Congregation," 42.

Strengths and Weaknesses of this Methodology

Ethnographic studies are contextually rooted and provide several advantages over other forms of qualitative research. If mass online or phone surveys offer a broad aerial view of the general features of multiple contexts, ethnographic research provides a contextually grounded, time-bound inquiry into a particular subject at specific places in time, in this case, experiences of work and church community. Although time and cost intensive, this narrower scope provides opportunities for an in-depth study of the social dynamics of a particular context. Instead of speaking in terms of statistical generalities, ethnographic research affords the possibility of indigenous accounts of the Christian discipleship.

The weaknesses of ethnographic research are related to these strengths. The person-centered nature of this in-depth research produces highly subjective data. Similarly, taking an interested sojourner posture within a context creates potential for researcher biases and contamination make verifying the reliability of the data difficult (e.g. How representative are the research participants of their community?). Furthermore the contextually-bound nature of this research creates difficulty in applying insights of ethnographic studies to other contexts. Differences between contexts places *demands on readers* of this research, especially those hoping to apply insights to their contexts.

Hypothesis

In order to make explicit some of my assumptions about theology, work and discipleship formation, I outlined several problems and hypotheses prior to my fieldwork. The framing of these problems, questions and hypothesis is embedded with theological and pedagogical assumptions and values that I carry with me as a researcher. In making these

explicit and subjecting them to testing/verification in the data collection I hope to redress some of my own biases. The following hypothesis were used in the drafting of the interview schedule (see Appendix C).

- Sub-problem 1: How do Christians understand God’s presence in the world as it relates to their particular weekday work?
 - Hypothesis: many Christians tacitly assume that God’s purpose for them at work is to provide a relational witness and influence on their co-workers, lending little value to their work in and of itself.
- Sub-problem 2: What is the relationship between the explicit conceptual categories within which evangelical Christians approach their work with the implicit theology revealed in their work practices? (Possible typology: functional-utilitarian, relational—character & evangelism, ontological—humanness & worship).
 - Hypothesis: The practices of most Evangelical Christians will reveal a functional-utilitarian and relational-character witness approach/value of their work. Both of these approaches reveal an implicit “work is a means to an end” approach to work despite what they claim their theology of work to be.
- Sub-problem 3: Do parishioners consciously bring their workweek experiences (stresses, failures, joys and successes) into community worship gatherings? (or, Do the workweek experiences of parishioners play a conscious role in the meaning-making process that occurs in the worship practices of the gathered community?)
 - Hypothesis: There is an implicit one-way relationship between (Sunday) worship and (9-5) work which discourages parishioners from bringing their

work experiences into worship and leads pastors to overlook these lived realities in the crafting of liturgies.

- Sub-problem 4: What are the pedagogical processes by which pastoral staff's attempt to form parishioners for vocational discipleship? (possible typology: worldview/teaching approach, mentorship/relationship approach, small group/discussion approach).
 - Hypothesis: A preoccupation with theological ideas & worldview dominates the discipleship processes within congregations, thus detracting from the embodied nature of knowledge in the formation of Christians.

Delimitations of the Research

1. This study excluded congregations outside of the evangelical tradition. Instead it focused on congregations who self-identify as evangelical Protestant. Within the evangelical community, no specific denominational affiliation was required.
2. This study did not consider evangelical congregations outside of the Southwest United States. While the work experiences and theological reflections from Christians outside of the U.S. are of great importance to a comprehensive theology of work, the scope of such qualitative research was beyond the scope of this research project. It is hoped that theologians in other contexts will undertake studies that examine the lived experiences of workers in their own contexts, thus providing more of an insider's perspective on the dynamics of work in their own cultural settings.
3. This study excluded congregations who have not had a sustained focus on vocational discipleship for at least two years. With the coming and going of

ministry fads and topical interests, time is needed to develop sustained vocational discipleship efforts.

4. This study did not consider congregations within the same geographic area. A concerted effort was made to study congregations in diverse geographic contexts.

Participant observation

In an attempt to understand the culture of each congregation I began with a review of the church websites. I read through the official texts (mission statements, articles of belief, church history, and staff biographies), descriptions of programs and events, and any stories that were highlighted.³⁵⁹ I compiled a list of important books and articles in circulation within the educational curricula of the church. These texts alerted me to the basic vocabulary, paradigms and central narratives intended to shape the memory and imaginary of the community.

The gathered meetings of the church communities (corporate worship, small groups, retreats and special occasions) provided strategic places to place myself to observe the sending and the gathering processes of the community amidst its weekly practices. I conducted a space tour of the church property to experience and observe the flow of events and patterns of social interaction of the congregants. In looking around the corporate gatherings I tried to imagine what it would be like to inhabit these spaces and events from

³⁵⁹ Schreiter, "Theology in the Congregation," 33-36; 49-50. See pages 34-35 for detailed questions for analyzing these four practices. In an attempt to pay attention to implicit and explicit theologies I will explore the theological significance of the actions I observe around me. Does church culture suggest a different picture of who they say God is? What does the allocation of resources reveal about their mission and priorities? Do the church processes reveal a different picture of power, authority and service than its written mission? Does the ecology in which the church lives make parts of its explicit theology difficult to attain? (Ibid., 36).

the perspective of those individuals. Whenever possible I followed up with impromptu conversations with those around me.

In an effort to become deeply acquainted with the actions, feelings, and orientations of parishioners of these churches I paid attention to generational differences, diverse roles and experiences of members, specific motivations for joining and staying at the church, and any differences between experiences of leaders and members.³⁶⁰

Data Analysis

Audio recordings of the face-to-face interviews were captured on a digital recorder and transcribed by Adler Enterprises LLC, a professional transcription service. Dr. Richard Flory, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Southern California, referred me to this transcription service. In an effort to provide consistent and systematic reflection on the interviews I used an inductive coding scheme that consisted of “sensitizing concepts” (themes, terms, and symbols used from theoretical and historical research) as well as “indigenous concepts” (themes, terms, and symbols that emerged from the data as well as discovering how people self-identify).³⁶¹ Coding was done using QSR’s *NVivo* software designed specifically for analyzing qualitative research.

I coded the 77 interviews based on six areas: 1. Work roles, 2. Areas of work satisfaction, 3. Resources of the faith, 4. Encounters with God, 5. Resources of the church community, and 6. Corporate liturgical worship. The coding categories correspond to my

³⁶⁰ Schreiter, “Theology in the Congregation,” 32; John Lofland, David Snow, Leon Anderson, Lyn H. Lofland, eds., *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis 14th Edition* (Belmont: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2006), 82-84.

³⁶¹ Justin G. Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions: The PostSuburban Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 17; Lofland et al, *Analyzing Social Settings*, 23.

central research questions. What role/s does work play in a person's life? How does work become satisfying? What resources does a person's religious tradition provide for how they pursue their work—especially as they deal with suffering and adversity? Are there ways in which God's presence is experienced in a person's work? How does the local church community and particularly liturgical worship figure into a person's life and work? Within each of these six coding areas there are several sub-coding categories that allow for more detailed descriptions of responses. See **Appendix C** for a complete list of codes and their descriptions.

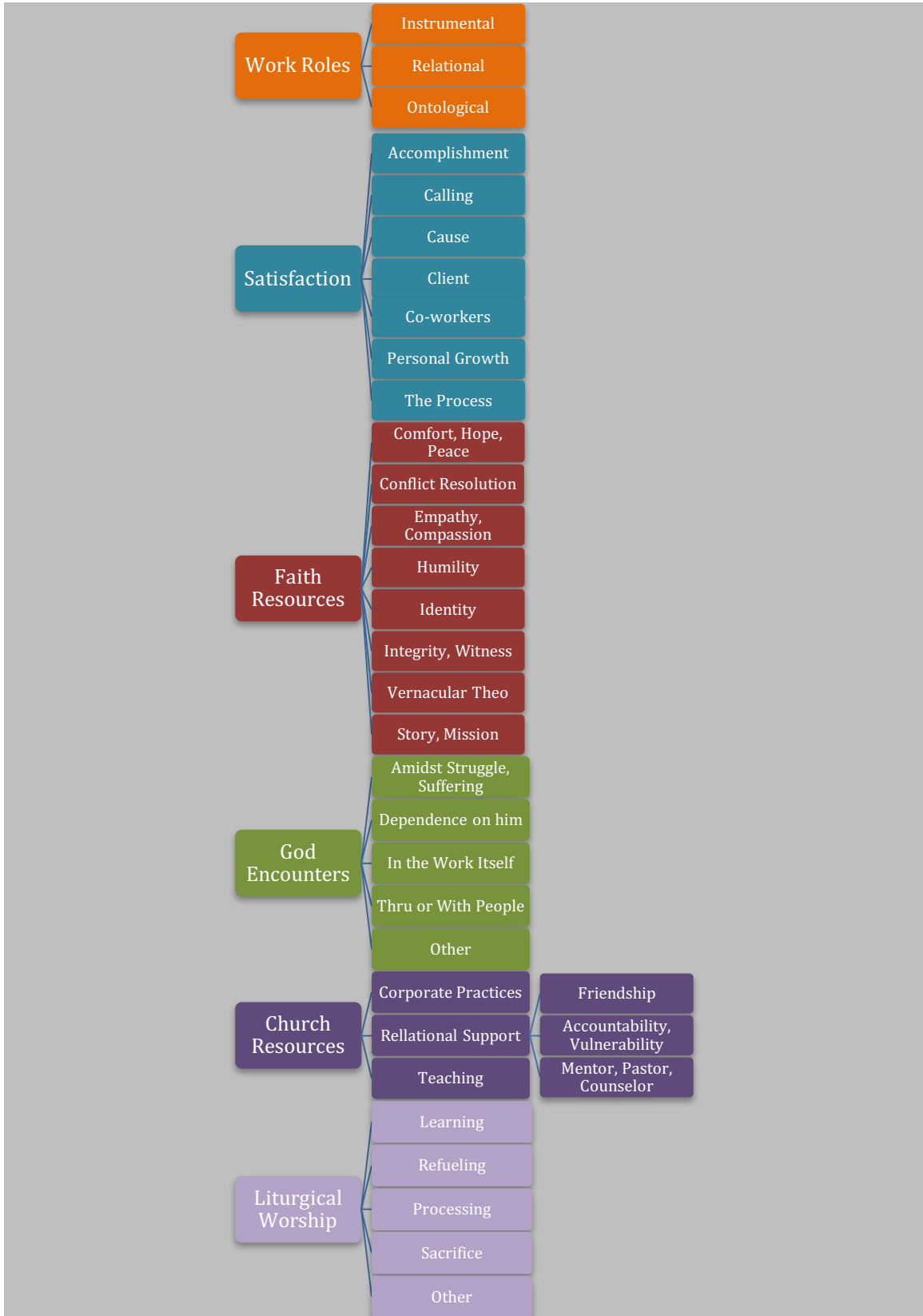


Figure 11: Coding Categories

With the lone exception of *work roles* whose sub-codes remained unchanged throughout the data collection, the sub-coding categories of all other areas were built from the ground up: modifying, expanding or narrowing their definition to more accurately capture the experiences of the responses given by the participants. *Faith Resources* had the most open-ended coding categories. The reason for this is that given my interest in the (vernacular) theologies-in-use I wanted to have flexible categories that were grounded in the language of the participants as much as possible while still making a connection between the experiences of different people. Each coding category was clearly defined so that it could be consistently applied throughout the coding process. The definitions were written in order to provide specificity/clarity or coding accuracy while not being so narrowly prescribed as to prevent relevance across interviews. I worked through each transcript applying the proper coding categories throughout the interview responses.

My Own Biases

The challenges and potential problems in my approach to this qualitative research involve my own biases as a researcher given my personal experiences and training, and the impact of my presence on the participants of the study and the community. The potential problem of bias was especially prominent in my research at Grace Brethren Church of Long Beach given my eleven-year history of attending the church and involvement as a lay elder. I attempted to maintain a “disciplined subjectivity” by keeping my use of “sensitizing concepts” to a minimum and favoring a more grounded theory approach of picking up on

the language and ideas in use among those whom I observed and with whom I interacted.³⁶² I also engaged in the reflexive practice of making explicit the values and preexisting beliefs that influence my thinking about theology and the Christian life and formation. On this matter, the problem statements and hypothesis stated above revealed my assumption that mere worldview approaches to Christian formation through cognitive acquisition of knowledge is necessary but insufficient for holistic discipleship. The corresponding value is that, in addition to clear theological teaching, the Christian community, spiritual practices and pastoral presence are all necessary components to church-based vocational discipleship.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the importance of incorporating tools from social sciences into a theology of work. This is especially important given the belief that God's activity is not limited to Scripture and the believing community but extends to the broader arena of cultural wisdom, beliefs, rituals, and individual consciences. Scripture does not exhaust God's revelation, even though it is the final authority in matters of Christian faith and practice. The confession that God has made himself known through Jesus and the testimony of Scripture through the power of the Holy Spirit should instill humility and expectancy in theologians as they engage in the fieldwork of qualitative research.

For the Christian theologian, the social sciences provide invaluable tools as they attend to the complexities of human experience in order to help Christians discern God's

³⁶² Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions*, 17; Margaret D. LeCompte, "Bias in the Biography: Bias and Subjectivity in Ethnographic Research," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Volume 18, No. 1 (1987), pp. 43-52: 43-44.

active presence in the world. The role of the theologian in this regard is that of a servant who, by taking on the *posture of a learner*, seeks to elucidate the wisdom contained in the vernacular theologies of Christians. Of importance to the theologian is the Holy Spirit's presence in the embodiment of the gospel in the *sensus fidelium*, the everyday faith and discerning experience of God's people.³⁶³ In this process we should not be surprised if we find various beliefs and practices of the believing community critiqued and refined. If the theologian is to be a servant to the discipling efforts of the Church then the dual emphasis on formal and vernacular theologies offers a point of entry into the desired symbiotic relationship between beliefs and practices of the community of faith. In this way the theologian's work also plays a role in enabling and equipping ordinary believers to embody the gospel in their everyday lives as well.

In the next chapter I present an overview of my ethnographic research in three congregations as well as major themes emerging from my analysis.

³⁶³ Richard J. Mouw, *Consulting the Faithful* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 23-25, 54; 82-84; cf. Gordon Preece, "The Threefold Call: A Trinitarian and Reformed Theology of Vocation in Response to Volf's *Work in the Spirit*" (Fuller Theological Seminary Dissertation, 1997), 323.

Chapter 6: Theology from the Road: Congregational Approaches to Vocational Discipleship

“Phoenix front row drive in seat to sunsets saturated with God's imagination
Open armed city of adoption
Including, welcoming any who would plants roots in her soil
Humble Phoenix, the not long known, still choosing, more blank canvas than preliminary
sketch,
Waiting, wanting to be named, and tamed, and cultivated
By her newfound daughters and sons
Waiting for us to speak creation over, and into, and through her
Waiting for us to look at her and proclaim,
‘It is good, it is very good’”
~ Will Vucurevich, an excerpt from: “Poem for where my sons were born.”

“In those moments, too, [when the job comes to fruition], it’s done, you’ve figured it out, it’s a completed thing, I would say in those moments I experienced God a lot, too, but in a different aspect in the sense of a different level of intimacy, because [I experienced] intimacy and contentedness with who I was and how he made me. [I am] really excited to be able to have done that project and done it well... [At these times I think] ‘Wow, you created me this way. You’ve put together such an interesting set of skills.’ It was just a very intimate moment, to [think], ‘This is who you created me to be.’ This is when I feel the most fulfilled.”

~ Interview 1.17

“And all the time those [sad and scary] things were happening, the very fact that I was able to save my sanity by continuing to write among other things a novel called *Godric* made my work blessed and a means of grace at least for me. Nothing I’ve ever written came out of a darker time or brought me more light and comfort.”

~ Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets: A Memoir*

Introduction

I argued in Chapter 4 that the human impulse to make meaning out of life through work derives from the command God gave to humanity to participate in his creation project. In responding to this command, humans seek to become more fully alive as they undertake their work in pursuit of the good life in a world where work is experienced as both toil and joy. Complicating this pursuit is the evolving nature of work given that the organizing center of work has shifted in the move from agricultural to industrial societies, and from industrial to information-centered societies. East of Eden, work is a mixture of humanizing and dehumanizing elements, especially when these tectonic shifts in work organization create social upheavals adversely affecting vulnerable workers (Chapter 2).³⁶⁴ The essential role work plays in human existence means that work is an important part of human well being. As such, theological inquiries into work should endeavor to understand the experiences of contemporary workers in their diverse contexts (Chapter 3).

In this chapter I explore Alistair MacIntyre's claim, "we have not yet fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be,"³⁶⁵ by beginning *at the end*. Starting with the social embodiments of congregations, I then proceeded to analyze the actual appropriation of the religious practices and teachings by Christians in these communities (what I described as

³⁶⁴ Pope Leo XIII, Herman Bavinck and Pope John Paul II all embraced the hermeneutical challenge of attending to Scripture amidst such cultural contexts in order to provide resources for Christian discipleship. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, work continues to be a critical locus for theological reflection.

³⁶⁵ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 2nd Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 23; see also Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 76.

“vernacular theology” in Chapter 5).³⁶⁶ In so doing this research explores the relationship between the “espoused theologies” and theories of formation of these churches and the vernacular theologies-in-use of their congregants.³⁶⁷

This chapter provides an overview of my preliminary research and demographic data of the cities and churches under study, a discussion of the major themes of the qualitative research across all three congregations, and an analysis of the ways these themes were manifested in each of the three congregations.

Preliminary Research: Geographic and Ecological Assessment

Prior to traveling to Tempe, Arizona and San Francisco, California for my research, I gathered demographic data on each city and its people through the U.S. Census Bureau’s website³⁶⁸ (such as gender ratio, age ranges, ethnic diversity, median income, and household size). I used local government websites and news reports to identify any significant changes in the socio-economic landscapes of these cities in terms of suburban sprawl, efforts in urban renewal, or patterns of gentrification. Given my interest in the

³⁶⁶ Instead of writing off individual experiences as simply manifestations of “expressive individualism,” Richard Flory and Donald Miller argue that Post-Boomer spirituality is best categorized as “expressive communalism” in that they desire an embodied spiritual experience set within community that extends beyond private devotion into public engagement in society (Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller, *Finding Faith: The Spiritual Quest of the Post-Boomer Generation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 17-8; vii). They want worship space that is aesthetically rich, participative, and relatively intimate where they can experience community rather than merely being entertained or presented with rational proofs and argumentation (ix). They want to be loved, not merely ‘stimulated’; they are in search of structure for their empty lives (viii). In pursuit of this spirituality they are seeking to recover ritual, giving a central role to the body and experiences, and seeking a community for both belonging and as the context for living out their Christian beliefs (159).

³⁶⁷ I am adapting Chris Argyris’s distinction between an “espoused theory” of action and an actual “theory-in-use.” These terms denote the difference between “the way [people] think they are acting and the way they really act.” Chris Argyris, “Teaching Smart People How to Learn,” *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1991) (5-15), 9.

³⁶⁸ <http://quickfacts.census.gov> (accessed 3/1/15).

subject I used similar websites to find the major sources of employment and any employment trends—areas where new jobs being created as well as unemployment numbers and trends.

	Tempe Population (2013): 168,228³⁶⁹	San Francisco Population (2013): 837,442³⁷⁰	Long Beach Population (2013): 469,428³⁷¹
<i>Average Household Income</i>	Median: \$47,941	Median: \$75,604	Median: \$52,711
<i>Ethnicity Demographics</i>	White 72.6% Hispanic or Latino 21.1% African American 5.9% Asian 5.7% American Indian 2.9% Pacific Islander 0.4%	White 48.5% Asian 33.3% Hispanic or Latino 15.1% African American 6.1% Pacific Islander 0.4% American Indian 0.5%	White 46.1% Hispanic or Latino 40.8% African American 13.5% Asian 12.9% Pacific Islander 1.1% American Indian 0.7%
	Persons below poverty line: 22.2% Home Ownership: 44.3%	Persons below poverty line: 13.5% Home Ownership: 36.6%	Persons below poverty line: 20.2% Home Ownership: 40.9%
<i>Top Employers³⁷²</i>	1. Arizona State University 2. Maricopa Community Colleges 3. SRP (Utilities) 4. Safeway Inc. 5. Wells Fargo Bank 6. Motorola 7. Honeywell 8. Kyrene School District 9. Chase Manhattan Corp. 10. U.S. Airways	1. Kaiser Permanente 2. City of San Francisco 3. U.C. San Francisco 4. University of Berkeley 5. Safeway Inc. 6. State of California 7. Wells Fargo Bank 8. Stanford University 9. U.S. Postal Service 10. Contra Costa County	1. Long Beach Unified School District 2. Long Beach Memorial Medical Center 3. Boeing 4. City of Long Beach 5. CSU Long Beach 6. Veterans Affairs Medical Center 7. Long Beach City College 8. CSU Long Beach Foundation 9. St. Mary’s Medical Center 10. Molina Health Care

Table 1: Demographic Information of Cities

³⁶⁹ U.S. Census Bureau website: <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (accessed 5/5/15).

³⁷⁰ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0667000.html>.

³⁷¹ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0643000.html>.

³⁷² “Tempe’s Top Employers” available at <http://www.tempe.gov/home/showdocument?id=8955> (accessed 5/5/15); “Largest Employers in San Francisco Bay Area” available at: <http://sfced.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Largest-Employers-20141.pdf> (accessed 5/5/15);

Surveys and Interviews

From March to August 2014 I engaged in participant observation in three congregations, administered online surveys and conducted face-to-face interviews with 77 congregants (Redemption Church Tempe, 27; City Church San Francisco, 23; Grace Brethren Church of Long Beach, 27). Working in concert with gatekeepers in each church we attempted to identify a representative pool of interview participants *that reflected the congregation’s diversity* in terms of gender, age, vocational area, socio-economic status and ethnicity. The demographic information of these interview participants is shown in **Figures 1-9**.

	Tempe	San Francisco	Long Beach
Age Range	22-60	26-63	24-72
Avg. Age	31.8	36.7	42.4
Income Range	<\$25,000 – \$124,999	\$40,000 - \$150,000+	<\$25,000 - \$150,000+
Gender	Male: 15 Female: 12	Male: 12 Female: 11	Male: 15 Female: 12
Marital Status	Single: 9 Married: 17 Divorced: 1	Single: 16 Married: 6 Divorced: 1	Single: 5 Married: 22 Divorced: 0

Figure 1: Demographic Overview of Participants

The pre-interview online survey consisted of 30 multiple choice and short answer questions enabling a basic assessment of each subject’s demographic information (e.g. age, education, marital status, household size and income, and ethnic heritage), work history and contexts, experiences of work satisfaction and frustration, prayer frequency concerning work, length of time and frequency of involvement in the church community, and perceived strengths and values of the congregation. The pre-interview survey streamlined much of the demographic data gathering of each participant and gave an initial sense of potential fruitful topics of inquiry in the face-to-face interview.

The average face-to-face interview lasted one hour and was conducted most often in public spaces (coffee shops, restaurants), occasionally in a church office, and in a few cases, in the participant's place of employment or home. Interviews drew on information taken from the online survey and covered three areas: experiences of work, spirituality and encounters with God at work, and involvement in the church community (see **Appendix B** for the interview schedule and complete list of interview questions). The data gathered through the surveys and interviews gave in-depth accounts of a sample of the experiences of work and church of members in each congregation.

I had countless conversations and formal interviews with many church leaders in each congregation. The focus of these interactions was to better understand the explicit theological and pedagogical frameworks, resources, and ideologies underlying the teaching and discipleship efforts of the congregation as well as to test initial insights derived from the interviews and my own observations. These conversations were helpful in juxtaposing the theologies-in-use observed in Sunday services and in congregant interviews with the espoused theories communicated in sermons and discipleship materials. These conversations also helped me identify new groups, people, or gatherings I needed to study.

In order to gain a general sense of the participant's experiences of work satisfaction and the role that it plays in their life, three vignettes were borrowed from Martin Seligman's "Work-Life Questionnaire" that measures satisfaction both in work and life in general.³⁷³ I created three similar vignettes to gain a sense of the participants' experience of corporate worship. These vignettes proved to be invaluable tools in gaining access to the participants'

³⁷³ This questionnaire can be found at the *Authentic Happiness* website: <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/home> (accessed: 2/26/15).

stories of work and worship (see **Appendix A** for a list of the online survey questions including these work and worship vignettes).

Gender: In each of the three congregations I interviewed a slightly larger representation of men than women. While I sought out to secure a representative pool of potential interviewees I had to rely heavily on my pastoral contacts in each church. With the exception of one pastor, all male. This along with the reality that I myself am a male and was unknown to all of the participants in Tempe and San Francisco could have hindered my ability to secure a more balanced sample of women in my research.

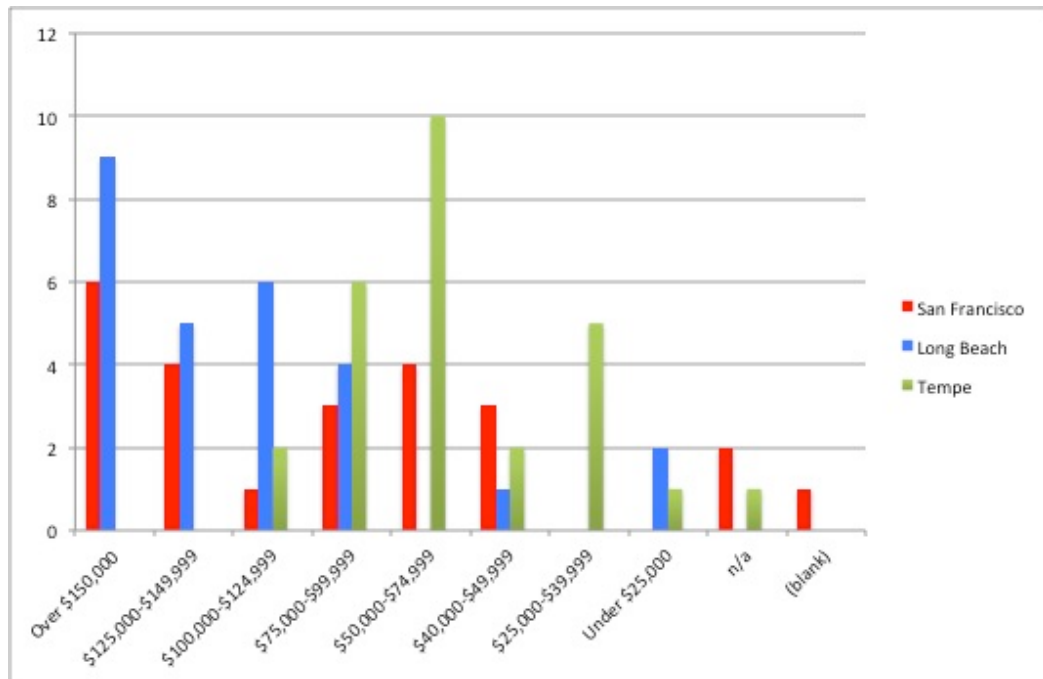


Figure 3: Income Range of Participants

Household Income: the median income in San Francisco, Tempe and Long Beach in 2014 was \$75,604, \$47,491 and \$52,711 respectively. In San Francisco, 14 participants reported household incomes at or above the median income. 7 participants were below the median household income and 3 participants chose not to respond to this question. 18

participants in Tempe reported household incomes above the median income, and 2 participants reported income at or just below the median income in that area. 6 participants reported income below the median income and one person chose not to report. In Long Beach 24 participants reported household incomes well above the median income, while 3 participants reported incomes below the median income in that area.

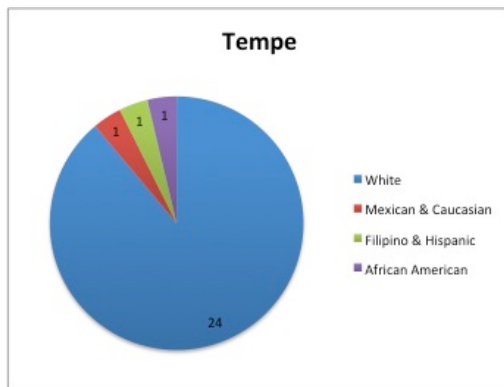


Figure 4: Ethnicity of Tempe Participants

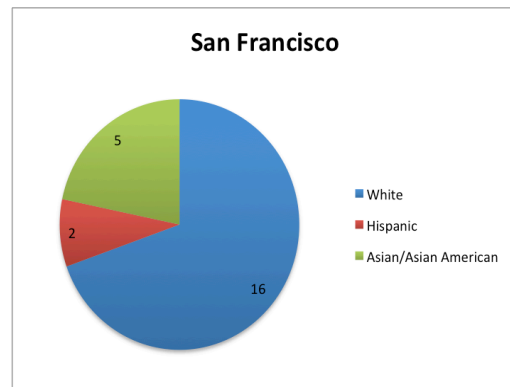


Figure 5: Ethnicity of San Francisco Participants

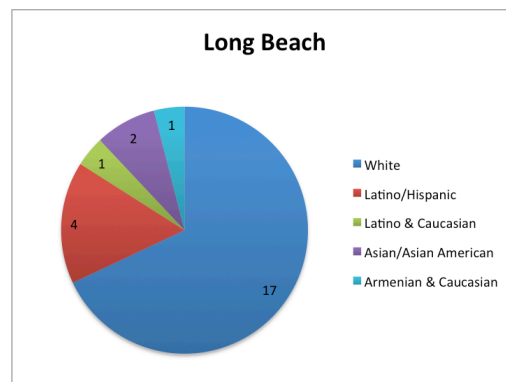


Figure 6: Ethnicity of Long Beach Participants

Ethnicity: Ethnographic research focuses on the dynamics within a particular context during a specific period of time. In this study the breadth and type of diversity under study is limited to the makeup of the particular congregations. Ethnically, all three congregations have majority white Caucasian members. In the on-line survey participants were asked to self-describe their ethnic background. (This was to circumvent the alienating experience of having to fit into predetermined categories or labeling oneself an “other”).

In terms of participants in this research, 89% of Redemption Tempe participants were White/Caucasian, 4% Mexican-White, 4% Filipino-Mexican, and 4% African American. Participants from City Church San Francisco were 67% White/Caucasian, 21% Asian/Asian American and 8% Hispanic. The ethnic backgrounds of participants from Grace Brethren was 63% White/Caucasian, Latino/Hispanic 15%, 7% Asian/Asian American, 4% Latino-Caucasian, and 4% Armenian-Caucasian.

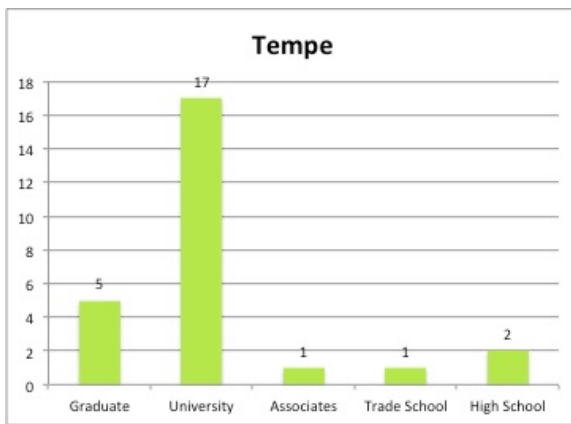


Figure 7: Education of Tempe Participants

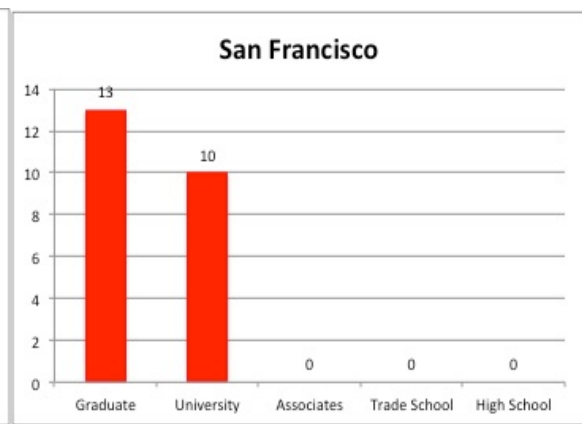


Figure 8: Education of San Francisco Participants

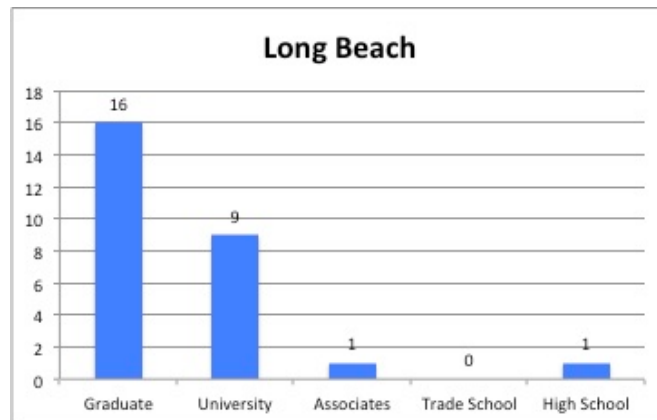


Figure 9: Education of Long Beach Participants

Education: The average educational level of participants was relatively high (University degree) across all three congregations. This educational level most likely has some correlation with the middle to upper class socio-economic status of the participants discussed above. City Church and Grace Brethren had high numbers of participants with

graduate degrees. Only six participants in this study had something other than a graduate or university degree.

Tempe		San Francisco		Long Beach	
Finance	4	Attorney	4	Education	5
Graphic Design	3	Finance	3	Healthcare	4
Social Worker	3	Technology	3	Attorney	2
Exec. Assistant (2 Parents & part time workers)	3	Architecture & Design	2	Accounting (1 retired)	2
Parent	1	Marketing	2	Social Work (1 Parent & part time worker)	2
Artist (bi-vocational)	2	Social Enterprise	2	Tech Sales	1
Teacher	2	Web Design	1	Human Resources	1
Construction	2	Medical	1	Business Owner	1
Accounting	1	Engineer	1	Social Enterprise	1
Hairdresser	1	Business Consultant	1	Coffee Shop Manager	1
Nanny	1	Energy	1	Storage Manager	1
Chef/Restaurateur	1	Parent & Real Estate	1	Parent/Interior Design	1
Marketing	1	Unemployed	1	Engineer	1
Missionary	1			Advertising	1
				Apprentice	1
				Barber	1
				Unemployed	1

Figure 10: Vocation Areas of Participants by Congregation

Vocation Areas: The largest work sectors represented by participants at Redemption Tempe were finance, graphic design, social work and administrative assistant. Financial institutions are among the largest employers in the Phoenix area and in this is reflected in the finance and accounting workers who participated in this research. There was a significant representation of “creative” types such as graphic designers and artists. Redemption Tempe has gone out of its way to encouraged artists in their congregation, hosting creative nights and installing an art gallery in the church lobby. Participants from City Church represent a variety of fields, law, finance and technology being the largest. All of the participants held what are commonly considered “white-collar” jobs. The participants from Long Beach reflected the major employers in the city: education and healthcare.

Summary of Major Themes of Qualitative Research

Using grounded theory principles, the data from the surveys and interviews were coded using categories that correspond to my central research questions and consist of a mix of “sensitizing” and “indigenous” concepts.³⁷⁴ The coded interviews were then analyzed and the results synthesized into three major themes arising from participants’ accounts of work and church. These themes fell into three areas: work roles and satisfaction, God encounters and spirituality, and approaches to liturgical worship in light of work experiences. The following is a story of two people’s experiences of work and church that illustrate three of the major findings of this qualitative research.

Three Themes: Work Roles, God Encounters, and Liturgy: The Stories of Dale and Dana.

(*Note:* Unless otherwise noted, the names, vocations and demographic details of all participants have been altered in order to protect their confidentiality). Dale is a 34-year-old white male who works as a gardener making enough to provide for the basic needs of his family of five. He has been attending church for eight years and met his wife at a summer event there. He is tan from long hours in the sun and sports a handlebar mustache. He came straight from work and I can smell the fresh coat of Old Spice deodorant masking his sweat. Dale is very reflective, a philosopher living a life of manual labor. When he formulates his thoughts he pauses and looks down at his hands. He brought along a plastic jug of water and every time he takes a drink he wipes his mustache.

³⁷⁴ The six coding areas are: 1. Work roles, 2. Sources of work satisfaction, 3. Resources of the faith, 4. Encounters with God, 5. Resources of the church community, and 6. Corporate liturgical worship. The “sensitizing” and “indigenous” concept distinctions are from Justin G. Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions: The PostSuburban Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 17; Lofland et al, *Analyzing Social Settings*, 23.

Work for Dale is a way of paying down debt and surviving. His narrow vocational experience and lack of education leaves him with few employment options. He has dreams of opening his own restaurant but for the time being he feels stuck in his current job. The satisfaction he derives from his work comes from helping people who can't do this type of work themselves. It is their thankfulness, he says, which is what is most satisfying to him. He also enjoys the problem solving aspects of his job and believes these skills will be useful to him when he is running a restaurant.

Near the end of the interview he opened up about his long endeavor of trying to make the police force. He tried out every year for seven years but failed every time. I can sense the sadness that this has left in his life, though he effectively covers the wound. Gardening was supposed to be a temporary gig that has become his employment for the past eight years. He lives with a kind of "future-tense" hope of finally getting enough money set aside to start his restaurant, the new dream that has replaced his ambition to become a cop.

Dale says that his Christian faith helps him trust that God will provide for his wife and three children. For him this trust is the root of contentment that holds him back from cutting corners by padding the time he bills his clients.

Not surprisingly, given Dale's philosophical bent, it is the teaching and preaching of the church that are what he values about corporate worship. What I found interesting is that the teaching was hardly mentioned when it came to those moments when he was dealing with his hardships at work. The role that Sunday worship played in those moments had more to do with encountering God amidst his vocational struggles. During the repeated work disappointments, he found the music on Sundays helpful to him and to his connecting

with God. The songs that were “Jesus-focused” helped reorient him to truth and not be self-focused. It was there amidst the songs of worship that he laid before God his desire to be a cop and then the repeated disappointments of being turned down for the academy.³⁷⁵

Dana is a single Hispanic female in her late 30’s. She works as a nurse supervisor at a local hospital making a comfortable upper-middle class salary. Dana stands about 5’8,” has long black hair pulled back into a ponytail, leather-topped clogs with fitness socks, dark fitted jeans, and a purple North Face long sleeve shirt. She is a former aspiring actress who almost got her degree in theater until she felt called to be a nurse after she came to Christ in a fundamentalist Bible church.

At first her responses are measured and she waits for me to finish posing the question before responding. Her comments are succinct and there does not seem to be much of “her” in what she says. In the course of the interview I sensed her settling in as she offered more information often expanding on her previous comments.

Work plays a central role in Dana’s life, but only because of the immense amount of time she spends there and the intense nature of her work. In spite of the obvious value of her work as a nurse she does not love what she does. Originally she entered into the field because in her fundamentalist upbringing the next highest goal for a woman besides motherhood becoming a missionary was nursing. She remembers being on a mission trip and distinctly feeling God call her to give up theater and become a nurse. She was never drawn to nursing and throughout her schooling she found little joy in it.

A few years back she moved out West and found a new church community. It was here that she began to raise questions like, “who is God?” and “who am I really?” Her new

³⁷⁵ Interview Transcript 1.21.

community had a less restrictive view of women and vocations and she experienced a newfound freedom to serve and glorify God in many different occupations. But this liberation has been accompanied by disorientation as she looks back to the time when she felt God called her to nursing while on that mission trip. Now she wonders what happened, “the calling was there but now it is absent. Have I been faithful to God? Did I hear God correctly? What do I do now?” She commented that hearing people in her community talk about how they serve God in their particular vocational contexts makes her realize what she has missed: “I had pigeon holed my career choices.” Not surprisingly, the concept of “calling” is a loaded term with many emotional triggers for her.

What gives her strength and inspiration to do her difficult work? Her faith in Jesus provides sources of strength and peace that transcend the moment. Before her shift she will often write down a few lines from a psalm, like Psalm 23 for example, and put it in her pocket at work. “I may not even read what I wrote [during my shift],” she explained, but because the psalms deal with “suffering and that shittiness [sic] of life that paper is a reminder that encourages me.”

Dana knows that God cares about her work and that it has inherent value. And she senses God’s presence in what she does. For example, she sees God at the bedside of the suffering and dying. She even sees her work as “being the hands and feet of God.”

She recounted a story of bathing a prostitute “covered in shit, lice and scabies.” Five hours after being discharged the woman returned and Dana had to administer the same care all over again. Yet knowing that God values her work doesn’t alleviate her angst over her calling, even if it does impact her spiritual growth. When asked about how her job has

impacted her prayers, she says that it has made her want a community that can face the “shitty” realities of life without sweeping them under the rug.

The desire for a safe community is very important to her. Dana recounted a painful story of when a child had died on her shift and in the absence of a doctor she had to pronounce the child dead. Coming into corporate worship that next Sunday, the liturgy provided a safe space for her to grieve. “I didn’t have to be that strong... for other people,” she explains. In worship “I could grieve, let go, and I didn’t have to save face for other people. I [was able to] just experience what I need to experience and process this.”³⁷⁶

Dana has a considerable amount of job mobility, but the financial security and years invested in this career hold her back from making a career “jump” at the moment. Underlying this tension is the existential struggle to trust God and specifically his leading in her life. What was surprising to me is that success, money and the obvious social good of her job have not been vocationally fulfilling for Dana. What is missing for her is a connectedness to her own desires and use of her gifts and passions in a way that fits her. Spiritually and theologically she is feels stuck trying to ascertain what happened on that mission trip years ago when she felt “called” by God to give up her dreams and to pursue nursing. More importantly she struggles with how she can trust God’s leading and her proper discernment of his presence as she thinks about her future.

Dana has many vocational options, whereas Dale has very few. Dale is more aware of his dreams (even if they are more idealistic), whereas Dana has a lucrative trade and is financially secure. Yet like Dale, Dana also longs for more. For her the issue of *calling* is

³⁷⁶ Interview Transcript 2.03.

front and center. She now knows that there are many more vocational options for women than she previously thought, and she genuinely wants to have that certainty of calling. But I wondered as I listened to her, is it joy in work that she's after, too?

Dale and Dana's stories are by no means typical of my interviews for each person's vocational journey is unique. Yet I chose their stories because they illustrate three reoccurring themes in this research: 1. Work roles and satisfaction are embedded in a larger story of a person's pursuit of the good life, 2. Spirituality for daily work is bound up with experiences of God's presence (or lack thereof), and 3. Approaches to relating liturgical worship to daily work hold formative influence for cultivating an integrated Christian theology with spirituality. While a person's work on the one hand often feels very ordinary and often unglamorous, it is nonetheless often deeply personal and inextricably bound up with bearing God's image in daily life (Chapter 5). After all, work is the source of some of the deepest human ambitions and anxieties. At critical moments, Dale could not help but carry his deep desires and crushing disappointments from work into Sunday worship. Along with this personal nature of work is the experience of God's presence or hiddenness in and through human work. Dana's disorientation over her calling cannot be understood apart from her overall view of God and how she experiences his presence in her life.

Dale and Dana's stories serve as vivid illustrations of the struggles to find God's presence amidst non-"dream" jobs. In both cases Dana and Dale exhibit creative vernacular theologies that draw on the teaching and practices of their respective communities. Dana draws strength from the earthy and raw spirituality of the Psalms, while Dale finds concrete hope in God's character to help him maintain an ethical practice instead of cutting corners.

For both of them, the space provided by corporate worship provides an essential tool of spiritual formation and discipleship.

Theme 1: Work Role and Satisfaction

Work is deeply human and is fundamental to how we bear God's image in the world. And yet there is a diversity of ways that work can function in a person's life and the satisfaction derived from these activities (Chapter 5). By *first identifying* the role that work plays in a person's pursuit of good life I was able to move the research from the realm of abstraction and situate it in concrete life stories. It is here I found God to be at work amidst the hardships encountered on the job, just as he is at work giving life in big and small ways allowing people to provide for their family, contribute to the well-being of their community, and sometimes even enable their own personal growth. I used the typology of instrumental, relational, and ontological as a heuristic tool for interpreting the stories and diverse experiences of a variety of participants. (*Instrumental*: work is a means to an end; *Relational*: work is a means of developing relationships or for the benefiting of relationships; *Ontological*: work is a fundamental part of a person's experience of being human). This interpretive tool sensitized me to the role/s that work plays in a person's life. For example, work plays largely an instrumental role for both Dale and Dana even though they are in two different socio-economic brackets. Likewise, both have jobs that are not well suited to their interests and gifts and yet they have found degrees of work satisfaction through relationships at work. Dana has found creative ways of identifying God's presence in her work. In seeking to understand the processes by which work becomes life-giving for a person, this sensitizing framework sets the topic of work within larger life pursuits of seeking joy and encountering suffering.

Beginning with the particular role/s that work plays in Dale and Dana's lives allowed *them* to inform me about their specific needs and struggles in light of their experiences of faith and work. This approach also held back the tendency for me as a researcher to impose value and meaning onto them, and instead learn from their vernacular theology and how they embody their faith in their work contexts. Combining questions regarding work roles with satisfaction provided a deeper analysis of the experience of work and the function that a person's faith plays in how they undertake their work. For example, Dale *desires* his occupation to play a central part in his life but his current job is viewed more as temporary means to another career. Dana's experiences of satisfaction in her job shed light on the ways in which her faith helps her experience God and approach her work as a Christian.

When I analyzed work roles and sources of satisfaction in the 77 interviews, specific patterns emerged that I describe here using three tropes. These tropes build upon and expand on the instrumental-relational-ontological framework above and offer greater specificity.

- *Trope 1: Channeling (finding) God Amidst the Struggle. "My job is a place where I encounter adversity, tension and struggle to find satisfaction and God's presence."*³⁷⁷
- *Trope 2: Personal Growth and Ontology. "My job is one of the most central ways in which I grow as a person, a place where I discover important aspects of who*

³⁷⁷ The three areas of struggle relate to the following issues: 1. Should I Stay or Should I Go? (Interview transcripts: 1.04, 1.14, 1.21, 2.02, 2.03, 2.04, 2.05, 2.12, 2.17, 2.22, 2.21, 2.23, 3.01, 3.02, 3.1, 3.26); 2. Family Ties & Competing Commitments (Interview transcripts: 3.09, 2.17, 3.25, 3.05, 1.22, 2.15, 3.2, 2.05, 1.07, 1.15, 1.23, 3.19; 3.09 & 2.17); and 3. Job Loss and Relational Adversity. (Interview transcripts: 2.14, 3.01, 3.1).

*God has created me to be, or the context where I employ my God-given gifts to bless others and pursue positive change.*³⁷⁸

- *Trope 3: Job as Avocation, or finding the “More to life” beyond my job. “My work occupies a very limited role in defining who I am and the satisfaction I hope to experience in life.”*

The first trope illustrates the hardships and tensions of work experienced by many people like Dale and Dana who struggle to connect with God in their work. The second trope attempts to capture the experiences of those for whom work is integral to their experience of satisfaction and meaning. The final trope describes the limitations that some set on the role that work plays in their life. What will be argued at the end of this chapter is that developing a theology of work faithful to Scripture and the culturally embedded needs of a person requires attention to the way in which work is situated in the overall story of a person’s life and desires.

Theme 2: God Encounters & Spirituality

The analysis of John Stott’s theology of the *missio Dei* in Chapter 4 highlighted the importance of the biblical themes of creation and redemption and their connection to our view of God’s active presence in the world. I argued that a theology of Christian witness will be myopic if it begins with Genesis 12 and John 20:21 apart from the rich creation theology of the bible. The implications of this view of the *missio Dei* for Christian discipleship in general and vocational work in particular is that it holds together God’s

³⁷⁸ Interview transcripts: 1.01, 1.03, 1.04, 1.05, 1.06, 1.07, 1.08, 1.12, 1.13, 1.16, 1.17, 1.18, 1.2, 1.23, 1.24, 1.25, 1.27, 2.01, 2.06, 2.08, 2.09, 2.14, 2.16, 2.18, 2.2, 2.23, 2.24, 3.02, 3.03, 3.04, 3.05, 3.06, 3.07, 3.08, 3.1, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15, 3.16, 3.17, 3.18, 3.19, 3.2, 3.21, 3.22, 3.23, 3.25. The sub-themes in this trope are: 1. Passion, Gifts and Growth; 2. Influence to Enact a Vision; and 3. Future Tense.

desires for cultivating creation as well as bringing healing to it. The Spirit of God is active outside the church and reflection on experiences of vocational work provides insights into knowledge of God, self and others that are important for discipleship. This speaks to the shortcoming of Volf, Hardy and Schuurman's approach to work and vocation that leads to theological formulations abstracted from the lived experience of workers (see Chapter 3).

The interviews yielded rich accounts of experiencing God's presence through work relationships as important parts of Christian witness. These illuminate the ways in which God is active pursuing his redeeming purposes through Christians in their work. In analyzing the interviews I noticed reoccurring themes in the accounts of how God's presence is experienced in work. Across all congregations the most common reported area of God's presence was in relationships with either *clients* (any recipient of services: customers, students, children) and/or *co-workers*. A second common area in which God is encountered is *in or through the work itself*. Finally, a significant number of people by saying either a *no* or that they were *unsure* indicating varying degrees of ambivalence about encountering God's presence in their work. Each of these three areas will be discussed in turn.

- *Through or With People*: 49% of participants reported encountering God through their engagement with people. Given the evangelical population I studied I was not surprised to find a highly relational component to the ways people described encountering God's presence in their work. What *was* surprising, however, was that witnessing to others (whether in evangelism or through Christian character/virtues)

was only *one of a variety of ways* in which God's presence was encountered.³⁷⁹ In many of the interviews in which people spoke of their witness providing occasions of encountering God, there was a shared sense of God's active work going on around them in the lives of other people. Some interpreted their witness as "sowing seeds of the gospel" that may bear evangelistic fruit at a later time, while others spoke of their witness as being faithful to God's calling to "enter into the broken lives of others." A common element in both types of responses was that *in the midst of bearing witness to others*, God's presence was clearly felt.

- *In/Through the Work Itself*: God encounters at work are not limited to interactions with other people. For quite a few people, an experience of God's presence comes in or through the process of doing the work itself (34% of respondents). There was a close connection between God's presence and the deeper knowing of the self that comes through engaging in work. For example, I interviewed a woman who sees her job as just a step in the journey to a more established career she hopes to have one day. Yet this temporary role this job plays in her life does not preclude her from experiencing moments when satisfaction in work is accompanied by deep intimacy with God. In her words, "[I]n those moments [when the job was completed] I experienced God a lot... [I had a] sense of a different level of intimacy [with him] and contentedness with who I was and how he made me."³⁸⁰
- *No or Unsure*: One of themes that emerged early in my interviews was the

³⁷⁹ These responses tended to fall within three categories: 1) God's work observed in the growth or change of another person, 2) God's character was revealed through the actions of others, and 3) God's presence was felt in Christian witness to non-believers.

³⁸⁰ Interview transcript 1.17.

frequency with which respondents either said that they did *not encounter God* in their work or *were unable to give specific examples* of such experiences (26% of respondents). Out of the 77 interviews, only one person made explicit their perceived dichotomy between ministry and non-church work, “I’ve never been in ministry... [and that I] never engage in anything religious or spiritual in my work.”³⁸¹ For most people their response to whether they experience God or his presence in/through their work was more along these lines: “I would have to say yes, but I’m hard-pressed to give an example of it... I’m not ... a touchy-feely person, so maybe my relationship in that respect is a little bit more intellectual than emotional.”³⁸² The ambiguity captured in responses like this point to a common experience of cognitive dissonance and the challenges of experiencing God in our daily work. It also reflects the common theme that many people struggled to give concrete examples of how they encounter God in or through their work. The tendency to offer theological explanations to this question rather than specific examples points to a theme of “obligatory,” “embarrassed” or even an “aspirational” response to the question of encountering God.³⁸³ It became apparent that many people had a “theology” of God’s presence in the world but could not give an account of experiences of encountering/discerning this presence.

The issue of experiencing God’s presence in work is an important part of work satisfaction that manifests itself in diverse ways according to personality, need and context.

³⁸¹ Interview transcript 1.11.

³⁸² Interview transcript 3.13; cf. Interview transcript 1.14.

³⁸³ In other words, some respondents felt they should respond positively to the question even if this did not capture their regular experience of work.

In my interactions with people in the three churches I found a common need for cultivating a spirituality attuned to God's presence in and around them. It may be that this spirituality will offer language that opens up dimensions of human experience which are present but only vaguely sensed by many Christians in their work. At the end of an interview one man reconsidered his earlier response about encountering God and said, "Maybe I do feel God's presence [in my work]—maybe I just don't have the right vocabulary for it."³⁸⁴ Work consistently provides opportunities to learn more about God, ourselves, others, and the world. For this reason, Christians need theological and spiritual resources to bring each aspect of their lives before God and to endeavor to understand his leading and activity in each domain of life.³⁸⁵

Theme 3: (Liturgical) Worship and Work

A third theme is that one of the characteristics of those who had a more integrated spirituality for daily work is that there was intentionality about bringing their work experiences from the week into corporate worship. Three vignettes describing different approaches to liturgical worship in light of work experiences were included in the pre-interview survey. (The full vignettes are included in **Appendix B**).

³⁸⁴ Interview transcript 3.27.

³⁸⁵ The spiritual attunement of these Christians to God's presence evidences a maturation that is desired among more people. Having a theology that says that God is active in the world is good but the ability to discern the Spirit's presence is to be far more valued! A theology of common grace and dynamic understanding of revelation can be beneficial theological concepts to these Christians as they seek to evaluate/test particular experiences in light of God's purposes. The Reformed doctrine of common grace is a way of upholding God's multiple purposes and activity outside of the church. (http://www.crcna.org/pages/positions_common_grace.cfm (accessed 5/15/15); see also Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines In All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 9-10.

For some people there is a sharp distinction between Sunday worship and work on the other six days of the week. This is often played out on a weekly basis as people attempt to “leave their cares at the door of the church” and try to focus on God and receive instruction from his Word (Those with this practice of worship were identified as *Leavers* and are described in vignette 1 in **Appendix B**). And yet there were some surprises in my research as well. Quite a few people reported in the online survey that they resonated “very much” or “somewhat” with the two liturgical worship vignettes describing a more dynamic interplay between liturgical worship and experiences of the workweek.³⁸⁶

In the course of conducting interviews I discovered a further clarification that needed to be made. Many participants who resonated more with the more integrated approaches to liturgical worship on the survey explained in their interviews that their responses were more “aspirational” than actual. In other words, when they read the various scenarios, there was something that resonated with what they thought worship *should* be, but their *actual experience* of inhabiting corporate worship did not necessarily reflect this type of worship. For this reason it was necessary to read through the transcripts with special attention to the descriptions of approaches to liturgical worship in light of work experiences. I offer a typology for describing various postures taken in liturgical worship below based upon coding of individual interviews.

- *Leavers* readily leave their work behind and focus on God in worship.

³⁸⁶ These two groups were labeled *Occasionals* who occasionally bring work matters into the liturgy in times of duress (vignette 2), and *Sacrificers* who actively bring the joys, sorrows and worries of work into the practice of liturgy (vignette 3). Results of coded interviews on approaches to liturgical worship: *All* 7%, *Sacrificer* 50%, *Occasional/Sacrificer* 10%, *Occasional* 15%, *Leaver/Occasional* 5%, *Leaver* 6%, *Null* 7%.

- *Learners* view worship primarily as a time to acquire new truths about God and the Bible.
- *Intercessors* use the space and time in worship to pray for those with whom they interact at work.
- *Processors* reflect on the emotions and stresses of work during worship.
- *Re-centerers* find the rest they need to re-center their life on God and receive from him in worship as he re-sends them back into their particular work contexts.
- *Sacrificers* exhibit a conscious synthesis of many of the characteristics of the other types in their practices of corporate worship.

Analyzing these types revealed distinct characteristics of those in search of a spirituality to sustain them through the joys and stresses of work and to offer their work to God as an act of worship. There is a strong relationship between a person's approach to liturgical worship and their experience of God's presence in work.³⁸⁷ There are a lot of reasons why a person's approach to worship might be more of an influencing factor in helping Christians experience God's presence in their work—particularly when offering the joys and pains of work as a sacrifice is a part of their practice of worship.³⁸⁸ What is clear, however, is that liturgical worship can be a profound Christian practice that fosters a holistic spirituality as people are given practices of bringing all parts of their life before

³⁸⁷ Those with some form of *Sacrificer* element in their approach to liturgical worship on average report that they encounter God in or thru their work an average of 1.56 ways (range 0-3). The averages for *Occasionals* was 0.95, *Occasionals-Leavers* 0.7, *Leavers* 0.7, and *Nulls* 0.6.

³⁸⁸ Typologies are heuristic tools that are useful for describing the basic characteristics of a particular demographic or phenomena, in this case experiences of work in corporate worship. Most people fall into more than one type, although often one type seems to be more dominant in their routine practices of worship.

God in worship. As James K.A. Smith clearly articulates it, “If all of life is going to be worship, the sanctuary is the place where we learn how.”³⁸⁹

In the next section I will use three case studies of congregations that show how the themes of work roles and satisfaction, God encounters in work, and approaches to liturgical worship were manifested in the three congregations. First, I will discuss the approach to vocational discipleship in each church and then explore how this discipleship is appropriated in the lives of the parishioners I interviewed.

Three Case Studies of Congregations

Case Study 1: REDEMPTION CHURCH TEMPE

Geographic Context, Church History and Culture

Geographical Context: Tempe is part of the larger Phoenix Metropolitan area and its sprawling suburbs that stretch for miles under the hot Arizona sun. The population of Tempe is 161,719, a small but important part of the surrounding Phoenix Metropolis population of 4,192,887.³⁹⁰ The original inhabitants of the area were Hohokam Indians who dug elaborate irrigation canals for watering their crops. In the 1860s, Hispanic settlers began to settle in the area, followed by American settlers on the heels of the establishment of Fort McDowell in 1865.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ James K. A. Smith, “Sanctification for Ordinary Life,” *Reformed Worship* 103: 19.

³⁹⁰ U.S. Census data: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/04/0473000.html> (accessed 6/10/15); Mike Sunnucks, “Census: Phoenix-area population tops 4.3 million, moves up metro rankings,” *BizJournals.com*, March 14, 2013. <http://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/news/2013/03/14/census-phoenix-area-population-tops.html> (accessed 6/10/15).

³⁹¹ Dean Smith, *Tempe: Arizona Crossroads* (Chatsworth: Windsor Publications, 1990), 8-21; Santos C. Vega, *Images of America: Mexicans in Tempe* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 11-15.

Entrepreneurship and education have played important parts in Tempe's history and story. The harsh desert environment has rewarded entrepreneurs who can find ways of helping the community survive and thrive. This has attracted and cultivated an entrepreneurial and pragmatist spirit among its residents and business environment. Chief among the needs for survival are water and energy. Water was the first engineering challenge that laid the foundation for the founding of Tempe (Salt River Valley) and has featured prominently in stage of the city's growth. Solar energy is the second engineering feat that provided the infrastructure to support the largest population boom that occurred after World War II with the invention of air conditioning (121,828 in 1940 to 4,192,887 in 2010).³⁹² Education has featured prominently in Tempe's history in particular. Tempe is home to Arizona State University (ASU) with its 82,000 students. In 1885, a small teaching college was established (Territorial Normal School which in 1958 became ASU) and has been the center for higher educational training for Arizona ever since.³⁹³

Church History: The entrepreneurial spirit of Phoenix is reflected in the history of Redemption Church as well. In January of 2011, three healthy independent churches (three congregations: East Valley Bible, Praxis and Second Mile) united to become Redemption Church.³⁹⁴ Sharing doctrinal convictions and a vision for what God might do through them in Arizona, they believed that they could be better together. The unified structure forged a

³⁹² Tyler Falk, "Cities that Wouldn't Exist Without Air Conditioning," City Lab from *The Atlantic*, <http://www.citylab.com/work/2012/06/cities-might-not-exist-without-air-conditioning/2399/> (accessed 6.10.15); Mark E. Pry, *Oasis in the Valley: The Story of Water in Tempe* (Tempe Historical Museum, 2007).

³⁹³ "The History of ASU and Founders' Day," <https://alumni.asu.edu/events/founders-day/history> (accessed 6/10/15).

³⁹⁴ "2 Healthy Churches Merge for Bigger Impact in Arizona," Audrey Barrick, *The Christian Post*, November 29, 2010 (<http://www.christianpost.com/news/2-healthy-churches-merge-for-bigger-impact-in-ariz-47837/>, accessed 6/1/15).

bond that was more intimate than simply a network association. These churches had already been collaborating in various ways but now began to bear each other's burdens. Redemption Church now includes ten congregations in ten cities which share strategic centralized resources that enable for local contextualization of the church's mission and values.³⁹⁵

Redemption Tempe congregation (formerly Praxis Church) had its inception in 2004 in the living room of Tim and Jody Anderson, the parents of founding pastor Justin Anderson. The church grew rapidly in the first eight years. Justin had previously been a youth leader at a church called the Rock in San Diego and drew on these experiences in reaching a younger generation of artists, hipsters and college students in the Tempe area. In 2011 Riccardo Stewart moved from Redemption Gilbert and joined the pastoral staff of Redemption Tempe. Ten months later he became Tempe's lead pastor when Justin left to start a church plant in San Francisco. Shortly afterwards Jim Mullins, a former missionary working in community outreach in the Redemption Gilbert office, joined Riccardo and the Redemption Tempe team as pastor of community and global initiatives. Currently, Redemption Tempe has a weekly attendance of approximately 1100 people.

Mission & Culture: It is not possible to attend Redemption Church long before encountering the oft-repeated phrase, "All of Life is All For Jesus." This simple statement operates like a tag line for the congregations and conveys in the most basic of terms the truth that the gospel of Jesus addresses every facet of human life individually and culturally. In their vision of church, corporate gatherings exist for the purpose of equipping

³⁹⁵ "How Our Multi-Congregational Church Model Works," <http://www.faithfulandfruitful.com/multi-congregational-church-model-works/> (accessed 6/1/15).

Christians to be salt and light in the world in and through their various vocational contexts. Tyler Johnson is the lead pastor of Redemption Church and serves the pastors of the ten congregations by providing vision and resources as each contextualizes their ministry for a missionary encounter with their cultural setting. One of Tyler’s leadership principles is that “culture eats strategy for breakfast,” a quote attributed to the late Peter Drucker.³⁹⁶ This emphasis on cultivating a *distinct culture* within the congregations helps shed light on the approach to discipleship formation at Redemption Tempe.

Vision of Discipleship: Content and Processes for Formation

The content of discipleship training materials of Redemption Tempe were assessed in terms of their ability to interpret and integrate knowledge of God and Scripture, self and relationships, as well as work and the world. The following table categorizes the content of discipleship materials according to the cognitive maps³⁹⁷ provided to their parishioners in these three areas.

Cognitive Maps	Key Texts and Authors
<p>Theological Map <i>Knowledge of God & Scripture</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Craig Bartholemew & Michael Goheen, <i>The Drama of Scripture</i>; ● Christopher Wright, <i>Mission of the People of God</i>; ● Cornelius Plantinga, <i>Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be</i>; ● Tim Keller, “The Centrality of the Gospel” and various discussions of justification, sanctification and idolatry; ● Martin Luther’s Preface to his Commentary on Galatians. ● Wayne Grudem, “Pleasing God by Our Obedience: A Neglected New Testament Teaching.”
<p>Discipleship & Vocation Map <i>Knowledge of Work and World</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Amy Sherman, <i>Kingdom Calling</i>; ● Tom Nelson, <i>Work Matters</i> (executive summary); ● Robert E. Coleman, <i>The Master Plan of Evangelism</i> (excerpts); ● Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”;

³⁹⁶ Fieldnote 3/19/14: Pastors Collective Meeting on Gilbert campus.

³⁹⁷ The term “cognitive map” was coined by E. C. Tolman in 1948 and refers to mental representations of typographical landscapes of environments familiar to a person. I use this term here to discuss the shared language and frameworks provided by a congregation to help parishioners filter and interpret experiences and information derived from their relationship with God, self and others as they engage in their daily work.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andy Crouch, <i>Culture Making</i> (excerpts); • Steve Timmis and Tim Chester “Evangelism” excerpt from <i>Total Church</i>; • Redemption Church, “Whatever you Do: Why Discipleship is withering—and what we can do about it.”
Spirituality & Psychological Map <i>Knowledge of Self and Others</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tim Chester, <i>You Can Change</i> (Gospel & Heart themes).

In terms of both content and processes, Redemption Church Tempe has the most developed discipleship curriculum of the three churches in this study. The table above outlines the discipleship materials in terms of the three main areas of knowledge that they address: God, world, self and others. The theological resources strongly stress the mission of God as unfolded in the narrative of Scripture. The four main chapters of the biblical drama (creation, fall, redemption and restoration) provide a cognitive map that helps parishioners understand the value of work and evaluate ethical issues that commonly arise in the workplace (idolatry, abuse of power, etc.). The vocational discipleship materials provide a cognitive map that orients parishioners to their work in ways that (1) reinforce how they can reflect God’s character in their workplaces as well as (2) help them see how their work contributes to the *shalom* that God desires in society. The three desired outcomes for congregants is to see their Christian discipleship extend beyond personal evangelism and bible study, a deep theology of place and Christian witness beyond the church community, and a commitment to serve the larger body of the church.³⁹⁸ The least developed area in their curriculum is providing a cognitive map for organizing the knowledge of the self and others that derive from work experiences.

³⁹⁸ Interview Transcript _113435.

Discipleship Processes

Language plays a foundational role in forming a theological imagination for all of life among parishioners. Sermons, announcements and discipleship materials are carefully crafted using terminology that is consistent, accessible and theologically sound in order to make vertical and horizontal connections to God and everyday life.

A regular feature of Redemption Tempe's worship liturgy is the *All of Life Interviews* originally conceived of by lead pastor Riccardo Stewart. Once or twice a month, a pastor interviews a parishioner about how they live out their faith in their particular cultural calling. Interviews include three to four questions and typically take up five minutes of the worship service. The interview concludes with a pastoral prayer for the person being interviewed and all of those in the congregation who work in a similar field. *First Wednesdays* is another monthly event in the liturgical rhythm of the church. Once a month a topic is chosen that pertains to Christian faith and culture and members from several Redemption congregations gather for a meal, discussion and presentation or panel discussion. Topics range from faith and science to faith and racial/ethnic identity. The goal of these events is to provide a venue for introducing the congregation to the basic contours of how the Christian faith intersects with important issues in society.

Redemption Communities (small community groups of 10-15 people) bring together congregants from diverse backgrounds and occupations in order to build community, encourage each other spiritually and work out the implications of the teaching and theology of the church. *Frontier Groups* are more *ad hoc* gatherings organized around specific vocations, such as education or medical care, and allow for deeper conversations regarding workplace challenges and opportunities. At these gatherings, common

knowledge of the occupation allows participants to discuss the ethical challenges they face in their job and the difficulties involved with living under the Lordship of Jesus at work.³⁹⁹ The *Surge* program is an intensive nine-month discipleship program that seeks to train lay leaders for their cultural callings and involvement in local congregations. The pedagogy of *Surge* is based upon an information-action-reflection model that instills theology and spirituality for faithful cultural discipleship.⁴⁰⁰

Trends Among Participants

- *Work Roles*: 18 out of 27 participants in Tempe (67%) reported that work plays some degree of an “ontological” role in their life. 44% (12 people) reported that work plays a “relational” role, and 33% (9 people) reported that work played an element of “instrumental” role in their life. These results are somewhat surprising given the younger age of the respondents in this congregation and that many of them are yet to find their way into career-type jobs. Perhaps this is a “youthful optimism” given that many are recent university graduates are working in multiple “non-career” jobs in order to get by.
- *Work Satisfaction*: In the interviews at Redemption Tempe “clients” were the most common source of satisfaction cited (avg. 1.6 times per interview), followed by “personal growth” (1.2 times per interview). “Accomplishment” and “co-workers”

³⁹⁹ I published an overview of Redemption Church’s approach to vocational discipleship in an article, “Between Two Worlds: How two pastors are helping people integrate their faith and work,” in *Leadership Journal*, April 1, 2014.

⁴⁰⁰ The program is offered by the Missionary Training Center in Phoenix and brings together participants from 20 churches. *Surge* is structured according to small groups of 3-10 people from a congregation who meet weekly to discuss readings and assigned discipleship practices. Information about *Surge* and the Missionary Training Center can be found here: <http://missionaltraining.org>.

were the third most common responses (0.7). This relational emphasis coincides with the larger evangelical culture in Phoenix and in many of the stories featured on the church's website.⁴⁰¹

- *God encounters & Spirituality*: 56% pray daily, 22% weekly and 22% occasionally. The two most common areas in which participants report encountering God are “through or with people” (48%) and “in the work itself” (41%). Redemption Tempe had the highest rate of regular prayer regarding work.
- *Liturgical Worship*: 15% of participants reported resonating “somewhat” with *All* of the scenarios of liturgical worship in light of their work, 59% “very much” or “somewhat” with *Sacrificer*, 15% “very much” with *Occasional-Sacrificer*, 4% *Leaver*, and 7% with none of the scenarios (*Null*). 85% of respondents resonated with some form of *Sacrificer* approach to bringing work experience into the practice of liturgical worship. This is extremely high percentage for a congregation. The interviews revealed that a large segment of this population was more “aspirational” in this approach to liturgical worship and that there is a desire for tangible ways of bringing work related issues into corporate worship.

Discussion and Commentary on Redemption Tempe

Tyler Johnson's repeated emphasis on “culture eats Strategy for Breakfast” provides a helpful clue to the strengths of Redemption Tempe's discipleship efforts. Borrowing the culture of strategy emphasis, it is the overall *congregational ecology* of

⁴⁰¹ Here is a sample of just a few of these stories: “On Mission to ‘Christian kids:’ Rick Umble's Story,” <http://tempe.redemptionaz.com/resources/stories/detail/on-mission-to-christian-kids-rick-umbles-story/>; “With Every Loose Thread,” <http://tempe.redemptionaz.com/resources/stories/detail/with-every-loose-thread/>; “Leah Thompson's Story,” <http://tempe.redemptionaz.com/resources/stories/detail/leah-thompsons-story/> (accessed 6.10.15).

Redemption Tempe that is perhaps the most dominant feature of their discipleship efforts. There are numerous intangible elements of Redemption's culture that contribute to the formation of congregants and yet the language, stories, cognitive maps and pastoral presence are the most prominent.⁴⁰²

The emphasis on carefully crafted consistent language has had an obvious impact on the congregation. Participants evidenced varying degrees of integration of their faith into all of life, and yet this central teaching provided a shared framework within which various activities, doctrines and discipleship efforts were explained and applied. The ecology of the congregation has been carefully seeded with narratives, teachings, practices and relationships that foster a holistic vision of Christian discipleship. Redemption churches share a centralized website that serves as a platform for the sharing of powerful stories of transformation and discipleship arising from the different congregations. Story telling plays an important part in the discipleship efforts of Redemption Tempe. Several members have had their stories featured on the church website and the regular "All of life interviews" provide another routine part of the church life.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² One parishioner described how an experience of Sunday worship reinforced the idea that "multiple aspects of me can be glorifying to God." She mulled over how "all aspects of her life are glorifying to God." This thought resurfaced again during a midweek Redemption Community prayer time but was not solidified until she attended a foster-adopt gathering. "I was thinking I have this desire to help children, whether that's adopting or fostering," she explained, "And then I had this thought, 'But you're supposed to be an artist. You're not supposed to be a foster mom, an adoptive mom.' But then I [thought], 'I could be both of those things. It's not limited to one or the other.' It was a long thought that maybe came more to the front of my mind last night" (Interview Transcript 1.08).

⁴⁰³ Interview Transcript 1.05: "I think what I was most struck by, looking back on past churches I've been to, and I remember a lot of the people who came to the front of the church to be interviewed or prayed for were missionaries or pastors, people going into full-time missionary work or thinking about goin' [sic] to seminary. At Redemption Tempe, every Sunday we interview people and pray for people who are in every kind of field, every kind of job, and it is a very subtle, probably not so subtle reminder, that all of life is all for Jesus, whether you're in engineering or teaching or pastoring or banking or financial services or science or medicine. Every job can be done to advance God's kingdom. So that is a huge thing that I didn't realize that a lot of other churches do that."

Another strength of Redemption Tempe’s discipleship efforts is the clear language and paradigms (cognitive maps) for understanding Scripture, theology and vocation. Most of the people I interviewed at Redemption Tempe described how the phrase “all of life is all for Jesus” impacted their thinking about the Christian faith. This simple but theologically loaded phrase was the governing center of their thinking and was referenced repeatedly whenever questions were posed that dealt with the integration of faith and life. Another influential teaching among parishioners was the missional nature of Scripture and the implications of this for the outward focused nature of Christian discipleship. Many of the parishioners explained that they had a preexisting high view of Scripture and placed an immense value on evangelism, and that what Redemption provided was a broader account of the gospel that addressed all of life.⁴⁰⁴

A final strength of Redemption Tempe’s discipleship work that deserves noting is pastoral presence. The pastoral staff’s “life-on-life” approach to discipleship has a direct impact on the experience of the congregants. Pastor Jim Mullins, whose responsibility it is to help provide vision and support to the discipleship efforts of the church, was mentioned frequently in the interviews. The pastoral presence of Mullins with his devoted attention to vocational discipleship and missional living was frequently cited as an influencing presence in the lives of parishioners. His presence helps offset the limited psychological and spiritual resources that filter and interpret knowledge of the self that arises in the course of life and work.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ The most commonly cited *corporate practices* in the interviews were the all of life interviews, Surge and Redemption classes, First Wednesdays, Redemption communities, and conversations with members of the pastoral staff.

⁴⁰⁵ For example, see Interview Transcripts 1.03, 1.05, 1.09.

In the course of research at Redemption Tempe a few *challenges and growth areas* emerged in conversations with pastoral staff that deserve mention.

Psychological Map and Work Roles: The richness and clarity of thought communicated in the theological paradigms reveal the lack of emphasis on cognitive maps for interpreting and integrating the knowledge of self and others that arise from the daily life of discipleship and work. Alongside a clear understanding of the story of Scripture there is a corresponding need to help internalize theological truths until they touch down on the specifics of a person's life. As one Tempe participant put it to me: "In spite of all the answers I give, it's a struggle to live that out in a way that effects meaningful change in my life."⁴⁰⁶ Knowing that God values his daily work was inspiring for this person, but he remained in tension over his own feelings of jealousy and disappointment over repeatedly being passed over for job promotions. The knowledge of himself that was being surfaced through his work experiences needed a framework of interpretation in light of the larger story of Scripture. There is a need for cognitive maps to help filter the knowledge of self and relationships with others that stem from experiences of work.⁴⁰⁷

Connecting evangelism and culture-making in the theological map: Several participants struggled with articulating the relationship between opportunities for evangelism and the inherent value of their culture-making efforts.⁴⁰⁸ The expressed desire of at least one pastoral staff member is to help their parishioners grow from seeing work

⁴⁰⁶ Interview Transcript 1.02.

⁴⁰⁷ Related to this is the need for older mentors in the community. Given the youthfulness of this congregation there are relatively few people above 40 who can serve as mentors for the largely twenty-something community. This was an expressed desire especially among the women that I interviewed.

⁴⁰⁸ See Interview Transcripts 1.02, 1.04, 1.05, 1.16.

strictly in terms of an opportunity for evangelism to seeing their responsibility as disciples to reflect God through their culture making activities. Complicating this somewhat is that the church website highlights several stories of relational evangelism and the staff bios all feature their personal conversion experiences. Furthermore, the verse-by-verse sermon series through the book of Romans (during the Spring of 2014) focuses primarily on the text at hand (when I was present the sermons were from Romans 9-10 and focused on issues of salvation and evangelism/conversion) leaving a few parishioners confused about the relationship of evangelism to cultural vocations.⁴⁰⁹ A commitment to the evangelistic mandate and authority of Scripture is to be applauded but more work remains to be done to help the average parishioner understand the “both/and” responsibilities of discipleship to evangelism and culture-making.⁴¹⁰

Spirituality Practices and God Encounters: Participants from Tempe on average report praying about work related issues more often than the other two congregations (56% pray daily whereas it is 26% at City Church and 27% at Grace Long Beach). Likewise, a high percentage of participants (59%) reported the importance of actively bringing their work experiences into liturgical worship. However, as noted above, there is an expressed desire for more concrete practices that help foster spirituality for work⁴¹¹ and help bridge the daily work-Sunday worship gap. One congregant told the story of his struggle to remain focused while praying on his daily commute and of the help he received from pastor Jim.

⁴⁰⁹ For example, see Interview Transcripts 1.02, 1.04, 1.05.

⁴¹⁰ “I’ll meet with some of the pastors and just talk to ‘em about life and different things, fleshing that out on a more personal level. ‘Cause obviously, like, today Ricardo’s preaching Romans 9, you’re not really talking about vocation in that. A lot of times it’s not the sermon, but the whole vision that’s encapsulated in All of Life” (Interview Transcript 1.04).

⁴¹¹ See for example Interview Transcripts 1.09 and 1.13

Working in tandem, the two helped create a “commuter’s liturgy” that used landmarks from the roadside typography as cues prompting him to petition, adore, confess and praise God.⁴¹²

Inhabiting the Liturgy: Bridging the weekday work and corporate liturgy gap is more challenging. Sitting through two staff reviews of Sunday liturgy, the emphasis was on evaluating the message conveyed through the service, with little attention given to what parishioners bring with them into the liturgy and how this influences how they inhabit corporate worship.⁴¹³ Missing from these conversations were clear evaluative structures for assessing how corporate worship helps integrate the theological/biblical, vocational and spiritual/psychological maps of the church’s discipleship efforts. We see a vivid example of this type of (unprompted) integration during worship in the comments of a parishioner recounting the reoccurring failure to secure employment:

So I’d come to worship, and that [failure from work was] there. My desire wasn’t always perfect at this, but my desire was to be bringing it with the expectation laying the expectation at his feet and saying, “Not my will but thy will be done,” with the disappointment, laying that at his feet and saying, “I trust your work. I trust your plan.”⁴¹⁴

This phenomenon of liturgy as an important practice for integrating knowledge of

⁴¹² Interview Transcript 1.09.

⁴¹³ In such absence reflections tended to be more along the lines of facilities/logistics (“In the second service we waited until 15 minutes after the service started to open up the overflow rooms”), level of attendance and the content (preaching/theological) matters such as “the gospel was preached” and “we aligned people to the true story of the gospel.” (Fieldnote notes of Staff meeting on 4/7/14 and 4/14/14). Logistical matters are of no little importance to the maintenance of corporate worship but there seemed little focus on the experiences of worshipers in light of the ebbs and flows of daily life.

⁴¹⁴ Interview Transcript 1.21. See also Interview Transcripts 1.01, 1.06, 1.07 and 1.09.

God, self, others and work falls in line with the *existing* central affirmation of Redemption Church that “all of life is all for Jesus.” Corporate worship teaches people how to embody such all of life discipleship by helping them bring the concrete experiences of daily work before God in corporate worship. There is a lot of discipleship formation taking place for congregants during corporate worship. The pastoral staff has a lot to gain by seeking to discover how the work experiences of the parishioners shape how they inhabit the corporate liturgy.

Case Study 2: CITY CHURCH SAN FRANCISCO

Geographic Context, Church History and Culture

Geographic Context: Like Phoenix, the land that would become known as San Francisco was inhabited by native Americans, the Ohlone Indians. In 1776 the Spanish military founded the Presidio Army Base in San Francisco and were accompanied by Padre Junipero Serra, who founded the Mission San Francisco de Asis a la Laguna de los Dolores (Saint Francis of Assisi at the Lagoon of Sorrows).⁴¹⁵ San Francisco remained a small town (on “annexed” land on the Mexican frontier) until the California gold rush of 1849. In the first year alone the population of San Francisco grew by 50,000. The city’s ethnic diversity had its roots from this time period as immigrants from around the world flooded into California for the gold rush and then again for the building of the Transcontinental Railroad.⁴¹⁶ Situated at the mouth of the bay, San Francisco has always been a hub for

⁴¹⁵ “How did our 58 counties get their names?” <http://www.counties.org/pod/how-did-our-58-counties-get-their-names> (accessed 6/2/15).

⁴¹⁶ History of San Francisco: <http://www.sanfrancisco.com/history/> (accessed 6/10/15).

commercial opportunities, cultural trends, intellectual ideas as well as immigrants desiring a better life for themselves and their families. Today San Francisco's lure includes the entrepreneurial mystique of the Silicon Valley and an incubator for startup companies and non-profits.

Church History: In 1996 Fred and Terely Harrell moved from Knoxville, Tennessee to San Francisco to plant a church committed to the historic Christian faith, as well as reaching the secular culture through a commitment to spiritual and cultural renewal, Christian liturgy, and service to the city. Most of all they desired to be welcoming to people of all religious and non-religious backgrounds in their faith journey.⁴¹⁷ From the outset a commitment to Christian witness in word and deed was ingrained into the fabric of the church life through its community groups and teaching. The launch team members were tasked with engaging their members as well as finding inroads for promoting social justice in the city.⁴¹⁸ On a weekly basis there is an average of 1000 attendees between the two campuses.⁴¹⁹

There are two important staff developments in terms of discipleship efforts of the church that deserve mention. First, in 2011 Scot Sherman helped found the Newbigin House of Studies, a joint partnership with Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan that seeks to “redevelop a vision for mission within our churches by training and mentoring a new generation of missional leaders, in partnership with the church and the

⁴¹⁷ See the section “Our Commitments” on City Church’s website: <http://www.citychurchsf.org/About/Our-Story> (accessed 6/2/15).

⁴¹⁸ Interview with Fred Harrell by Laura Turner: <http://www.citychurchsf.org/Who-We-Are-Our-Story> (accessed 6/10/15).

⁴¹⁹ <http://www.citychurchsf.org/About/Our-Story> (accessed 6/12/15).

seminary.”⁴²⁰ A second important staff acquisition to note is that of Jonathan Gundlach who joined the City Church staff in 2009 and serves as the Director of Operations and the Director of the Newbigin Fellows, an intensive discipleship program focusing on cultural discipleship in an urban context through worldview development, spiritual formation and relational connection.⁴²¹

Mission and Culture: A core element of the City Church’s culture is captured in this commitment to welcoming hospitality: “City Church is a place for all people, regardless of where you might find yourself on your faith journey. If you are spiritually skeptical, curious about Christianity, or a committed follower of Jesus Christ, we make room for you wherever you are in your process.”⁴²² This, “come as you are and journey with us” mentality is based on the belief that God is in process with Christian and non-Christian alike.⁴²³ Along with hospitality, City Church has a strong commitment to seeking personal spiritual and psychological renewal (especially in the work of City Church Counseling Center) as well as social and cultural renewal through efforts organized by City Hope, which seeks to promote social justice efforts in the city.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁰ Newbigin House of Studies’ website: <http://newbiginhouse.org/about/> (accessed 6/2/15).

⁴²¹ Description of the Newbigin Fellows program: <http://newbiginhouse.org/fellows/> (accessed 6/2/15).

⁴²² From City Church’s website comment under “Our Commitments:” <http://www.citychurchsf.org/About/Our-Story> (accessed 6/2/15).

⁴²³ This sentiment was not only communicated in a variety of ways on a regular basis by church staff and leadership but was a common theme in my interviews with parishioners. See for example Fred Harrell’s comments in, “Our Story” <http://www.citychurchsf.org/Who-We-Are-Our-Story> (accessed 6/1/15).

⁴²⁴ <http://www.citychurchsf.org/About/Our-Story> (accessed 6/2/15).

Vision of Discipleship: Content and Processes of Formation

City Church places a strong emphasis both on cultural discipleship and on psychological and spiritual growth. The discipleship training offered by the Newbigin House of Studies provides theological maps for orienting Christians to live wise and distinct lives in society. The table below outlines the materials that address Scripture, cultural discipleship and spiritual/psychological development.

Cognitive Maps	Key Texts and Authors
Theological Map <i>Knowledge of God & Scripture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lesslie Newbigin, <i>Foolishness to the Greeks, Truth to Tell, & Proper Confidence</i>; ● Michael Goheen, <i>The True Story of the Whole World</i>; ● Christopher Wright, <i>The Mission of God’s People</i>; ● Francis Collins and Karl Giberson, <i>The Language of Science and Faith</i>.
Discipleship & Vocation Map <i>Knowledge of Work and World</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jamie Smith, <i>Discipleship in the Present Tense</i>; ● William Cavanaugh, <i>Being Consumed</i>; ● Daniel Wolpert, <i>Creating A Life with God</i>; ● Ken Wilson, <i>A Letter to My Congregation</i>; ● Eric Metaxas, <i>Amazing Grace</i>; ● Amy Sherman, <i>Kingdom Calling</i>.
Spirituality & Psychological Map <i>Knowledge of Self and Others</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enneagram materials; ● Chuck DeGroat, <i>Leaving Egypt</i>; ● Richard Foster, <i>Celebration of Discipline</i>; ● David Brenner, <i>The Gift of Being Yourself</i>; ● Henri Nouwen, <i>Return of the Prodigal Son</i>.

In terms of cultural discipleship, Newbigin Fellows are taught how to interpret cultural trends and think theologically about the public dimensions of their embodied life in culture. Fellows receive a concentrated dose of the teaching and discipleship training on offer more generally within the church.

The vocational emphasis in the discipleship materials is fairly limited. Issues of faith and science, sex and sexuality and consumerism receive more attention than a sustained discussion of a theology of work. In terms of psychological and spiritual resources, the Enneagram is widely used within the congregation as a map for organizing and interpreting knowledge of the self and relationships with others. This complex

personality test is commonly used in the public gatherings and small groups as a pedagogical tool for integrating spirituality and faith. Chuck DeGroat's book, *Leaving Egypt: Finding God in the Wilderness Places*,⁴²⁵ is used to integrate theology, spirituality and psychology by helping individuals narrate their own lives in light of Israel's exodus from bondage in Egypt and journey to God's promised land. The narrative approach of this book is used as a pastoral tool for helping people locate their personal stories in the story of God's journey with Israel.

Discipleship Processes

The areas of discipleship that are most commonly emphasized at City Church are the Counseling Center, City Hope San Francisco, the Newbigin House of Studies, and the weekly corporate liturgy.⁴²⁶ In a church that experiences approximately 28% turnover each year due to the transient nature of life in San Francisco, community groups are strongly emphasized as a way to help cultivate stable relationships among parishioners.⁴²⁷ There is no set curriculum for *community groups*, which allows each gathering to adapt to the given needs.

Six years ago City Church began an intensive, nine-month, whole-life discipleship program called the *Newbigin Fellowship*. Vocational discipleship is one theme among many that is touched upon in the Newbigin Fellowship. An annual *Faith and Work retreat*

⁴²⁵ Chuck DeGroat, *Leaving Egypt: Finding God in the Wilderness Places* (Grand Rapids: Square Inch, 2011).

⁴²⁶ This is reflected on the church website (www.citychurchsf.org/Who-We-Are) as well as in what is celebrated by the leadership in corporate gatherings and in conversations among parishioners.

⁴²⁷ This statistic was given to me in a meeting with the executive team at City Church on June 10, 2014.

has been held for four years and serves as a convergence for the various types of vocational groups discussing issues of faith and work. Finally, a *weekly bible study* is held in the downtown area, and provides space for those in proximity for a mid-day gathering to reflect, pray and receive teaching and encouragement focusing primarily on workplace issues.

There is a strong emphasis on spiritual and psychological growth within the congregation. It is not uncommon for pastors to reference their own experience of therapy in their sermons. *Testimonials* of those who have benefited from the services of the Counseling Center are offered throughout the year and announcements are made online and in corporate worship gatherings regarding available services. The *Enneagram* personality model is one of the primary tools regularly used by staff and parishioners alike to integrate knowledge of self and others into a growing relationship with God.⁴²⁸ These discipling processes bring together an assorted group of spiritual and psychological resources to help people find themselves within the larger context of God's story.

Finally, the weekly *corporate liturgy* provides ritual practices that rehearse God's "true story of the whole world" so that worshipers can have their lives "re-storied" as they inhabit the ancient Christian liturgy that reaches back more than two millennia.⁴²⁹ The audiences that City Church seeks to disciple are many and include the deeply committed

⁴²⁸ An overview of the Enneagram personality profile can be found in this report by the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Doctrine and Pastoral Practices: http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/documents/ennea2.htm (accessed 6/10/15).

⁴²⁹ For a description of the theory behind this approach to ancient-future liturgical worship visit the article "Who We Are: On Liturgy" on the City Church website: <http://www.citychurchsf.org/Who-We-Are-On-Liturgy>. The language "true story of the whole world" is borrowed from Michael Goheen, an important influence on the Newbigin Fellows program. The concept of being "re-storied" was cited in the web article on liturgy and is indebted to the philosophical anthropology by James K.A. Smith.

Christian, the spiritual seeker and the religiously disenfranchised. The “come as you are” emphasis is stamped upon each part of the church’s discipleship efforts in an effort to bring the gospel to bear on each aspect of all walks of life.

Research Among Parishioners

- *Work Roles:* 15 out of 23 participants (65%) reported that work plays some element of “ontological” role in their lives. 35% reported a degree of “relational” in the role work plays in their lives. 48% reported that work plays an “instrumental” role in their life. Given the San Francisco geographic context and the high cost of living, the instrumental role of work looms large for many of these Christians despite the fact that most of them are upwardly mobile, accomplished workers. Nonetheless, the high level of instrumental responses is surprising and points to a larger reality that high-paying “white-collar” jobs do not equate to job satisfaction and personal fulfillment.
- *Work Satisfaction:* Participants from City Church San Francisco cited “accomplishment” as the main source of satisfaction (1.2 references per interview), “co-workers” (1.0), and finally “personal growth” and “client” (0.9 references per interview).
- *God Encounters & Spirituality:* 26% pray daily, 39% weekly and 31% occasionally, and 4% never. The two most common areas in which participants report encountering God is “through or with people” (35%) and “through a sense of dependence on God” (30%). Participants from City Church report praying about work-related issues less regularly than the other two churches. Part of this may be due to the intensity of city life and the pressure packed work environment. This also

provides support for a common theme in the interviews that many people desire concrete spiritual practices that help them “channel God” in their work.⁴³⁰

- *Liturgical Worship*: 43% resonated “very much” or “somewhat” with *Sacrificer*, 9% “very much” with *Occasional-Sacrificer*, 26% “very much” or “somewhat” with *Occasional*, 8% “very much” or “somewhat” with *Leave-Occasional*, and 13% with *Leaver*. 52% of respondents resonated with some form of *Sacrificer* practice of bringing work into liturgical worship.

Discussion and Commentary on City Church

City Church’s emphasis on serving the larger city is an attractive feature of the church’s life for many congregants. The frequency with which the ministries of City Hope and the Counseling Center are celebrated in the weekly services of the church reinforce the dual emphasis that the gospel addresses all aspects of our *personal faith journeys* and leads us to *serve others around us*, especially the poor.⁴³¹ Many people were attracted to a more intellectually rigorous and culturally savvy version of Christianity than the typical evangelical mainstream churches. City Church’s emphasis on the implications of the gospel for all aspects of life and each domain of the city is what inspires many congregants. The Newbigin Fellows program is an important feature in cultivating this type of culturally engaged disciples providing a curated assortment of excellent theological writings that address the pressing issues in public theology.

⁴³⁰ Interview Transcript 2.21.

⁴³¹ The most frequently cited church activities were community groups, Counseling Center support groups, Newbigin Fellows, the mid-week downtown bible study, Faith and Work retreat, pastoral relationships, and Sunday liturgical practices of Eucharist, confession, prayers for the city and world.

The concepts that “life is a journey” and that “God is involved in our struggles for growth and health” were the predominant teachings referenced in interviews at City Church. The welcoming hospitality intended by the church leadership is indeed experienced by congregants who described their experience of City Church as “healing,” “a safe refuge” and “[a place where] it literally feels like there is more oxygen in there—especially in my community group.”⁴³² There was a marked need for tangible hope among the participants, a need for connection to a bigger story or perspective beyond the immediacy of the pressing stresses squeezing in on them.

The work culture of San Francisco was the most pronounced and intense among all three geographic contexts. The work environment is a *pressure cooker* that brings to light deep-seated personal issues of identity, meaning and passion. Competition for jobs is immense and economic pressures force people to work longer hours just to keep up with peers who have chosen to make work the focal point of their lives (this helps explain in part the high percentage of people for whom work plays an instrumental role in their lives, 48%). Several people described their frustrations and fears that work takes up so much of their life, leaving little room for dating, family and simply a *life beyond work*.⁴³³

In this milieu, City Church’s use of psychological tools (the Enneagram) and spiritual/theological frameworks (Chuck DeGroat’s *Leaving Egypt*) have proven very useful to a broad contingency of parishioners. When work pressures and conflicts generate awareness of personality styles, motivational structures and emotional wounds, these

⁴³² Interview Transcripts 2.01 and 2.14; 2.07; 2.09.

⁴³³ Interview Transcripts 2.02, 2.03, 2.04, 2.07, 2.08, 2.09, 2.1, 2.12, 2.13, 2.21, 2.22.

psychological-spiritual-theological maps provide a shared language for interpreting these experiences among friends at church.⁴³⁴

A few *challenges and areas for growth* emerged as I processed this research with various staff and parishioners at City Church.

Vocational Map and Work Roles: After family relationships, work is perhaps the main source of knowledge of self, relationships and God. In finding our way in the world, work is a strategic site for reflecting on relationships with God, self, others and the physical world. This is an underdeveloped area in the Newbigin Fellows curriculum, as one person expressed this disappointment:

[A] lot of the people I know go into [Newbigin Fellows] wanting answers about life and work and vocation. That's probably one of the least developed parts of the curriculum. [T]hat's one thing I wish that there was more... I never felt like I was given a lot of wisdom in [this area]. I think they did a *theology of work and the idea that God created us to work*—and I believe that [theologically], but *how you take that and transfer it into your own life and vocation* [is lacking].⁴³⁵

The emphasis on merging personal narratives with the story of Scripture is a unique feature of the Newbigin Fellows and City Church. The strong emphasis on psychological and spiritual growth is significant and provides clear language and frameworks for interpreting and integrating knowledge of oneself and relationships with others. Yet the strategic value of work experiences in forming followers of Jesus for cultural discipleship has yet to be tapped. The resources are present but the connections have yet to be worked

⁴³⁴ Interview Transcripts 2.02, 2.03, 2.04, 2.05, 2.06, 2.08, 2.09.

⁴³⁵ Interview Transcript 2.1.

out in the Fellows program and other church programs. More than any other church context, I found that conversations about work with participants from City Church brought me into some of the most personal losses, anxieties and aspirations of Christians.⁴³⁶

Community and Locating Oneself on the Maps: Growth in this area of “vocational way-finding” is somewhat hampered by the high volume of turnover of parishioners within the congregation (approx. 28% annually).⁴³⁷ As a few perceptive parishioners described it, City Church does a great job providing theological and psychological maps that orient them to Scripture and self-reflection, but locating oneself on that map requires a *consistent community of people* who are intimately acquainted with your story and invested in your life.⁴³⁸

Spiritual Map and God Encounters: The intensity and demanding nature of the work culture in San Francisco threatens to squeeze out any room for spiritual health. As noted above, 26% of participants pray about their work daily, and a relatively lower percentage of people report encountering God in some way through their daily work. Amidst these work pressures and cultural norms, prayerlessness, anxiety and depression are common. There was a strong interest in finding tangible spiritual practices to help mitigate against being inundated with daily work pressures. As one woman expressed it, “what I’m interested in exploring in terms of my faith is ‘channeling God’ *in my workplace*

⁴³⁶ Among these interview Transcripts 2.02, 2.03, 2.07, 2.09, 2.1, 2.12 were the most in depth and personal.

⁴³⁷ The term “vocational way-finding” is from Dave Evans, conference speaker at the Spring 2014 Faith and Work Retreat at Marconi Retreat Center. The statistics on yearly turnover of congregants was from a meeting with the Executive Team on 6/10/14.

⁴³⁸ See especially Interview Transcripts 2.1, 2.12 and 2.22.

where I'm at the majority of my life besides sleeping.”⁴³⁹

For quite a few people the gap is not so much between the “sacred and the secular” but rather between the “spiritual and the earthly.” I was surprised to find in one interview that the person headed up the Sunday morning prayer ministry at the church and yet he reported on the survey that he rarely if ever prays about work-related issues. There was a conceptual block at the root of his cognitive dissonance that became evident as the interview unfolded. What were missing were spiritual practices that connect the day-to-day realities with God.⁴⁴⁰ Self-sufficiency and high levels of competency also were cited as factors that mitigate against prayerfulness. Prayer for work is more ad hoc and typically prompted by a situation that is beyond them.⁴⁴¹ There were quite a few participants who demonstrated a solid theology of work, but many of these struggled to cultivate an awareness of God's presence in their work and finding ways, as one man said, of “not staying in my head” by simply theologizing.⁴⁴²

Amidst the struggles I found several people who, like Dana the nurse, carry a psalm in her pocket, had developed some creative spiritual practices that attuned them to God and cultivated a vibrant spirituality for daily work. Another woman told of a time when things were toxic with her co-workers and she was at her rope's end. Her team wasn't getting along and nothing she tried seemed to be working. Finally one night she was alone in the

⁴³⁹ Interview Transcript 2.21.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview Transcript 2.01. This same theme surfaced in other interviews as well. For example, another person commented, “[I struggle] connecting the day to day duties with God. I tend to stay in my own head when dealing with non-people issues.” The impersonal “software issues” doesn't seem to stimulate prayer as easily.” It is generally only when he knows that a situation is beyond his scope that he looks to God (Interview Transcript 2.16).

⁴⁴¹ See for example Interview Transcripts 2.13 and 2.1.

⁴⁴² Interview Transcript 2.16.

office and desperate for help and she felt prompted to go around and pray for each person on her team, physically laying her hand on each person's desk.⁴⁴³ Another person described the practice of using Christian virtues for their computer passwords at work. Given that he types the password dozens of times a day it is a good reminder and spiritual discipline for him. He laughed as he commented, "It's hard to be angry with a co-worker when you keep these virtues in front of you all day long."⁴⁴⁴ Concrete spiritual practices like these help attune people to God's presence amidst the pressures and strains of work. Providing access to these stories to others in the congregation might prove beneficial to those seeking deeper spiritual practices for their work routines.

Liturgical Worship as Strategic Integrator: At City Church the emphasis on liturgy is pronounced and it is seen as a central tool for forming the gospel story in worshipers. For example, in the order of service on June 15, 2014 were printed these words: "[we believe that] work and worship are one, that life is undivided."⁴⁴⁵ A similar sentiment was expressed in some of the interviews, but for many people the *implications* of this statement were not understood. In the online survey only 26% people reported that they resonate "very much" with the *Sacrificer* vignette that reflects this approach to life and worship, but only a handful of these when asked could offer an example of a time when their work was intentionally brought into worship. For several of these people their survey response was an "aspirational" that didn't reflect their regular experience.⁴⁴⁶ This trend identified in the

⁴⁴³ Interview Transcript 2.02.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview Transcript 2.08.

⁴⁴⁵ Sunday morning printed liturgy, June 15, 2014 (pg. 9).

⁴⁴⁶ This is not to say that people are not formed by the current liturgy in profound ways, but if formation entails a growing consciousness of how life is undivided then it should not be ignored. See for example, Interview Transcript 2.16: He fears that he will get stuck in his work circumstances if he thinks

survey responses was later explored further in the interviews. Much like the desire for concrete spiritual practices, most people were unsure about what it looks like for “work and worship to be one,” and for “life to be undivided”—but desired ways of approaching the liturgy in this way.⁴⁴⁷

While the liturgy at City Church does a good job of telling the gospel story, what parishioners desire are on-ramps for inhabiting this story in light of the stresses and strains of everyday work life. City Church’s liturgical model has an espoused view of how liturgy forms worshipers (ritual efficacy), and this is primarily centered upon what is *said* and *done* in the liturgical performance, without attending to what the congregants bring with them into their participation in the liturgy and what can be done to help facilitate the merging of these two horizons. During the liturgy, the pastors do a good job naming the stress, burnout, anxiety, and the longings of the people, and this offers a warm invitation for people to bring their emotional life to God in worship. What is needed are concrete

about them in worship. Wants to get a bigger perspective on life. Feels it would be disrespectful to God to think about work in worship. “If I’m mired in that while I’m at church, I feel like it’s disrespectful to God, too, because that’s my time to really worship him, or at least at points in the process it is. And if I’m sitting there singing and thinking about, ‘What am I going to do with the issue of Susie on Monday morning?’ it doesn’t feel like I’m being present with God. That’s why that one resonated with me. But it certainly happens that I dwell on other things in the service. But I like to make that God’s time.”

⁴⁴⁷ Here is an example of one parishioners intuitive development of living life undivided: “There are times where I’ve been really struggling with a difficult death or a really tragic event that I was part of at work, and being able to go through the grieving process in the context of church, being welcome to bring that kind of emotion in the liturgy and being able to feel the things that I’ve felt even in the service. **Q: Are there certain points that are more conducive to that in the service? During the sermon, during a prayer?** A: Honestly, you never know when it’s gonna [sic] hit. All of a sudden it’s just like, “Oh, man!” I can be very overwhelmed by a feeling, and there’s no particular reason it was that moment. Maybe it was a particular word, and the next Sunday I’ll be expecting it right then and it doesn’t happen. I don’t know. [T]here’s no formula to how I feel or respond on any particular Sunday. Any time there’s a kid who dies it is particularly painful and it takes time for everybody to process that. That had happened, and I had a feeling [that I needed] a safe place to grieve that [a place where] I don’t have to be so strong, because in the medical field, you have to just be really strong. [H]aving a moment where I don’t have to be that strong right now, I can grieve this, let go, and I don’t have to save face for other people. I can just experience what I need to experience and process this. Probably in singing, probably the music is usually when that happens.” (Interview Transcript 2.03).

ways of helping parishioners bring the joys and strains of work with them into the act of worship.⁴⁴⁸

Case Study 3: GRACE CHURCH LONG BEACH

Geographic Context, Church History and Culture

Geographic Context: Long Beach, California makes up just under a half million of the Los Angeles metropolitan area's 12,874,797 residents.⁴⁴⁹ The City of Long Beach was founded in 1888 and experienced significant growth from its incorporation through the 1930's due in large part to the instillation of the Pacific Electric trolley (1902-10), the construction of the port (1911, which in 1941 included the U.S. Naval Shipyard), and the discovery of oil on Signal Hill (1921).⁴⁵⁰ California State University Long Beach was founded in 1949 and its student population in 2014 reached 36,822.⁴⁵¹ Today the Port of Long Beach and CSU Long Beach are two of the central engines of the economy.

⁴⁴⁸ Inhibiting this development perhaps is the Reformed liturgical arch of confession, assurance, and response. This good but incomplete framework does not readily expose worshipers to the full breadth of the psalms and their emotional and experiential complexity. For example, one person noted with gratitude how the weekly practice of confession reminds him of his need to confess the sins he has committed against his co-workers throughout the week—impatience, anger, and selfishness (Interview Transcript 2.08). But what does it look like for a nurse who pronounced a child dead at work on 6:05 am on Thursday morning to bring this into the liturgical formula of confession and assurance? Does the liturgy afford a safe space to grieve and lament this loss of life? (Interview Transcript 2.03.) Where would such a lament fit in the rehearsing of the gospel story and the structured responses of guilt-grace-gratitude? The robust liturgy of City Church is an important part of their approach to discipleship; it holds promise for a still deeper formation as it finds ways of helping parishioners bring their work experiences into the act of liturgical worship.

⁴⁴⁹ Long Beach population: 462,257 (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0643000.html>, accessed 6/10/15); "New Los Angeles Population Figures Prove that We're No.2," by Dennis Romero, <http://www.laweekly.com/news/new-los-angeles-population-figures-prove-that-were-no-2-2389807> (accessed 6/10/15).

⁴⁵⁰ <http://www.visitlongbeach.com/visitors/about/facts-history/> (accessed 6/10/15).

⁴⁵¹ https://web.csulb.edu/divisions/students/presidents_scholars/campus_facts.htm (accessed 6/10/15).

Long Beach is the third most ethnically diverse city in the country.⁴⁵² Long Beach is home to a growing Hispanic population (40.8%) that will likely top the Caucasian population (46.1%) within a few years. There are also sizeable Asian (12.9%) and African American populations (13.5%) in the city.⁴⁵³ For all the diversity, there is still pronounced segregation along neighborhood lines and sections of the city. In some neighborhoods where gentrification is occurring, neighborhood business associations are encouraging small businesses to move in to attract middle and upper middle class to these areas.

Church History: Grace Brethren of Long Beach was founded in 1913 and its founding pastor, Louis S. Bauman, remained with the congregation until 1948.⁴⁵⁴ The commitment to being a church for the city was apparent from the inception of the church. “The Brethren Church in Long Beach is an accomplished fact,” the church leaders wrote at the dedication of the church in 1913, “Every stranger that shall enter her gates will find a warm welcome.”⁴⁵⁵ This value has endured through many cultural changes within the congregation and has taken new forms such as the Community Carnival that Grace has provided for two decades as a safe space for celebrating Halloween. The 102-year history of Grace in Long Beach has provided a consistent Christian presence within the community. On average there are 500 weekly attendees at Grace.

⁴⁵² <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/The-most-and-least-diverse-cities-in-the-U-S-6080150.php#photo-1866706> (accessed 6/10/15).

⁴⁵³ Census figures for Long Beach, California: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0643000.html> (accessed 6/10/15).

⁴⁵⁴ Facts about the history of Grace Brethren Church of Long Beach are available at the denominational website: <http://history.brethrenchurch.org/details.php?CID=129>; <http://history.brethrenchurch.org/details.php?MID=74> (accessed 6/12/15).

⁴⁵⁵ Molly Lewis, “100th Narrative,” unpublished paper for centennial celebration of Grace Brethren Church of Long Beach.

Mission & Culture: Grace has its roots in the history of American Fundamentalism as well. On the wall of the foyer leading into the sanctuary hangs a plaque that reads, “The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible,” making clear the church’s allegiance to the historic fundamentals of the Christian faith as defined by its conservative interpreters. Today Grace looks and feels much different in terms of its ethos. In 1990 Lou Huesmann was called to be senior pastor, and his vision for ministry helped the congregation’s witness in the city to evolve in the past two and a half decades. During this time the church started Hope for Long Beach, a ministry focusing on social justice and mercy ministries in the city. Christian witness no longer was confined to the saving of souls alone but took many forms of seeking the renewal of Long Beach culturally, socially and spiritually. Today this both/and approach to discipleship is captured in Grace’s mission statement: “We are a community of the new creation, living out of the gospel, for the flourishing of all.”⁴⁵⁶

Vision of Vocational Discipleship: Content and Processes of Formation

Grace Long Beach is still in the beginning stages of developing its approach to vocational discipleship. As the table shows, many of the same biblical, theological and vocational discipleship resources used in the other two churches have also influenced the language and vision of the church staff (e.g. Goheen, Wright, Newbigin, Crouch, Garber, Keller, Sherman), and yet little work has been done to codify this language in an explicit manner. As a result the culture of the church *has been markedly shaped* by these various resources but there remains *little shared language* of vocational discipleship within the congregation.

⁴⁵⁶ Grace Brethren of Long Beach website: <http://www.gracelb.org>.

Cognitive Maps	Key Texts and Authors
Theological Map <i>Knowledge of God & Scripture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Craig Bartholemew & Michael Goheen, <i>The Drama of Scripture</i>; ● Christopher Wright, <i>Mission of God</i>; ● N.T. Wright, various sources; ● Al Wolters, <i>Creation Regained</i>.
Discipleship & Vocation Map <i>Knowledge of Work and World</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Steven Garber of the <i>Washington Institute</i>; ● Amy Sherman, <i>Kingdom Calling</i>; ● Tom Nelson, <i>Work Matters</i>; ● Smith and Pattison, <i>Slow Church</i>; ● Timothy Keller, <i>Every Good Endeavor</i>; ● Allen Wakabayashi, <i>Kingdom Calling</i>; ● Andy Crouch, <i>Culture Making</i>; ● James Davidson Hunter, <i>To Change the World</i>.
Spirituality & Psychological Map <i>Knowledge of Self and Others</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parker Palmer, <i>Let Your Life Speak</i>; ● Richard Beck, various books; ● Tim Keller, Gospel centrality resources.

The expressed hope of the staff is that clear tracks will be laid down to help parishioners to live on mission in every sphere of life.⁴⁵⁷ As the staff plans how to move forward with cultural and vocational discipleship, these seeds can be nurtured and harvested among the congregants. For two years several staff members have used 3DM discipleship materials in small group intensive training. The cognitive map provided by 3DM teaches Christians to think reflectively about relationships in three dimensions of their life: up (God), in (self), and out (others). 3DM also offers instruction to equip Christians to discern God’s activity in the world by identifying “persons of peace” who are open to receiving mentoring input from them.⁴⁵⁸ At present, no clear language or maps have been developed for integrating psychological and spiritual issues. However, concepts from Richard Beck and Parker Palmer have been incorporated in several sermons offering

⁴⁵⁷ Interview Transcript: 20140825_142918.

⁴⁵⁸ For an overview of the 3DM Movement and history see the website: <http://3dmovements.com> (accessed 6/15/15).

the congregation at least an initial exposure to frameworks that can be further developed in other discipleship contexts.

Discipleship Processes

During the course of the past few years there has been a strong emphasis from Grace staff on the ways in which God’s story moves us beyond the four walls of the church to “live out of the gospel for the flourishing of all.”⁴⁵⁹ The main vehicle of discipleship formation within the congregation has been the *weekly sermon and liturgy*.⁴⁶⁰ It is through this regular practice that a new theological vision has been imparted, igniting the imaginations of many to pursue creative expressions of discipleship in their cultural callings. Several individuals identified the preaching and teaching of the church as a main influence on their culture making pursuits. Grace is a draw to many people in search of a more intellectually credible and cultural savvy approach to Christianity and discipleship, and the preaching is one of the primary touch points for outsiders’ first encounter with the church.⁴⁶¹

Lifegroups have become a mainstay at Grace for several years and have helped transform the community from a church culture with high barriers to entry, to a warm and inviting culture. Lifegroups are topic or activity based, 10-week gatherings of 10-20 members. The goals for each group vary but their purpose is clearly communicated as efforts to help people build relationships in a fast-paced society with little margins of free

⁴⁵⁹ The mission statement of Grace is “We are a community of the new creation, living out of the gospel, for the flourishing of all” (<http://www.gracelb.org>).

⁴⁶⁰ This claim was also substantiated in a group interview with two staff members. Interview transcript: Group Interview.

⁴⁶¹ Interview Transcript 20140325_154200.

time.⁴⁶² *Journey Groups* are focused discipleship groups of 10-15 people. A set curriculum from 3DM provides the content and method of discipleship centering on a structured relationship between mentor and mentees in which the former ask non-directive questions in the mentees life with God, self and others. The structure of Journey Groups is conducive to faith and work discussions, but the curriculum does not focus on this dimension of discipleship.

Faith and Work conversations occur once a quarter on an invite only basis. These gatherings typically are convened around a meal or *hors d'oeuvres* and take up a central question for discussion among peers. To date, invitations have been based upon common interests or vocational domains. The purpose of these gatherings are first to build momentum and interests among parishioners for faith and work topics and to establish new forms of relating between pastors and laity in which the latter are assumed to be the primary knowledge workers and stakeholders. The role of the pastor in this context is as convener, learner and resource provider to the group.

Finally, *Christ and Culture electives* are held a few times a year as second hour electives following the main service. Topics for these occasional events range from discussions of the *Da Vinci Code* book and movie to a discussion on a theology of California culture. Christ and culture events are intended to create a broad interest among the congregation in thinking theologically about cultural activities and to stimulate discussion within the church about the public dimensions of the Christian life. This outward “public” dimension of Christian witness beyond the four walls of the sanctuary is an

⁴⁶² Interview Transcript 20140325_154200.

explicit value that the staff attempts to ingrain into every part of the congregation's activities and rhythms.

Trends Among Participants

- *Work Roles:* out of 27 interviewees 24 people (89%) reported that work plays some element of “ontological” in their life. 33% (9 people) reported that work plays an element of a “relational” role, and 10 people (37%) reported that work plays an “instrumental” role. The high percentage of respondents who indicated that work plays an “ontological” role in their lives in this congregation raises many questions to be explored below.
- *Work Satisfaction:* Grace Brethren Church participants described relationships with “clients” most often as a source of satisfaction (avg. 1.5), followed by “accomplishment” (avg. 1.2) and “personal growth” (avg. 0.9).
- *Spirituality and God Encounters:* 27% pray about work daily, 27% weekly, and 46% occasionally. 56% report encountering God “through or with people,” 19% “in the work itself,” and 26% “no or unsure.”
- *Liturgical Worship:* Long Beach: 4% resonated “somewhat” with *All*, 44% with *Sacrificer*, 8% with *Occasional-Sacrificer*, 22% *Occasional*, 7% “very much” with *Leaver-Occasional*, 7% with *Leaver*, and 7% with *Null* (none). Overall 56% of respondents resonated with some form of *Sacrificer* approach of worship.

Discussion and Commentary of Grace Brethren Church

The vision to be “a community of the new creation, who lives out of the gospel, for the flourishing of all,” has captivated the imaginations of a majority of the research

participants. One of the most significant features of Grace Church is that it has had a long track record of attracting highly gifted culture-makers to the community.⁴⁶³ Many parishioners talked about the impact of sermons and grassroots conversations with other congregants as significant sources of encouragement. The specific teachings within this theological vision commonly cited were discussions of how Christianity intersects with culture, generosity and daily work, stewardship, living on mission and the culture-making mandate. Several parishioners mentioned that they feel that the church values their vocational callings and their public witness in the city. The outward, city focus of the church is compelling and important to them.⁴⁶⁴ Life Groups have helped foster a more open and hospitable ethos and Journey Groups have been met with mostly positive results with the participating demographic.

The pulpit and the corporate liturgy are the main sources of discipleship formation at Grace Long Beach. For a long time, it was the sermon that carried the bulk of the weight of formation in the service, but this has undergone consistent change with the growing influence of the director of worship, Beth Balmer, who has led the church into a more holistic approach to liturgical planning and leadership. The sermon now plays an important but not all-encompassing role in the service (it is part of the “receiving” portion of the “reorient-receive-respond” movements in the liturgy). Responsive worship through song, prayer and offering is given its own weight and attention in the liturgy as parishioners are

⁴⁶³ Interview Transcript 20140325_154200.

⁴⁶⁴ The corporate practices most frequently referenced in the interviews were the Life Groups, Journey Groups, outreach ministries of Hope for Long Beach, pastoral relationships and casual conversations about faith and work with other parishioners. Data taken from questions 10 and 13 on the pre-interview online surveys and select interview transcripts.

guided into embodied forms of active participation in worship rather than remaining passive recipients of theological ideas.⁴⁶⁵

Intuitive Approaches to Liturgy: One of the most striking features in the interviews at Grace Long Beach was the liturgical “creativity” evidenced among the congregants. The thoughtfulness with which liturgies are crafted is evident, but it is the unscripted connections and the impromptu adaptations in how parishioners bring their work experiences into their engagement in the liturgy and how they use this practice to re-enter their workweek that are worth noting. For example, worship amidst the community on Sunday morning is something that Rick has come to count on in his weekly routine. It is something that he has come to count on as providing a place for him to process the emotions and experiences of his workweek. Rick explained:

Ofentimes Sunday is the first time I’ve sat still and had space in which to process. Sometimes it’s the dichotomy of the worship between what I’ve experienced in the week and the words and the beauty of what I’m hearing sung, the beauty of the music, of the environment. Everything’s good in the world, God’s in control, God loves you. It doesn’t necessarily match up with what I’ve experienced all week long. So it becomes really important for me to sit and hear those words and to remind myself of the truths that are there and to help me process through the difficult stuff and to ask the question, “Where is God in this? Why does God let these things happen? How do you move forward? How do you help this kid, this

⁴⁶⁵ Interview Transcript 20140806_143543.

adult?” Bringing all of that to worship and trying to allow God to speak into it, allow God to make sense of it for you, and allow it to change my heart.⁴⁶⁶

It is not hard to appreciate why corporate worship is so instrumental in Rick’s life as a disciple of Jesus. For it is in this space where he brings vulnerable areas of disconnect between what God desires and the lived reality of his work experiences that God bends low and speaks to him amidst his fatigue and despair and draws near.⁴⁶⁷

On the other side of the liturgical event is the benediction as the congregation prepares to re-enter their week. Here it is not so much the experiences of the past week that form how the liturgy is interpreted and engaged—rather it is how the liturgy frames how the work of the coming week will be taken up. This sending aspect of the liturgy was powerfully captured in another interview I had with a woman in Long Beach. When asked, “What refreshes you and keeps you motivated to do your work,” Jean, a social worker said simply, “The benediction at [church].” Her response was shocking to me and begged further elaboration. Here’s how Jean explained to me the role that the benediction plays in her life:

Whenever I hear [the final sentence], “May the blessing of God almighty—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—be upon us and through us with all those to whom he sends us, now and forever. Amen.” I’m like “who’s he gonna [sic] send me to this

⁴⁶⁶ Interview transcript 3.16.

⁴⁶⁷ This aspect of *vulnerability in worship* was captured in another interview: “Language carries so much importance. I think I am the most emotionally connected or rejuvenated with God during certain [worship] songs. When I’m listening to a sermon, it’s like, ‘Yes, I understand, this makes a lot of sense, this is helping me to see things in the way that I need to see things,’” but it’s once a song comes that it speaks what I mean that it makes more sense and is more truer worship, ‘cause I’m being vulnerable. It’s easy to listen to a sermon and not be vulnerable. [I know] my life needs to change in that way. But speaking the words out loud, especially in song, is more vulnerable” (Interview transcript 3.12).

week?”... Hearing it reminds me that I’m called to do this for God, to be about his business. This is where I can be about his business, because some people are called to be missionaries or pastors or a businessman or a businesswoman. I feel like this is where I’m supposed to be, so I need to make this prayer for my setting, so that I am fruitful and I do his work and glorify him in it.⁴⁶⁸

In Jean’s life, the weekly liturgical practices of worship are a reaffirmation of God’s commission for her to enter her vocational work as his ambassador. It is not simply that her work finds validation as a genuine expression of faithful worship of God, it is that God has prepared her work context for her, he provides regular space for her to process work experiences in his presence, and each week he sends her out again with open eyes to those to whom he sends her.

It is important to note that these approaches to liturgical worship and work were not explicitly taught to Rick or Jean from the pulpit, nor were they learned from a book. No pastor or worship leader stood before Jean on Sunday and invited her to make the connections between her caseload and the benediction. Their way of inhabiting the liturgy with hearts and minds full from their week is more of an organic, intuitive search to bring all of their lives and emotions before God. This might be seen as a quest to find a spirituality that integrates weekday work and corporate worship.

The consistent and theologically sophisticated pulpit ministry and liturgies at Grace Long Beach have played important roles in forming the community at large. As stated above, it is the theological sophistication that attracts thoughtful Christians interested in applying their faith to every area of life. The theological imagination of the community has

⁴⁶⁸ Interview transcript 3.21.

been seeded with deep theology and liturgy that has *only just begun to be harvested*. This will require more attention to developing more on-ramps into discipleship formation for the congregation.

Communal Maps and Clear Disciples Tracks: The nascent quality of discipleship programs is apparent in the community and is the area of ministry in most *need of growth*. Several staff members sense a need for clear “tracks” of discipleship for the congregation and yet the desire for “fresh language” to inspire the community remains in tension with developing consistent cognitive maps that help parishioners interpret knowledge of God, self, others and work.⁴⁶⁹ The high percentage of participants for whom work plays an ontological role in their life (89%) combined with the low rate of daily prayer (27%) suggests that work is a fertile area for pastoral ministry.

Community, Work Roles and Spirituality: Another noteworthy theme expressed in the interviews was the desire for deeper communities to process life and work with like-minded people. One of the demographics at Grace in most need of such groups are moms who are wrestling with competing commitments between work and parenting.⁴⁷⁰ Some women work full-time outside the home while others work as stay-at-home moms.

⁴⁶⁹ Interview Transcript 20140325_154200.

⁴⁷⁰ In singling out women and motherhood I am not being prescriptive for gender roles nor am I ignoring the fact that in at least three instances it is the father who provides the primary care at home for their family. However, proportionally more women than men at Grace report tensions over navigating the parenting and work issues. Here is just one example: “I feel oftentimes very alone in this season. And when we talk about work and vocation, I feel identified. I feel like somebody gets me, ‘cause I don’t know a lot of women who work full-time and are raising a family. It’s conflicting for me, but when I enter into these conversations, I feel like I’m doing the right thing. I wish there was more. I wish we could do something like Redeemer in New York. I feel like I could identify with the New York culture. That would fit me, because other women are figuring that out... When we enter into conversations like this, I feel like my job is valued. When we don’t, I just continue to feel like work isn’t important. It’s not a value. You’re working to make money, yeah, I get that, but it isn’t a value in regards to who we are as a church or who we are as women. It’s conflicting. It’s hard—it’s a weird place for me to enter” (Interview transcript 3.05).

Suspended between these two narratives are women like Kendra, a mother of two who works two days a week outside of the home. “It feels like [there are] two teams when it comes to being a working mom,” Kendra explains. On the one team are those moms who say, “I can never stay home with my kids, I have to work.” And the other team who says, “I could never work, I have to stay home with my kids, that’s my primary role.” Inhabiting the middle ground is difficult, she says, “sometimes I feel stuck in the middle.”⁴⁷¹

Conflict, ambiguity and tension are *present in all three* of these arrangements of parenting and working outside of the home. Those who work full-time often feel guilty that they are neglecting their responsibilities to their children.⁴⁷² Yet those who choose the path of full-time stay-at-home parent often report feeling guilty (or even lazy) about not utilizing their gifts outside the confines of their family.⁴⁷³ Complicating matters is the lack of models for families attempting to find their way in a time in history in which there is unprecedented mobility and flexibility in terms of work configurations and an ongoing “destructuring” of rigid social markers in Western societies from which to gain our bearings.⁴⁷⁴ In this context, the presence of a non-judgmental, empathic community of people who can navigate the diverse work-parenting configurations is the orienting presence in the lives of many Christians. What are also needed are relational, theological and spiritual resources to

⁴⁷¹ Interview Transcript 3.25.

⁴⁷² This is *especially true for women* who report feeling both internal as well as external pressure from social norms of culture, family members and other Christians. See for example Interview Transcripts 3.03, 3.05, 3.12.

⁴⁷³ See for example Interview Transcripts 3.19, 3.2, 3.25.

⁴⁷⁴ James Cote: *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 27-29.

help Christians connect with God amidst the tensions and challenges of work in the home and in the workplace.⁴⁷⁵

Conclusions from the Qualitative Research on the Everyday Work of Christians

In this chapter I outlined the three major themes identified in the qualitative research and situated these findings within the three congregations under study. Before concluding it is important to summarize the major conclusions from this research on the everyday work experiences of Christians.

Conclusions on Work, Satisfaction and Toil

1. *Paying Attention to Work Roles Helps Us Understand Where Meaning and Satisfaction are Found:* The use of Darrell Cosden's categories (instrumental, relational, ontological⁴⁷⁶) proved useful as a heuristic tool in sensitizing me to the various configurations of work roles within a person's life. Conversations that begin with, "what role or roles does work play in your life?" led into fruitful conversations about work that included stories of joy as well as pain.

⁴⁷⁵ The low percentage of regular prayer among participants suggests an underdeveloped spirituality that addresses the daily challenges of work. This gap showed up in various ways in the research. One of the themes that emerged early in my interviews was the frequency with which respondents either said that they did *not encounter God* in or through their work or *were unable to give specific examples* of such experiences. Many of the responses to whether they experience God or his presence in/through their work was more along these lines as one man put it: "I would have to say yes [I do encounter God in my work], but I'm hard-pressed to give an example of it... I'm not ... a touchy-feely person, so maybe my relationship in that respect is a little bit more intellectual than emotional" (Interview Transcript 3.13; cf. Interview Transcript 1.14). The ambiguity captured in responses like this point to a common experience of cognitive dissonance between *espoused theology and lived experience*. A *spirituality* that connects the espoused theology of the value of work to the ordinary day-to-day events that fill up her workday is needed to address the dissonance between theology and lived experience.

⁴⁷⁶ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 178-79.

In listening to these stories I took note of not only the ways in which work plays a role in a person's quest for beauty, joy and the good life, but the ways in which work involves practical ways in which people attempt to cope with adversity, toil and hardship in life and in work. It is important that a theology of work reflects the stories of people like Damaris and Dale discussed earlier whose unsatisfying and low-paying jobs still play a part in their pursuit of a meaningful and God-honoring life.⁴⁷⁷

2. *Work, Idolatry and Growth*⁴⁷⁸: For some people, work is one of the most central ways in which they seek to honor God and find personal fulfillment in life. As one interview participant described for me, "I think God knew that I needed a vocation to become whole." Deidre had grown up an oppressively legalistic family that squelched her sense of efficacy and inhibited her discovery of who God made her to be. She explained:

⁴⁷⁷ The language of "poetic practices" employed in this dissertation is drawn from the work of William Dyrness. Dyrness explains poetic practices in this way: "human longing for the good (even beautiful) life inclines people inevitably to shape "poetic practices" that become objects of their devotion—things for which they live and die." The thesis of this dissertation has adapted the concept of poetic practices by showing how these symbolic culture-making activities relate not only to beauty and joy but also to struggles against meaninglessness, adversity and pain. William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), ix.

⁴⁷⁸ At first blush, we may be tempted to interpret the *ontological work role motif* as a drive for self-actualization and to secure influence as evidence of idolatry—the constructing of something from this world to offer meaning and satisfaction that only God can give. The attempt to "make a name for ourselves" through our cultural activities (Gen. 11:4), is counteracted by instilling a *different quality of drivenness* that takes forward the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:27-28). While the story of Babel in Genesis 11 alerts us to idolatry and its many stripes, the subsequent story of God's calling to Abraham to "bless the nations" in the very next chapter (Genesis 12:1-3) should prompt us to find ways of infusing a *drive to accomplish* with a theological imagination centered on cruciform love and a self-giving use of power (For an excellent exposition of the theme of cruciform love in 1 Cor. 8:1-13 see Wil. S. Rogan's "Cruciform Love as the Preeminent Intellectual Virtue," unpublished paper presented at Biola University's Center for Christian Thought conference, "Intellectual Virtue and Civil Discourse," May 8-9, 2015). In fact, the loss of this platform to influence people and company cultures or to be an agent of positive change in and through work is what many people lamented about their experience of aging (Interview Transcripts 2.2, 3.06, 3.23. Interview Transcript 3.19. Some people have asked, "How much is too much when it comes to hours in a workweek?" From my interviews the answer is it depends largely upon the degree to which the person looks to work for satisfaction in their life. As soon as work begins to tip the scale and spill over into other areas of life that threatens to detract from other essential sources of satisfaction, then it is too much.

I have so much wanted and needed a place where I felt like I was an integral part, because I think it would [help me] become whole and interlink [me] with other people. In [my] work setting, I have felt a sense of—I don't want to say family per se, I don't want to make it so cozy, but I certainly have experienced the wholeness of what it looks like when we're working closely together for causes that are worthwhile. And that's called healing.⁴⁷⁹

For Deidre work is a means by which she is attempting to make meaning out of her broken life by locating her work in the context of a larger work of God in her life.⁴⁸⁰ This phenomenon has theological significance and should not simply be labeled as “idolatry” and dismissed. The remedy to the *hubris* of Babel (Gen. 11) is to be found in a vision of blessing and flourishing that carries out God's command to fill the earth, multiply, cultivate and have dominion over creation to the glory of God (Gen. 12:1-3). A theology of work should *not* condemn the desire to find meaning and personal growth through work as idolatrous, but rather seek to find ways in which a person's desire for meaning, well-being and satisfaction can be found through participation in God's mission.

Conclusions on God Encounters and Spirituality for Work

1. *The Connection Between Theology and Spirituality*: A few pressing questions arise out of the interviews with parishioners. Does our theology of work cultivate an awareness of the Spirit's work in and around us? Does it readily lend itself to embodied spiritual practices?

⁴⁷⁹ Excerpt from interview transcript 3.19.

⁴⁸⁰ Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 5.

A frequent response among interview participants to the dissonance between espoused theology and lived experience was to compensate by focusing more on *theological truisms* that speak to the inherent value of their work in God’s eyes rather than on their actual experiences. Yet theology alone is insufficient as the comment from one woman illustrates: “I don’t think I would have ever intellectually agreed with the idea that some jobs are more spiritual than other jobs,” she said about her work, “[but] on the emotional level I believed that.”⁴⁸¹ What is needed to bridge this espoused theology-embodied spirituality gap are practices that cultivate attentiveness to God in work. “I think that [what would] really help people,” said one seasoned salesperson “is providing tangible things [Christians] can do in any profession to see growth in [their] life and ways God is actively engaged in the little stuff.”⁴⁸²

The issue of experiencing God’s presence in work is an important feature of Christian spirituality that manifests itself in diverse ways according to personality, need and context. It may be that this spirituality will offer language that opens up dimensions of human experience which are present but only vaguely sensed by Christians in their work. At the end of an interview one man reconsidered his earlier response and said, “Maybe I do feel God’s presence [in my work]—maybe I just don’t have the right vocabulary for it.”⁴⁸³ In the next chapter I will pick up on this relationship between theology and spirituality and argue that a recovery of the Psalms in the lives of Christians and worshiping communities can help address this pressing need.

⁴⁸¹ Interview Transcript 3.01; cf. Interview Transcripts 1.16; 2.1.

⁴⁸² Interview Transcript 3.07.

⁴⁸³ Interview Transcript 3.27.

2. *Work and Intimacy with God*: A reoccurring theme surfaced throughout the interviews: even in the midst of struggle, there can be experiences of intimacy with God through a person's work. A theology of work that fosters Christian spirituality should offer an account of such experiences with God. The framework of poetic practices can be taken further by showing the relationship between everyday culture-making practices, the desire for meaning and joy and encounters with God. As one clerical worker described her work:

In those moments, [when the job comes to fruition], it's done, you've figured it out, it's a completed thing, I would say in those moments I experienced God a lot, too, but in a different aspect in the sense of a different level of intimacy, because [I experienced] intimacy and contentedness with who I was and how he made me... [At these times I think] 'Wow, you created me this way. You've put together such an interesting set of skills.' It was just a very intimate moment, to [think], 'This is who you created me to be.' This is when I feel the most fulfilled.⁴⁸⁴

Looking at work from the perspective of the symbolic nature of our everyday culture-making practices can be illuminating (as Dyrness argues). However, we should not limit our understanding of poetic practices to a quest for beauty and satisfaction. This woman's experience (and others like her) highlights the point that even in the midst of our toilsome work there can be degrees of intimacy with God.

Conclusions on (Liturgical) Worship and Work

1. *The Holy Spirit in our midst*: Two important questions arise out of the research in congregations. Do we have a theology that frames the weekday work and corporate

⁴⁸⁴ Interview Transcript 1.17.

worship in terms of dynamic reciprocity? Do we connect this to our theology of the Holy Spirit's work in the world and in the church?

One of the surprising and exciting themes arising out of my research in the field is the stories of people describing how their workweek influences how they inhabit corporate worship. Much of the literature surrounding faith and work emphasizes the ways in which Sunday worship should influence Monday through Friday work. In contrast to this, it was those people who had regular practices of bringing weekday work into Sunday worship who reported a higher rate of encountering God in their work.⁴⁸⁵

In light of the detailed accounts of how Christians participate in the liturgy more attention should be given to this practice in theologies of work and vocational discipleship. The weekly rhythms of the corporate worship liturgy are vital to a pursuit of living all of life before the face of God. Counter-intuitively, what seems most critical to cultivating an “undivided life” in which “work and worship are one” (a value of City Church San Francisco) is *not a focus on connecting Sunday sermons to weekday work* but rather *providing worshipers with tangible practices* for bringing the praises, laments, confessions and petitions arising from everyday work experiences into the liturgical performance. These sacrifices of thanksgiving, lament, repentance and supplication are ways of responding to God and become a means of employment in the story rehearsed through the liturgy.

Theologically speaking, this raises the issue of the Holy Spirit's presence in the lives of believers—both in their everyday work as well as in corporate worship. A theology

⁴⁸⁵ Those with some form of *Sacrificer* element in their approach to liturgical worship on average report that they encounter God in or thru their work an average of 1.56 ways (range 0-3). The averages for *Occasionals* was 0.95, *Occasionals-Leavers* 0.7, *Leavers* 0.7, and *Nulls* 0.6.

of work needs to focus on the presence of the Spirit in both contexts and explore the role that liturgy plays in integrating these experiences. The numerous accounts from participants about experiences of corporate worship in light of work highlights the need to explore practical ways of fostering intentional integration of weekday work and liturgy. This also raises question of the pastoral role in the lives of parishioners. In the next chapter I outline practical recommendations for integrating weekday work and corporate worship. I also suggest that the metaphor of the pastor as *Missionary Bible Translator* can assist pastors desiring to come alongside parishioners in order to help discern the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that lessons from the vernacular theologies of Christians and congregational approaches to vocational discipleship have significance to theologians seeking to construct a theology of work. The specific theological questions a person asks arise from specific contextual realities and are largely based on the given role work plays in their life. Studying vernacular theologies allows us to see important connections that the *sensus fidelium* makes in bringing God's Word and the Holy Spirit's leading to bear on their lives.⁴⁸⁶ Theologians stand to learn much from these connections, but they will only appreciate their depth and importance if they take the time to undertake a "theology from the road."⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶ Richard J. Mouw, *Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 23-25, 54; 82-84.

⁴⁸⁷ John Mackay, *A Preface to Christian Theology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 29-30.

In the final chapter of this dissertation I will build on the conclusions of this qualitative research and explore four recommendations for the ongoing work of vocational discipleship in these congregations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: A Theology & Spirituality of Work Fit for our Times

“In nothing has the Church so lost her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that *the greater part of the world’s intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion.*”⁴⁸⁸
[Emphasis mine]

~ Dorothy Sayers

“My story is important not because it is mine, God knows, but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours. Maybe mothering is more important than that we keep track, you and I, of these stories of who we are and where we have come from and the people we have met along the way because it is precisely through these stories in all their particularity... that God makes himself know to each of us most powerfully and personally. If this is true, it means that to lose track of our stories is to be profoundly impoverished not only humanly but also spiritually.”⁴⁸⁹

~ Frederick Buechner

“At their face value, then, these are psalms [referring to psalms with a postscript connected to specific stories of David] straight from life: from the battlefield or ‘the cave,’ not from the sanctuary or the cultic drama. But the musical directions and the allusions to ‘the choirmaster’... show that they were collected, and where necessary adapted, for use in worship. This is the opposite direction of flow (that is, from life to cult) from what is pictured by most modern scholars.”⁴⁹⁰

~ Derek Kidner

⁴⁸⁸ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?: Why Christians Must Choose Either Dogma or Disaster (Or, Why It Really Does Matter What You Believe)* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 1999), 106.

⁴⁸⁹ Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 1991), 30.

⁴⁹⁰ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 16-17.

Introduction

I have now come to my concluding chapter. The aims of this dissertation are twofold: to provide resources to help evangelical churches engage in vocational discipleship within their community and to provide an alternative method for constructing a theology of work based on qualitative research. My thoughts have been framed by this central research question: what theological and methodological resources could be drawn from the Neo-Calvinist tradition, biblical studies, theology of work scholarship, and qualitative research to help address the failure of a Reformed theology of work to make its way into the everyday work lives of Christians?

I have argued for throughout this dissertation that a theology of work is best developed by attending to the manifold mission of the Triune God as revealed in the Scripture. My thesis is that *work is an integral part of human existence, it can be a poetic project through which humans seek joy and cope with suffering.*⁴⁹¹ *Work plays an integral role in how Christians seek to glorify God as they pursue a satisfying life in the face of pain and adversity.*

In Chapter 1 I offered a preliminary analysis of the field of theology of work and outlined the need for an interdisciplinary approach in future explorations of this important subject. Chapter 2 was my historical account of early Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed approaches of bridging the ancient Scripture-contemporary culture gap in light of the social problem and dehumanizing work experiences of nineteenth century workers. In Chapter 3 I analyzed the two leading late twentieth century theologies of work (Catholic and

⁴⁹¹ Recall the discussion above and footnote 6 that “poetic practices” refer to symbolic culture-making activities by which people attempt to experience a satisfying life.

Pentecostal) as well as substantive Reformed responses to these texts. My analysis of these interchanges between Catholic, Pentecostal and Reformed theologians highlighted the need for a biblical theology for understanding human work in light of the Holy Spirit's presence in the world as well as an interdisciplinary methodology for assessing the lived experiences of Christians in their work and church.

In light of this assessment of the theology of work literature, in Chapter 4 I set out a biblical theology of the mission of God and its implications for understanding the Holy Spirit's active presence in the world and human work. Chapter 5 outlines the interdisciplinary methodology that I used for incorporating ethnographic research into the construction of a theology of work. Finally, in Chapter 6 I gave an analysis of my ethnographic research conducted in three congregations. Since my argument is that the faithful embodiment of the gospel requires ongoing reflection on the dynamic interchange between formal theology and vernacular theology, I argued that the place to begin is with an inquiry into the theological reflection taking place in the everyday life of Christians. The findings of this qualitative research highlighted the need for vocational discipleship efforts to include and go beyond worldview formation to include Christian practices that cultivate a spirituality for faithful discipleship in the workplace.

In this chapter I pick up on the conclusions from the qualitative research outlined at the end of the previous chapter and set forward recommendations for four areas of development for a theology of work to support the vocational discipleship efforts in the three churches under study. These recommendations include a new metaphor for thinking about the pastor's role in vocational discipleship, reinstalling the Psalms as the Prayer book of Jesus as a way of cultivating an earthy spirituality in churches, cultivating

congregational ecologies where vocational discipleship can take place, and fostering habits of inhabiting corporate worship that foster spiritual tenacity and an integrated life of work and worship.

Recommendations for Vocational Discipleship in Congregations

1. Changing the Metaphor of the Pastor's Role

The latter part of Lesslie Newbigin's life was devoted to urging Western churches to undertake a missionary encounter with the societies in which they exist. Critical to this missionary encounter is both a firm identity in the narrative of Scripture which offers a "yes" and a "no" to every culture—this is a critical dimension of a public demonstration of the lordship of Jesus Christ over every aspect of public life particularly *in and through the ordinary cultural vocations of Christians*. On this account changes in pastoral ministry were needed. Speaking out of his context as a bishop in Madras he wrote, "The ordained pastor is called to train all the members committed to his care for their ministry in the world, even though some of them have not yet woken up to the fact that there is a ministry to which they are called."⁴⁹²

If the work of pastoral ministry involves bridging the worlds of Scripture and work, what does this mean practically for pastor's role in the life of these Christians? Transitioning from the context of Scripture to the realities of work today is not always easy. While the task of exegeting Scripture places the pastor in a teaching and preaching role, the task of equipping Christians for the work world places the pastor in a resourcing and

⁴⁹² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1977), 77.

equipping role much like that of a *Missionary Bible Translator*. There are many implications for the role a pastor plays in helping Christians translate their faith into the work world, but I will highlight just one here.

In his seminal work, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Lamin Sanneh argues that the commitment of Western missionaries to the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular of African people groups was the means by which the colonial impulses were resisted and ultimately overturned by Africans. Missionaries engaged in the translation work quickly found themselves at the mercy of cultural insiders to help navigate “the quicksand of indigenous cultural nuances” and ultimately had to “turn matters over to indigenous experts who, in any case, may feel called upon to challenge missionary leadership.”⁴⁹³ Post-colonial efforts at missionary activity and translation have attempted to learn from these historical abuses that conflated Christianity with colonial agendas. It is more common today to see the translation process as a joint effort of Bible translators and cultural insiders with the awareness that it will be successive generations in that culture who will work out more fully the indigenous and pilgrim impulses of the gospel in that context.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹³ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Mission: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Revised) (Maryknoll: Orbis books, 2009), 4-6.

⁴⁹⁴ The “indigenous” and “pilgrim” principles are set forth in Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 7-9. An illustration from a missionary Bible translator is apt here. When Daniel Shaw first began his career, he served as a missionary to the Samo people in Papua New Guinea and encountered a unique problem while translating the passage in Matthew 14:13-21 where Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 people. After hearing an initial translation, the Samo asked, “What kind of grass did Jesus tell the people to sit on?” A conversation ensued that revealed the complexities in translating the message of Scripture for a present-day audience. As he came to learn, there were nearly forty words for grass in the Samo language—each one referring to a different type of grass in the surrounding landscape. The word choice triggered various associations for the Samo that colored the way they heard the story. The wrong word choice, for example, might draw their attention away from Jesus as the central focus of the story if the word selected referred to thorny grass that was painful to sit on. In the translation process, Daniel and the Samo worked together to find the proper word

The temptation for pastors seeking to equip their parishioners is to overemphasize attempts at worldview formation to the neglect of other dimensions of spirituality and discipleship. As early as 1941 Dorothy Sayers was decrying this pastoral misstep of trying to remove laypersons from their vocational contexts in order to insert them in more spiritual church work. She writes:

when you find a man [*sic*] who is a Christian praising God by the excellence of his work—do not distract him and take him away from his proper vocation to address religious meetings and open church bazaars. Let him serve God in the way to which God has called him. If you take him away from that, he will exhaust himself in an alien technique and lose his capacity to do his dedicated work. It is your business, you churchmen, to get what good you can from observing his work—not to take him away from it, so that he may do ecclesiastical work for you. But, if you have any power, see that he is set free to do his own work as well as it may be done. He is not there to serve you; he is there to serve God by serving his work.⁴⁹⁵

The shortcoming of worldview formation is not that it is wrong but that it is incomplete for Christian discipleship. The danger lies in not realizing its incompleteness. As has already been shown in this dissertation, acquisition of theological categories can be helpful for equipping Christians to pursue their work as disciples of Jesus but that this does not necessarily (or easily) translate into a fully formed spirituality. Part of the reason for this is that such emphasis on cognitive acquisition of doctrines does not respect the more

that enabled an understandable hearing of the story that was nonetheless shocking in its portrayal of Jesus' abundant and miraculous hospitality. (R. Daniel Shaw, "Of Grass, Food, and Hospitality: The Role of Cognitive Studies in the Translation/Communication Task." *Scriptura* 2007 Vol. 96, pp. 501-523).

⁴⁹⁵ Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* 110.

intuitive ways in which most Christians engage in their work. As one woman explained it to me:

I don't think about what I do, I just do what I do. I think that God is weaving a story through me and my work. That may be why it looks intentional, but it's really more of a synthesis of my gifts and desires, opportunity and the Holy Spirit's work in me. I'm seeking him and my interests simultaneously and this is where he has brought me! I guess what I mean to say is that I don't think about the theology surrounding my work, I just do what I love and I serve Jesus by doing what I am passionate about. There is theology mixed in I guess, but I don't start there.⁴⁹⁶

Pastors need to be aware of this more tacit approach to the life of faith evidenced by many Christians. Even if the comment about pursuing God and self-interest may raise red flags, it should not necessarily be written off as irrelevant. Like missionaries, pastors need to begin where the gospel begins and that is with the concrete socio-historical-psychological-spiritual situatedness where God draws people to himself. As Andrew Walls reminds us, God does not wait for us to purify all our motivations any more than he does require us to clean up our sinful lives and rid all cultural prejudices before coming to him.⁴⁹⁷

In reflecting on the pastoral work of Jim Mullins and Riccardo Stewart we learn that in order for effective translation of gospel to take place in the lives of Christians the pastor's role needs to be as much as a *learner* as it is a teacher. The pastor and the Christian in the workplace are both experts in their own field, and it is vital they work together to

⁴⁹⁶ Informal conversation about work with a parishioner at Congregation 3. Her comment came in the context of reflecting on her experience of doing a "Faith and Work" interview with *Christianity Today*.

⁴⁹⁷ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 7.

bring about effective translation of the faith as was the case in Mullins’s collaboration with a parishioner to create a commuter’s prayer liturgy.⁴⁹⁸ The pastor has knowledge and skills for interpreting the world of Scripture, but on their own they cannot translate the Christian faith into the realities of the workplace. Much like the translation work that occurs across cultures, the process of translation into the world of work requires the laity to take ownership of interpreting and embodying Christian faith in their workplaces.

The role of the pastor in the translation process entails helping people “keep track of their stories of who we are and where we have come from and the people we have met along the way because it is precisely through these stories in all their particularity... that God makes himself known to each of us most powerfully and personally.”⁴⁹⁹ The development of a theological worldview is more exciting and challenging than the simple acquisition of creation theology and cultural mandate doctrines. The responsibility of the church to engage in vocational discipleship pushes pastors and parishioners alike to develop an ecclesiology in which all members of the body have unique gifts and mutual responsibilities in the church’s participation in the *missio Dei*.

2. *Cultivating an Earthy Spirituality: Reinstalling the Psalms as the Prayer Book of Jesus*⁵⁰⁰

Research conducted in three congregations revealed a felt need for a Christian spirituality that can help reclaim the vivifying rhythms of work and rest, and fortify against

⁴⁹⁸ See Interview Transcript 1.09.

⁴⁹⁹ Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 1991), 30.

⁵⁰⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1974). See especially Chapters 1-2, pages 9-21.

the growing “present shock” felt in American society today.⁵⁰¹ As far back as 1973 Peter Berger began describing malevolent features of late modernity in Western, technologically driven societies. For Berger, a malaise of loneliness, homelessness and alienation cast a spell on people who found themselves forced to inhabit numerous “lifeworlds” on a daily basis.⁵⁰² This experience was poignantly captured by Max De Pree’s words: “For many of us who work, there exists an *exasperating discontinuity* between how we see ourselves as persons and how we see ourselves as workers. We need to eliminate that sense of discontinuity and to *restore a sense of coherence* in our lives.”⁵⁰³

Fragmentation and loss of coherence has accelerated due to the rapid proliferation of technology to every facet of life. With the expanded mobility afforded by technology it is not only possible, but expected that a person should be accessible at all times of the day and from every corner of the globe. The shift to an information-centered society has moved *work to the people*, but in doing so it has broken all levies and threatens to fill every part of life with work. Whereas the nineteenth century worker had to face the erosion of the centuries-long trade guilds, the twenty-first century worker faces the erosion of boundaries between work and non-work. The eight-hour workday and six-day workweek seem

⁵⁰¹ Douglas Rushkoff, *PRESENT SHOCK: When Everything Happens Now* (New York: Current, 2013), 2. “Our society has reoriented itself to the present moment,” writes Rushkoff. “Everything is live, real time, and always-on. It is not a mere speeding up... [i]t’s more of a diminishment of anything that isn’t happening right now—and the onslaught of everything that supposedly is.”

⁵⁰² Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, Hansfried Kellner, “Modernity and Its Discontents,” in *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (Oxford: Penguin, 1973), 182-200.

⁵⁰³ Max De Pree, *Leadership is An Art* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 32. (Emphasis mine).

antiquated in a work environment where virtually everyone has given up on these traditional boundaries of work and rest.⁵⁰⁴

Looking to the Scriptures in light of this congregational research we find the book of Psalms to be a *locus classicus* providing tangible practices that cultivate a spirituality that can impart life-giving creational rhythms and integrate knowledge of God, self, others and the world. Here I will focus on Psalm 104 as a sample of what the Psalter offers in terms of spiritual practices that attune the mind and heart of the believer to the active presence of God in and around them.

Between the pre-fall cultural mandate given in the garden (Gen. 1:28) and the New Creation when lion and lamb lie down together in peace (Isa. 11:6-7), the Scriptures attest to ambivalence about work that corresponds to the experience of life in a fallen world. Work is not only a gift of God basic to humanness (Ps. 104:23), it is also the target of the curse of sin outside of the garden (Gen. 3:17-19; Ps. 104:35). Any theology of work for equipping the church must face this ambivalence head on and accept the world as it is. It is in this tension of the already-but-not-yet that the Spirit of God is at work in the lives of people as they pursue their daily work. Psalm 104 offers two essential resources for work East of Eden: a dynamic view of God's active presence in the world and freedom within the rhythms of work and rest.⁵⁰⁵

A Dynamic View of God's Presence in the World. For the many individuals who awake each day to the looming inundation of work and the demand to be incessantly “on,”

⁵⁰⁴ A recent Gallup poll (August 24, 2014) found that the average workweek of Americans is not 40 but 47 hours per week, and that 25% of salaried employees work 60 hours or more per week (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/175286/hour-workweek-actually-longer-seven-hours.aspx>, accessed 9/18/14).

⁵⁰⁵ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 190.

feverishly plugged in, and frantically busy, Psalm 104 helps us experience the world and work differently—to sense God’s activity in the ordinary events of daily life. This psalm offers the most extensive discussion of the relationship between God and creation outside of Genesis. As Genesis 1 and 2 unfolds the beginning of the story of God and His creation community, Psalm 104 functions as a prayer that enables us to inhabit this story in a God-honoring way.

Psalm 104 teaches us that God is the main actor of the creation story and his presence pervades this world. God is the transcendent other distinguished from creation, but he is at the same time immanent within the world, wrapping himself in light (v. 2), and riding on the winds and the clouds (v. 3). In these verses God’s originating and ongoing activity with each part of creation is as royal as it is intimate. We see a striking example of this in Psalm 104’s inversion of the Aaronic blessing:⁵⁰⁶ when God hides his “face” creation is dismayed, and when He sends forth his spirit He renews “the face of the ground” (v. 29-30). God does not stand at a distance but is continually involved in providing energy and breath (v. 29-30), provisions of food and water (v. 10-16, 27), and even a variety of habitats for the members of non-human creation (v. 12, 17-18).⁵⁰⁷

Like a vaccination that prevents the spread of a deadly virus, Psalm 104 injects a timely antidote to fight off the prevailing disenchantment in our Western social imaginary by inviting us to pray in a way that names God’s active presence in the most detailed of accounts. The desire to “channel” or connect with God in one’s work can be greatly aided

⁵⁰⁶ Numbers 6:24-26.

⁵⁰⁷ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 368; John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume III: Psalms 90-150* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 181-2, 197-9; James L. Mays, *Psalms: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 333, 335.

by cultivating a praying imagination that is funded by these vivid pictures of God's ongoing care for Creation.⁵⁰⁸ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks makes this connection between theology and prayer clear when he writes: "summary statements of Jewish faith orient us to the spiritual contours of the world that we actualize in the mind by the act of prayer."⁵⁰⁹ This is a helpful way of viewing how Psalm 104 orients the worshiper to life through the act of praising God for the specific ways His presence is experienced in the world. Following its lyrical praise we are invited into a powerful practice of worship that attunes us to the spiritual contours of the world and places our work within the larger reality of God's *enduring* benediction, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).⁵¹⁰

Freedom Within Rhythms and Constraints. The opening four verses of the psalm depict the kingly majesty and power of God with rich imagery. It is the rule of this Creator King over the winds and clouds and earth that invokes security, "You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken" (v. 5). And the king's might is displayed by setting limits and constraints on the various patterns of life within the creation community. "The bounds are set against the chaotic waters (v. 9)," James Mays writes in commenting on this psalm, "but the limits hold because the LORD reigns. Life in the world depends on

⁵⁰⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 25-89; Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John & the Praying Imagination* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), xiii-xiv.

⁵⁰⁹ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, commentary on "Shaharit," *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd., 2009), trans. Jonathan Sacks, 22.

⁵¹⁰ Mays, *Psalms*, 331. The words, "Bless the Lord, oh my soul," open and close this psalm and reinforce the liturgical invitation to individual and community to move from being a mere spectator to worshipful response to God as creator and provider (Goldingay, *Psalms*, 196-7, 181-2; Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 55-8.).

the reign of God.”⁵¹¹ God’s reign permits a reliable world that includes consistent rhythms of day and night, sun and rain, springtime and harvest (v. 16-23). His ongoing involvement produces order and function as well as the boundaries between each part of the creation. He gave specific tasks to each part of creation and arranged them in patterns of interdependence (springs for animals, v. 10-1; grass for cattle and plants for humans, v. 14-5; trees for birds to nest, v. 16-7, night and day to demarcate the work of animals from humans, v. 20-3).⁵¹² Creation’s order is not intrinsic to its nature but rather due to the fact that God continues to be active within creation. He stands at His post day and night calling forth the sun, moon, and stars to run their course and to undertake the particular vocation he has given to them (v. 19-20).⁵¹³

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Herman Bavinck described the changes affected by technology on the human experience, “Technology has now been elevated to the rank of science,” he wrote, “and has gradually turned man into a ruler of nature and of all its powers. Every invention that he makes is a kind of emancipation; steam and electricity shortened the distances and render people more and more independent of place and time, of wind and weather.”⁵¹⁴

A century later we can now see the long-term impact of these “emancipations” through technology which has placed more and more responsibility on individuals to set

⁵¹¹ Mays, *Psalms*, 333-4; Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 65.

⁵¹² Terence Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), pp. 280-1; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 197-8. Old Testament texts that are relevant to this topic are: Hag. 1:10-1; Job 37:6; Deut. 28:4; Ps. 65:9-13.

⁵¹³ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 198.

⁵¹⁴ Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family* (Kampen: Kok, 1912), trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian’s Library Press, 2012), 129.

self-imposed limits. The natural rhythms of light and darkness and changes of seasons and weather no longer loom as inhibitors over our plans and schedules as in former times (this is to say nothing of the loss of social mores that once governed society through explicit “blue laws” or unspoken taboos concerning work).⁵¹⁵ Amidst such unstructured experience of “freedom,” Psalm 104 offers life-giving coherence by aligning us with the daily rhythms of the entire cosmos. In particular, verses 19-24 show us a picture of the movements of the larger community of creation, “teeming with life and exerting pull of their rhythm on man and beast.” The rhythms of light and darkness are a safeguard built into creation that established rhythms of work and rest, which in Derek Kidner’s words, “is one of His [God’s] best gifts.”⁵¹⁶ Freedom requires constraints, and in these creational boundaries and rhythms the psalms help us find humanizing paths to which we must conform our lives.

We see a vivid example of this in Dana’s practice of carrying verses from the Psalms in her pocket while she is on duty. This is an embodied spiritual practice that tunes her to the Spirit of God’s work within the confines of the hospital. The psalms provide a way of facing the “shitty” [*sic*] realities of life in a fallen world and bringing these before God as she prays for awareness of his presence in the broken lives and sick bodies to which she attends. Work does not afford the time and space that the liturgy provides for fully processing these hardships or her emotional exhaustion. However, this does not lead her to assume that God is therefore absent or unfeelingly aloof from her or her patients. There is a type of spiritual communion with God that can only be found in her participation in God’s

⁵¹⁵ See entry on “blue laws” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*: <http://www.britannica.com/topic/blue-law> (accessed 6/19/15).

⁵¹⁶ Kidner, *Psalms Books III-V*, 371.

purposes (e.g. “being the hands and feet of Jesus”) *through* her work that cannot be found in other responsibilities of Christian discipleship. The ability of Psalms like Psalm 23 to orient her to the spiritual contours amidst the darkness of the fallen world illustrates the ways in which this prayer book of Jesus is a tool that the Holy Spirit uses to conform Dana to the cross of Christ. Jesus’ testimony to the Holy Spirit is that he is the comforter and guide who would “lead you into all truth” (John 16:12; 14:26) and there is not a domain of human existence where this does not apply.

3. Congregational Ecologies & the Strategic Role of Vocational Discipleship

Throughout my qualitative research I found that while work may not be the most pressing issue facing the church today it is nonetheless a strategic area for engaging in the formation of holistic cultural discipleship. Some of our most profound joys and pains have their roots in our work. Work is the source of some of the highest human aspirations and deepest anxieties.⁵¹⁷ Churches who desire to equip disciples for every sphere of life would do well to give focused effort to engage the laity in their weekday work.

Genesis 1 and 2 help us understand the ways in which work is fundamental to human existence as God intended. Humans are hardwired to engage in “world formation,” the cultivating of creation’s potentialities into cultural acts and artifacts.⁵¹⁸ Through these activities we image God by imitating his own creative and life-giving work in the creation

⁵¹⁷ The young with their future-tense hope and fear “what will I do?,” the unemployed with their anxious need for survival wonder “when will I find work to support myself/family?,” the restless, unhappily employed wonder, “maybe there is a better line of work that will bring me joy and utilizes more of my gifts?,” the vocationally mobile wonder “should I make a switch to a job that better fits my career ambitions or makes me more happy? How do I weigh the costs and benefits to me and my family?”

⁵¹⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “More On Vocation: A reply to Eller,” *The Reformed Journal* Volume 29, Issue 5 (May 1979), 22.

project that the human community has continued since Eden. In so doing humans can experience a form of fellowship with God that is unique to this mode of human activity.

This theological foundation helps us interpret experiences of work that bring together personal passions, gifts and growth and offers pointers on redirecting the abusive forms of work to more God-honoring ways. The close connection between God's presence and the deeper knowing of the self through work are by no means insignificant. The stories of Christians experiencing God while using their talents at work attest to the reality that in imitating God humans reflect God's image and find deep fulfillment. In setting out to develop creation's potentialities, this population attests to their own growth and development of potentialities through their work.

There are a variety of roles that work might play in a person's pursuit of the good life.⁵¹⁹ By beginning with a theological vision of the human person, we are in a better position to show the goodness and limits of work. Work is an integral part of how humans find satisfaction and image God in the world. However, a person can be authentically human while not having the opportunity or capacity to work.⁵²⁰

Pastorally speaking one of the most fruitful lines of inquiry in my research was to begin by tracing the interplay between the roles that work plays in a person's life and the satisfaction they experience from it. Endeavoring to discover the role that work plays in a

⁵¹⁹ The human desire to undertake culture-making activities can take a variety of forms, some of which extend beyond how a person makes a living. This both substantiates the value of paid work and relativizes its worth in light of its ability to deliver on complete life satisfaction. Job satisfaction does not equate to life satisfaction, though it certainly has an important role to play. Human work extends beyond occupations to include all world-formative endeavors.

⁵²⁰ Here it is important to note the linguistic nuance between arguing that work is a way that humans "achieve" their humanity (Pope John Paul II), "express" their humanity (Miroslav Volf), and that through "work a person's humanity comes to light" (Herman Bavinck). Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 23; Volf, *SJT*, 72-73; Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, 118. See my discussion of these three theologians and my opting for Bavinck's view in Chapters 2 and 3.

particular person's life offers a unique vantage point for ascertaining the shape that their pursuit of a God-honoring, satisfying life has taken and the role that their faith plays in their life. Conversations about work were consistently strategic inroads into conversations about God, identity (self) and the gospel's power to address all of life. The desire to "locate" oneself on the theological map of God's story was one of the reoccurring themes in the interviews. Those who have experienced growth in integrating knowledge of God and Scripture, self and others, and work and the world tended to mention these elements:

- An enduring community where they are known.
- Pastoral accompaniment through the joys and struggles of life and work.
- Shared language (cognitive maps) within a community of people.
- Experience of learning through pain and success.
- Embodied Spiritual practices and liturgical worship.⁵²¹

Focused effort within churches is needed to cultivate a congregational ecology with these values, relationships and dispositions in mind.

Churches should seek not only to impart to Christians a theology of work but also spiritual practices that form a posture and sensitivity to the Spirit's work in their lives and the world. On this front, the Reformed doctrine of common grace can prove helpful in discerning God's activity outside of the church.⁵²² But more important than worldview

⁵²¹ These elements are very similar to what Steven Garber identifies in terms of formative practices for spiritual vitality of Christians in his book, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*. Garber's themes include a coherent worldview/story that conveys truth that meets the demands of contemporary pluralistic society, a mentor who incarnates this truth in and through their lives and words, and a community of people with whom to embody the Christian faith (Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior*, Revised (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007)).

⁵²² The 1924 synod of the Christian Reformed Church identified three elements of common grace that are distinct from "special (saving) grace," these are: 1) Natural blessings of God to humanity at large, 2) Restraint of sin in society by God's Spirit, and 3) Civic acts of righteousness of non-regenerate persons. The specificity of the elements of common grace provides a heuristic tool with which to test specific cultural

formation is the cultivating of a social imaginary within the congregation itself. Redemption Tempe has done the most work in this area through its emphasis on stories, shared language, communal support and concrete spiritual practices. Focusing on cultivating a congregational ecology has the advantage of resourcing the intuitive ways in which most Christians undertake their work.

4. Liturgy, Spiritual Tenacity & Characteristics of an Integrated Life in Work & Worship

Perhaps the most interesting insight arising from this portion of my research is the narrative accounts of the meaning-making process that occurs during corporate worship. There is a deep spiritual process underway as Christians engage in worship of God in light of their daily life experiences. The Holy Spirit is the final preacher... and healer... and counselor.⁵²³ And it is ultimately his work among his people in the act of worship—and the meaning-making process—that is important to explore.⁵²⁴

activities in light of God's revealed purposes. Common grace is a way of upholding the multiple purposes of the ongoing *missio Dei* while not succumbing to the temptation that Stott decried of assuming that God's revelation and will was being revealed in natural historical processes of cultural development. G.C. Berkouwer's comments are helpful here: In Romans 2 we can see that forms of "civic virtues" evidenced in society do not necessarily originate in the movement of human hearts *toward God*, but rather from perceiving "the goodness and usefulness of God's orderings." Fallen persons may not understand the origin of the goodness these orderings or laws, but they may have the ability to see the attractiveness and practical benefits of these laws. For John Calvin, natural law does not depend on humanity's nature or reason (as it does for the Catholic view), but on the goodness of God's law and ordinances. (G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 200-202).

⁵²³ The idea of the Holy Spirit as the "final preacher" was suggested to me by Cornelius van der Kooi.

⁵²⁴ Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 114, 118, 37-38, 40-42; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 75; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Trumpets, Ashes and Tears," *The Reformed Journal* (February 1986): 17-22. In Chapter 4 I synthesized key elements of Hendrik Kraemer, Lesslie Newbigin and Nicholas Wolterstorff's arguments concerning liturgy and the laity. I argued that the laity in their everyday work is located at strategic outposts in the mission of God. Furthermore, Newbigin argued that the *telos* of liturgical worship is to equip the laity for their important work in their vocational settings. Liturgy is the fulcrum between the gathering and sending rhythms of the people of God. In gathering together, the people of God bring with them the trumpets, ashes, tears and petitions arising from their work contexts and offer these sacrifices in response to God's work. This theological framework is essential for

There are several characteristics of those who display a spiritual tenacity to wrestle with God through the joys, laments, failures, disorientations and victories of life in the systolic and diastolic rhythms of work and worship. These characteristics are helpful for vocational discipleship efforts in local churches. These characteristics include the following:

Coming Mindful and Expectant: Instead of seeing corporate worship and weekday work as two distinct parts of the Christian life, worship is approached with awareness that the residue of the emotions and experiences of the past week are carried consciously (or unconsciously) into worship. Coupled with this mindfulness of the effects of work there is an expectancy of undergoing a reorientation that will guide how the past workweek is evaluated and the coming work is undertaken.

Acceptance and Freedom: An awareness of the effects of work—the victories, defeats, anxieties, and hopes—opens the worshiper to accept where they are actually at emotionally and spiritually, not where they think they “should” or even “want” to be. There is a newfound freedom in such a state to take these life events and praise or cry, repent or petition as a way of laying all of life open before God in worship.⁵²⁵

connecting the shalom-seeking work of the people of God in their daily work with the corporate rhythms of liturgical worship.

⁵²⁵ A: On the good week, it's how to apply that to the weekly stories. But on the very common Sunday, it's more about the stories of either the things that I bring in from work or the relationships that I have with people outside of work. Q: What does that look like? When you bring that in, what does that look like? Is it something in the sermon, in the music, the prayer and what do you do with it? A: Sometimes it's in the reading of the scripture. What do I do? I think I let it inform my posture. **If there's a reason to praise, I'm going to enter into that. But if there's a reason to cry, I can't sing. So in those moments when I can't sing, I don't. Or in the moments that I know that I can—or maybe in my life, I feel like I'm in a place of praise, but I know that my friends are not, then I feel like I'm in a place to sing for them, and I can do that. So in that way, that's how I feel that that's informed, that space and that time is informed.** I guess it really depends on where I am, how I am emotionally, where I am spiritually. This particularly in light of A___'s death, has been a more challenging time. But as I see other friends move towards—I don't want to say normalcy, but maybe healing. Even J___ himself, I see him move towards life without A___ and

Empathy and Agency: There is a direct link between the workweek and the act of corporate worship. Taking to heart the physical and spiritual needs of others is an important aspect of Christian witness and discipleship. Corporate worship is not only a time for *receiving from God*, but also a space in which the liturgy enlists us in *interceding for the life of the world*.

Inhabiting Quietness and Facing Uncertainty: Christians, precisely in their various and scattered callings in society, are at the strategic frontiers of the Church's participation in the mission of God.⁵²⁶ The liturgical practices of the gathered community take on special significance in the rhythms of work and worship. Chief among these needs is a space and time where they can be still before God, process the difficulties of the week, invite God into those places of joy and pain, and receive from him during worship. Corporate worship affords space to inhabit quietness and allow the Spirit of God to empower us to honestly face the struggles of life and the uncertainty of the future. Encounters with God in worship often follow on this wrestling with God over the hurts and hardships of life during the liturgy.

Vulnerability in Receiving: The fact that profound experience of God's presence is found where the worlds of work and liturgy converge should not minimize the genuine risk such practices entail. Worship is in fact a time alone with God where worshipers sometimes receive personalized confirmations of God's care through song and sermon. Yet the act of bringing our deep hurts and hallelujah's before God also demands a level of vulnerability

I feel like I want to move with him, there's a little permission to maybe feel slightly differently or sometimes not, sometimes even just wrestle with that. (Interview transcript 3.17; cf. transcripts 3.17 and 2.11).

⁵²⁶ Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 172; Michael Goheen, "The Missional Church: Ecclesiological Discussion in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America," *Missiology* 30, 4 (2002): pp. 479-490.

when, for example, we offer our “desire for a job before God and then laying the disappointment at his feet.”⁵²⁷ Petitions offered to God with the hope of fulfillment require an embrace of vulnerability as we hold out our hands to receive and open ourselves to the possibility of disappointment.

Re-centered to be Re-Sent: The liturgy of corporate worship meets worshipers in their current spiritual and emotional state and usher them into the practice of rehearsing the story of what God has done, is doing and will do in the world. The liturgy also invites us to re-center our life around this story by responding to God with the praises, confessions, laments and petitions arising from our life in the world. Having been reoriented and refreshed in worship we are re-sent back into the workweek to be agents of *shalom*.

Confirmation that God is for Me in this Place: the weekly liturgical practices of worship are a reaffirmation of God’s commission to enter the specific vocational context that he has prepared for us. Through the benediction God promises to send his presence out with us and reminds us to open our eyes to those to whom he sends us.

My research among these three congregations coincides in many ways with the philosophical anthropology put forward by James K. A. Smith and the liturgical framework described by Newbigin and Wolterstorff.⁵²⁸ However, the move from the descriptive task

⁵²⁷ Interview transcript 1.21.

⁵²⁸ In his books, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), and *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), James K. A. Smith argues that evangelical approaches to cultural exegesis have placed too much emphasis on cognitive analyses of worldviews and propositional truths. This “intellectualist” approach has led evangelicals to overlook the ways in which cultural practices instill a distorted view of the kingdom of God (or the good life) and misshape human desires away from the worship of God. Smith’s argument is that attempting to counter the power of these cultural practices through the formation of the intellect alone is ill-conceived and betrays a skewed anthropology that privileges the mind over affect (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 18, 23-24; *Imagining the Kingdom*, 6-10; 12-13). “To be human is to be just such a lover,” Smith writes, “a creature whose orientation and form of life is most primordially shaped by what one loves as ultimate, which constitutes an affective, gut-like orientation to the world that is prior to reflection and even eludes conceptual

to the prescriptive approach to discipleship formation should be approached with great care. The aforementioned typology of postures towards liturgical worship in light of daily work is a heuristic tool at best that should serve to *sensitize* pastors and liturgists to the diversity of practices *already operative* within their congregation and raise an awareness of the importance of accessing the meaning-making practices at work in the lives of worshipers. In this perhaps the first step for pastors as well as parishioners is to truly grasp the integral role that cultural vocations play in the mission of God and the church's missionary encounter with society and then find creative ways of helping Christians bring those experiences—those trumpets, ashes, tears and petitions—into their participation in the liturgy.⁵²⁹

An Example of a Pastoral Prayer Within a Congregation

To conclude this dissertation I offer an example of a pastoral liturgical prayer that draws upon the work and prayers of the laity in their various and scattered vocational contexts. I begin with a copy of the email I sent soliciting input from congregants in a variety of work settings. I then proceed to show how this collaboration with parishioners

articulation" (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 51). The rational mind needs to be situated in the landscape of the foundational human imagination and desires. Lesslie Newbigin discussion of the two tasks of pastoral ministry involving gathering and sending the people of God can be found in his book, *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 79-80. Nicholas Wolterstorff adds greater specificity to what is entailed in this systolic-diastolic rhythm of the church gathered and scattered in, "Trumpets, Ashes and Tears," *The Reformed Journal* (February 1986): 17-22.

⁵²⁹ The following is a list of objections from parishioners after my presentation on the "Rhythms of work and worship" series at Grace Long Beach. I noticed what seemed to be a desire to move to generalities or "the big picture." Three areas in particular: 1. Why not just talk about "life" instead of narrowing down to "work?" 2. Why not just talk about worship in all of life rather than congregational liturgical worship? 3. Why not focus on bringing our "authentic selves" into worship instead of looking at the hopes, joys, pains and stresses of the week?

helped shape the pastoral to prepare while simultaneously preparing those who contributed to inhabit the liturgy mindful of their work contexts.

Email to Parishioners:

Dear sister or brother in Christ:

I have been asked to lead the congregation in a pastoral prayer on Oct 5th and I would love to get your input in helping me craft this prayer.

Part of my prayer will name specific areas where we need to see God's kingdom to come and His will to be done in our city and the world. Would you mind sending me 2 or 3 sentences from your daily prayers for your work context and events in our city and world that names some of these needs? Please draw from your own prayer life as your prayers will help infuse my own and help minister to the congregation.

I deeply appreciate your input on helping me shepherd our congregation in this way!

Thank you in advance.

Warmly,

Cory

After receiving many responses from parishioners I crafted the following responsive prayer as part of a corporate liturgy. I used the framework of King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:14-19 to help lay before the Lord the details of the lived realities facing his people in their various vocational callings. Whenever possible I tried to use phrasing of the congregants to help paint a picture of the lived realities in our city and in their work contexts.

Scripture Reading & Responsive Prayer

After the Scripture reading of Psalm 13 I then lead the congregation in this responsive prayer. Verse 1 of the psalm form part of the congregation's response in the liturgical prayer below.

Introduction: Please take out your bulletin and turn to the responsive prayer on page xx. As followers of Jesus we are called to be attentive to the ways in which the world is not the way it's supposed to be and where God's will is *not* being done on earth as it is in heaven. We gather here together every week to bring those experiences before God and intercede on behalf of the world. As you join me in this responsive prayer, I invite you to make the psalmist's words your own.

Leader: Eternal God made known to us in Jesus and who through the Holy Spirit bends low to hear the cries of your people. Open your eyes and look upon us your people and upon your world. Every week we leave this place and return to our neighborhoods where people are inundated by the busyness of life leaving little opportunity to experience true community, let alone the love of Jesus.

In many places in our city: race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, mental ability, income, or immigration status impede them from being seen as your true image bearers. In too many places it seems that justice is only for the privileged. The cycles of poverty, addiction and violence are so powerful that those whose work it is to assist struggle to hold out any hope for change. *We long for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, so we pray:*

ALL: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Leader: Just and Holy God, we think of the mass of bodies that are left in the wake of the wrath of ISIS in Syria and Iraq. The killing of unarmed innocent people, slaying of prisoners of war, and mass executions. Young women are being

torn from their families and sold as slaves for men's lusts!⁵³⁰ Don't you see? Can't you hear their cries slipping through the silencing hands of their oppressors! Surely the murder of children should arouse you to act!

Rise up, Lion of Judah, break the teeth of the wicked; thwart the violent plans of those in charge. Cause their strong arms and members to fall limp at their sides; their weapons to jam and rust; and the violent plans they plot to fall back on their own heads. Remember it is your name they mock, and your precious image bearers that they are devouring. *We long for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, so we pray:*

ALL: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Leader: Within our Church community needs abound. Remember the families here that are torn apart by unforgiveness and resentment. Father, some here are so weighed down with sadness unspeakable that they can't sing or pray. Hear their groans and attend to their longing to "be [made] well."

Some are in a long season of unemployment, fearful that they will not be able to provide for themselves or their family. They are simply longing for a sliver of light to lead them to a new job. Many are attempting to navigate life after divorce. Pressures of single parenting, providing an income, and salvaging of friendships squeeze out any emotional space for grieving their losses, let alone for beginning

⁵³⁰ "U.N. Report Details ISIS Abuse of Women and Children," October 3, 2014 of *The New York Times*: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/04/world/middleeast/un-report-isis-abuse-women-children.html?_r=0 (accessed 6/16/15).

the long journey of forgiveness.

Some here lay in bed at night with a loneliness so palpable that it threatens to choke away all hope. Singleness, a loveless marriage, and widowhood are not experiences they have willfully chosen. Others are struggling with retirement, trying to deny the lie that their shelf-life has expired, and hoping to find meaning in life beyond their former careers or even the golf course. *We long for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, so we pray:*

ALL: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Leader: For those working in companies with poor leadership or unethical clients, open their eyes to both the brokenness and your heart for redemption. We pray for creativity and collaboration among the business community to form strong businesses, create new jobs, and help establish a stable economy for our city. For those who protect our society: bring your peace to the turbulence and violence of their work. Fill them with wisdom that they may be shrewd yet innocent, just and yet merciful to all they meet.

Give attorneys the opportunity to represent you well in their work. Cause them to be patient with those they encounter, regardless of what they may spitefully hurl at them. Let judges not be tired emotionally and physically. Let them take seriously their positions and know that every single decision they make each and every day will affect generations and generations that follow.

For those who work in community health clinics, help them to imitate your

compassion towards their patients. Grant teachers and administrators the wisdom and grace to love their students the way *you* love them. Give grace to foster care and social workers, to be opened afresh to each case and grant them wisdom to use their power to help those who are so vulnerable. *We long for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, so we pray:*

ALL: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Jesus, it is into your resurrected and resurrecting hands that we bring our prayers to. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Comment

Drawing on the experiences and prayers of parishioners and their daily work life communicates the value placed on their vocation in the mission of God as well as solicits their help in forming the praying imagination of the congregation. Just as psalms like Psalm 51 arose from the lived realities of life outside of the liturgical gathering, these prayers come from the front lines of workplace realities and inform the worship of the congregation.⁵³¹ This practice simultaneously helps the participants prepare to bring the stresses, anxieties and successes from work into the act of liturgical worship, forming a sort of “ascension” practice in their lives.

⁵³¹ Derek Kidner writes: “At their face value, then, these are psalms [referring to psalms with a postscript connected to specific David stories] straight from life: from the battlefield or ‘the cave,’ not from the sanctuary or the cultic drama. But the musical directions and the allusions to ‘the choirmaster’... show that they were collected, and where necessary adapted, for use in worship. This is the opposite direction of flow (that is, from life to cult) from what is pictured by most modern scholars.” (Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 16-17.

Conclusion

As far back as 1948, Hendrik Kraemer was emphasizing the importance of bringing theology and the social sciences together in order to gain a critical self-understanding of the church and its changing context in the West. He writes that in Holland “the Church founded a Sociological Institute, out of the conviction that in our rapidly and incessantly changing world the Church needs not only sound theology, but also a realistic self-understanding of its concrete existence.” There is no reason why sociological research should not help support theological reflection on church life. He goes on to say that, “the traditional Church must itself create the instruments for a well-informed self-understanding and revision of its functioning and patterns. Study and discussion alone may enlighten the mind; they do not change the situation.”⁵³²

In this dissertation I have followed up Kraemer’s point and sought to ground a theology of work in qualitative research on the life of congregations. The attempts Herman Bavinck and pope John Paul II to forge a hermeneutical bridge between Scripture and contemporary challenges were built upon, using recent biblical scholarship and qualitative research to develop an updated Neo-Calvinist theology of work. The hope is that by engaging in serious study of Scripture, history as well as the current social embodiment of specific churches will reveal the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christian communities seeking to understand and participate in the manifold mission of God.

⁵³² Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 42.

Appendices

Appendix A: Demographics

Basic Demographics of the Three Cities

	Tempe Population (2013): 168,228⁵³³	San Francisco Population (2013): 837,442⁵³⁴	Long Beach Population (2013): 469,428⁵³⁵
<i>Average Household Income</i>	Median: \$47,941	Median: \$75,604	Median: \$52,711
<i>Ethnicity Demographics</i>	White 72.6% Hispanic or Latino 21.1% African American 5.9% Asian 5.7% American Indian 2.9% Pacific Islander 0.4%	White 48.5% Asian 33.3% Hispanic or Latino 15.1% African American 6.1% Pacific Islander 0.4% American Indian 0.5%	White 46.1% Hispanic or Latino 40.8% African American 13.5% Asian 12.9% Pacific Islander 1.1% American Indian 0.7%
	Persons below poverty line: 22.2% Home Ownership: 44.3%	Persons below poverty line: 13.5% Home Ownership: 36.6%	Persons below poverty line: 20.2% Home Ownership: 40.9%
<i>Top Employers⁵³⁶</i>	1. Arizona State University 2. Maricopa Community Colleges 3. SRP (Utilities) 4. Safeway Inc. 5. Wells Fargo Bank 6. Motorola 7. Honeywell 8. Kyrene School District 9. Chase Manhattan Corp. 10. U.S. Airways	1. Kaiser Permanente 2. City of San Francisco 3. U.C. San Francisco 4. University of Berkeley 5. Safeway Inc. 6. State of California 7. Wells Fargo Bank 8. Stanford University 9. U.S. Postal Service 10. Contra Costa County	1. Long Beach Unified School District 2. Long Beach Memorial Medical Center 3. Boeing 4. City of Long Beach 5. CSU Long Beach 6. Veterans Affairs Medical Center 7. Long Beach City College 8. CSU Long Beach Foundation 9. St. Mary's Medical Center 10. Molina Health Care, Inc.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Cities

⁵³³ U.S. Census Bureau website: <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (accessed 5/5/15).

⁵³⁴ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0667000.html>.

⁵³⁵ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0643000.html>.

⁵³⁶ “Tempe’s Top Employers” available at <http://www.tempe.gov/home/showdocument?id=8955> (accessed 5/5/15); “Largest Employers in San Francisco Bay Area” available at: <http://sfced.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Largest-Employers-20141.pdf> (accessed 5/5/15);

Basic Demographics of Participants

	Tempe	San Francisco	Long Beach
Age Range	22-60	26-63	24-72
Avg. Age	31.8	36.7	42.4
Income Range	<\$25,000 – \$124,999	\$40,000 - \$150,000+	<\$25,000 - \$150,000+
Gender	Male: 15 Female: 12	Male: 12 Female: 11	Male: 15 Female: 12
Marital Status	Single: 9 Married: 17 Divorced: 1	Single: 16 Married: 6 Divorced: 1	Single: 5 Married: 22 Divorced: 0

Figure 2: Demographic Overview of Participants

Average Commute of Participants to Church

	Tempe	San Francisco	Long Beach
Distance Range in Miles	0 – 30.5	0 – 3.94	0 – 19.7
Avg. Distance	5.11	1.47	3.04

Figure 2: Approximate Distance of the Commute to Church

Household Income of Participants

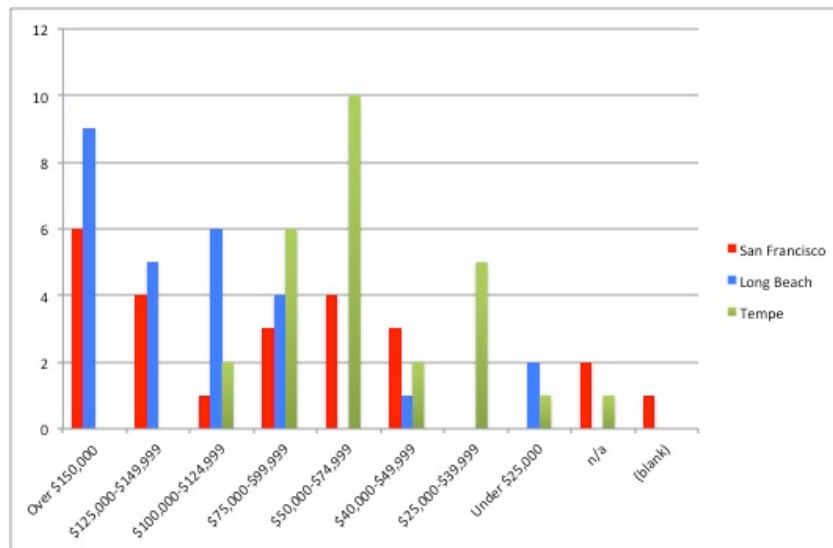


Figure 3: Income Range of Participants

Ethnicity of Participants by Congregation

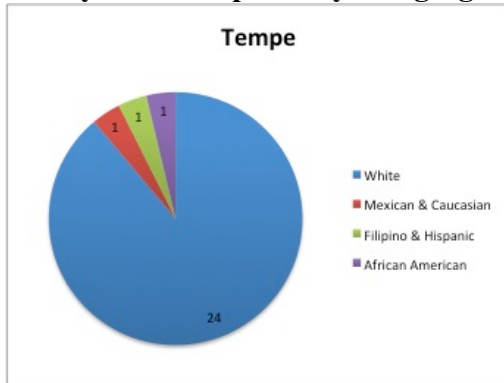


Figure 4: Ethnicity of Tempe Participants

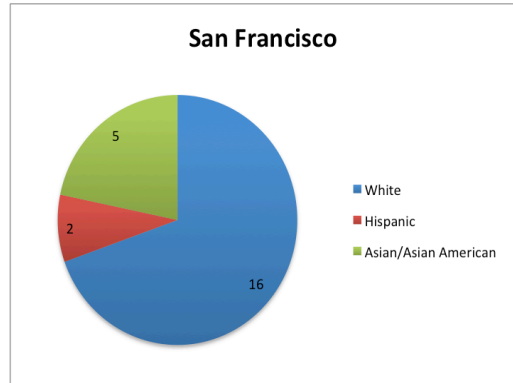


Figure 5: Ethnicity of San Francisco Participants

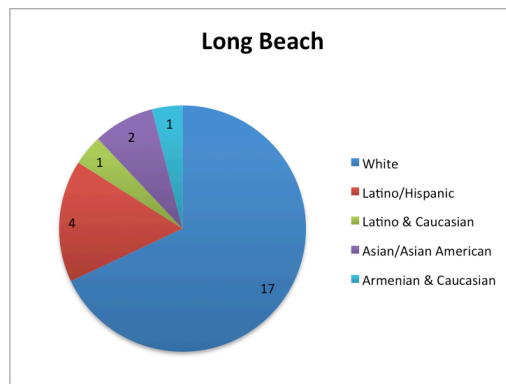


Figure 6: Ethnicity of Long Beach Participants

Education of Participants by Congregation

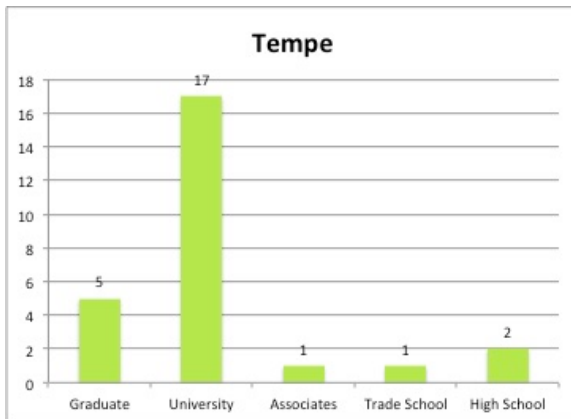


Figure 7: Education of Tempe Participants

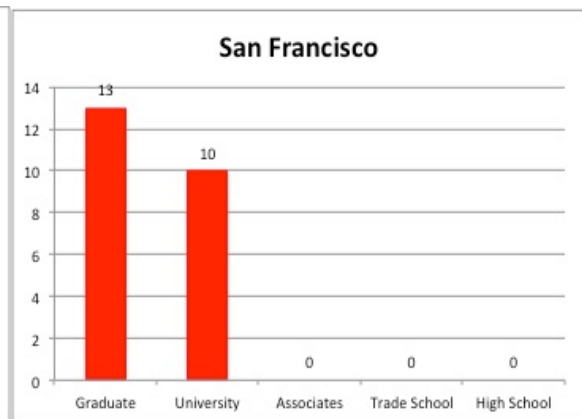


Figure 8: Education of San Francisco Participants

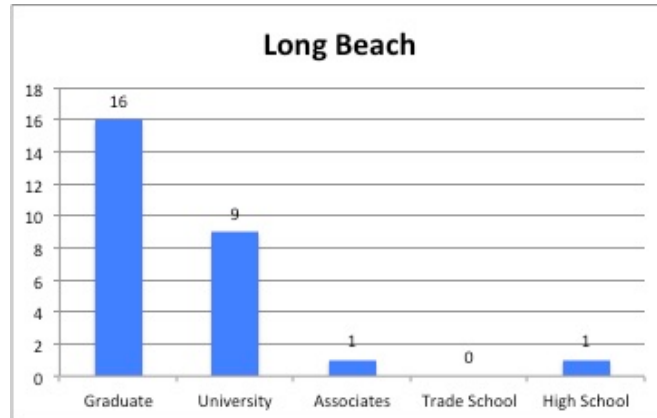


Figure 9: Education of Long Beach Participants

Vocation Areas

Tempe		San Francisco		Long Beach	
Finance	4	Attorney	4	Education	5
Graphic Design	3	Finance	3	Healthcare	4
Social Worker	3	Technology	3	Attorney	2
Exec. Assistant (2 Parents & part time workers)	3	Architecture & Design	2	Accounting (1 retired)	2
Parent	1	Marketing	2	Social Work (1 Parent & part time worker)	2
Artist (bi-vocational)	2	Social Enterprise	2	Tech Sales	1
Teacher	2	Web Design	1	Human Resources	1
Construction	2	Medical	1	Business Owner	1
Accounting	1	Engineer	1	Social Enterprise	1
Hairdresser	1	Business Consultant	1	Coffee Shop Manager	1
Nanny	1	Energy	1	Storage Manager	1
Chef/Restaurateur	1	Parent & Real Estate	1	Parent/Interior Design	1
Marketing	1	Unemployed	1	Engineer	1
Missionary	1			Advertising	1
				Apprentice	1
				Barber	1
				Unemployed	1

Figure 10: Vocation Areas of Participants by Congregation

Appendix B: Copy of the Online Survey

This questionnaire helps me to get acquainted with you and your experiences of work and church. All of your responses will be kept confidential. The initial demographic questions about your age, marriage status, education, and household size and income, are important to gain a basic understanding of your social location. The symbol () indicates that a response is required in order to complete the questionnaire.*

Demographic Information

1. **What is your name?***
2. **In what year were you born?***
3. **How do you describe your ethnic heritage?**
4. **What is your marital status?**
 - Single
 - Married
 - Divorced
 - Widowed
5. **What is the highest level of education have you completed?***
 - Grade School
 - High School
 - Trade School
 - Junior College
 - University
 - Graduate School
6. **What is the size of your household?**
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 or more
7. **In 2014, what do you anticipate your household income to be?**
 - Under \$25,000
 - \$25,000-\$39,999
 - \$40,000-\$49,999
 - \$50,000-\$74,999
 - \$75,000-\$99,999
 - \$100,000-\$124,999
 - \$125,000-\$149,999
 - Over \$150,000
8. **What is your home zip code?***
(To show your proximity to the church property)

Church Community

9. **How long have you been a member of this congregation?***
 - Less than a year

- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years

10. In a few sentences, describe why you chose to commit to this church.*

11. What church did you attend before this one?*

(If you attended a church)

12. In a typical week, how many times would you be involved in some church-related service or activity?*

- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5 or more

13. What has being a member of this congregation meant to you?*

(What role does this congregation play in your life?)

14. If you were a first time visitor to this church, what values would you think are important to this community? *

15. From your perspective, what does this church do particularly well?*

(Finish this sentence: "This church is really good at ___?")

16. What would you say have been the major events (either positive or painful) in the life of this church community in recent years?

17. Are there areas you would like to see your church grow?

Work

18. What line of work are you in?*

(How do you spend the majority of your time Monday through Friday?)

19. How long have you worked in this field of work? And what did you do before this job?*

20. How long have you worked for this company? What positions have you held?*

21. On a typical week, how many hours do you spend working (including commute)?*

22. How often do you find yourself praying about your work or work related issues?*

- Never
- Occasionally
- Weekly
- Daily
- Other:

23. What is the most common thing you pray for related to your work?*

Experiences of Work

24. Ms. A works primarily to earn enough money to support her life outside of her job. If she was financially secure, she would no longer continue with her current line of work, but would really rather do something else instead. Ms. A's job is basically a necessity of life, a lot

like breathing or sleeping. She often wishes the time would pass more quickly at work. She greatly anticipates weekends and vacations. If Ms. A lived her life over again, she probably would not go into the same line of work. She would not encourage her friends and children to enter her line of work. Ms. A. is very eager to retire.*

How much are you like Ms. A?

- Very much.
- Somewhat.
- A little.
- Not at all.

25. Ms. B basically enjoys her work, but does not expect to be in her current job five years from now. Instead, she plans to move on to a better, higher level job. She has several goals for her future pertaining to the positions she would eventually like to hold. Sometimes her work seems like a waste of time, but she knows she must do sufficiently well in her current position in order to move on. Ms. B can't wait to get a promotion. For her, a promotion means recognition of her good work, and a sign of her success in competition with her coworkers.*

How much are you like Ms. B?

- Very much.
- Somewhat.
- A little.
- Not at all.

26. Ms. C's work is one of the most important parts of her life. She is very pleased that she is in this line of work. Because what she does for a living is a vital part of who she is, it is one of the first things she tells people about herself. She tends to take her work home with her and on vacations too. The majority of her friends are from her place of employment, and she belongs to several organizations and clubs pertaining to her work. Ms. C feels good about her work because she loves it, and because she thinks it makes the world a better place. She would encourage her friends and children to enter her line of work. Ms. C would be pretty upset if she were forced to stop working, and she is not particularly looking forward to retirement.*

How much are you like Ms. C?

- Very much.
- Somewhat.
- A little.
- Not at all.

Experiences in Corporate Worship

27. Mr. X expects Sunday morning worship to be a time when he can refuel spiritually on a weekly basis. When he enters the sanctuary for worship he gladly leaves his stresses from work at the door of the church and focuses his energies on receiving encouragement from God. When thoughts from work come to mind Mr. X sees these as distractions that take away from worship of God and tries hard to set them aside. Sunday worship fills him with spiritual fuel that he needs to make it through the rest of the week. By the end of the week he feels depleted by his work and is in need of recharging.*

How much are you like Mr. X?

- Very much.
- Somewhat.
- A little.
- Not at all.

28. Mr. Y looks forward to Sunday worship because it is often a place where he is spiritually rejuvenated. He does not leave his work experiences at the door of the sanctuary but neither does he intentionally dwell on them. A few months ago Mr. Y faced a particularly difficult

season with his job and his emotions were weighed down by his work while he was worshipping. While Mr. Y looks back on that experience as being a time when the tenderness of God was very tangible, he is reluctant to allow those types of work experiences to occupy into his mind during worship. Except for times of emergency and hardship, worship for Mr. Y is first and foremost about God and not about his own circumstances.*

How much are you like Mr. Y?

- Very much.
- Somewhat.
- A little.
- Not at all.

29. Mr. Z enters Sunday worship expecting to be renewed but also to offer his life and workweek as a sacrifice to God. Experiences of joy, failure, stress, and strain of work are purposefully carried into the act of worship. He desires to receive from God during worship but also to intercede, petition, lament, praise, and celebrate what God is doing in the world in connection to Mr. Z's work. Sunday worship and weekday work are closely tied together for Mr. Z. They are two parts of his overall service and worship of God.*

How much are you like Mr. Z?

- Very much.
- Somewhat.
- A little.
- Not at all.

30. What days and times work best for you to take part in an interview?*

Please list two or three days/times of the week (including Sundays) that might work with your schedule.

Appendix C: Interview Schedules for Parishioners

Work Overview, Satisfaction/Joy, and Frustrations

A. *Work Overview*

- Describe your typical workday?
- What role does your work play in your life? **Prompt:** What has your work meant for you personally?
- In the pre-interview survey you indicated that you resonated with ____ experience of work. Please tell me more about this.

B. *Satisfying*

- What do you find most *satisfying* (rewarding/meaningful) about your work?
 - **Probe:** Can you give me an example of this?

C. *Frustrations*

- Do you find parts of your work frustrating?
 - **Probe:** Can you give me an example?
 - **Probe:** Does your faith help you make sense of these difficult circumstances? (**Prompt:** teaching, truth, bible verse, friendship, etc?)
- Are there tensions that you face in your work as a Christian? (Between your faith and work? Or because of your faith?)
 - **Probe:** Can you give me an example?

D. *Flow, challenge/growth, contribution*

- In what ways have you grown as a person because through your work? (**Prompt:** Have you faced significant challenges in your work that have caused you to grow? (times when you weren't sure if or how you would complete a project or manage new responsibilities but were able to accomplish it anyway?)
 - **Probe:** Please explain.
- Describe a time when you felt you made a significant contribution to others through your work?

God at Work

- Think of your everyday work life, are there ways in which you feel you encounter God in your work? (**Prompt:** are there ways you sense God is present in your work?)
 - **Probe:** Can you describe such a time?
- Think of your everyday work life, do you think God cares about your work? (**Prompt:** What value/importance do you think your work has to God?)
 - **Probe:** In what ways?
- Do you think God has you in this particular workplace for a reason?
 - **Probe:** please explain.
- Are there certain truths, biblical passages, authors, sermons, or prayers that give you strength or inspire you in your work?
 - **Probe:** Please tell me about them.
- In the pre-interview survey you indicated that you mentioned that **you pray ____ about** work related issues. Please tell me more about this.
 - **Probe:** What are some common things that you pray for? Can you give me examples of some recent prayers?

Church and Work

- What role has your church played in helping you to pursue your work as a Christian? (**Prompt:** What church activities or events have helped you to conduct your work in ways that are consistent with your Christian faith?)
 - **Probe:** Please describe what has been helpful to you. (**Prompt:** activities or events such as sermons, curriculum, worship, prayer, small groups, friends, etc.).
- In the pre-interview survey you indicated that you resonated with ____ experience of worship. Please tell me more about this.
 - **Probe:** In worship, have you felt that God was speaking to you about something related to your work life?). Please describe these for me.

- Are there regular times within your church community for you process to your work experiences in light of your Christian faith? (**Prompt:** opportunities in worship services: silence during service, prayers of the people, small groups, Q&A with pastor?).
- What else could your church do to help you approach your weekday work as a Christian?
- **Probe:** Do your work experiences influence your experience of worship on Sunday in positive or negative ways? Please explain. (**Prompt:** Do the stresses or successes influence your experience of hearing the sermon, singing and praying on Sunday?)

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