

CALLED OUT OF THE WORLD AND INTO VOCATION:  
REFORMED CONTRIBUTIONS TO A THEOLOGY OF VOCATION AS  
RESPONSES TO ROMAN CATHOLIC AND ANABAPTIST TRADITIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Called out of the world and into vocation: Reformed contributions to a theology of vocation as responses to Roman Catholic and Anabaptist traditions.

By Viktor S. Szemerei

My experience as a Christian engaged in business fulltime lead me to consider questions addressed in this paper regarding God calling his people to not only have a relationship with him, but to engage in that relationship in fields that are outside clerical ministry or other overtly ecclesiastic efforts. Drawing on scripture which describes a God engaged in the work of creation and providence to care for his created order, this paper shows man called to both image God and to steward the creation. That call to serve God is both in moral obedience to normative rules as well as the creative endeavor to work alongside God in his restoration of his creation until its consummation. Moses' instructions to the people of God in the wilderness, wisdom literature shared during the time in the Promised Land, and the exhortations and laments of the prophets during the period of exile all point to the moral dimension of economic decisions and its societal effects in God's redemptive history. As people strayed from being Godley stewards of his blessings and gifts in their labors and riches, calamities of economic and cultural significance befell God's people. Jesus' teaching and parables shared insight to his own engagement with labor, wealth, and commerce. The early church as expressed through the lens of Luke, Paul, and Peter also provide insight on the realities of the first centuries' Christian experience under Roman rule.

This paper will walk through the key developments in theology related to how vocation was understood from Eusebius and Augustine in the early church, medieval theology expressed by Aquinas, to pre-reformers that culminated in the Reformed positions of key theological doctrines. The developments in theology regarding soteriology, common grace, ecclesiology, and eschatology all had impacts on a theology of vocation and the developments during and after the Reformation all led to distinctives in approaches to earthly labor between Reformed positions and Roman Catholic thought. During this time, the development of Anabaptist positions provided another perspective worthy of exploration and consideration.

Over the centuries to the present as these positions have debated, they provide insights for Christians today to contemplate how they can serve God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. Culture, technology, and personal monetary situations always shift. In that experience, Christians need to know how to labor in the vineyard of the Lord according to their call to serve him, image him, and steward his creation. This paper provides analysis of how much Luther and Calvin's influence has impacted not only a Reformed understanding of vocation, but helped to mediate Catholic and Anabaptist positions along the way. It also humbly considers that the Reformed position as not the end of the discussion, but rather the best framework for going forward into a changing landscape of enhanced insight brought by the information revolution. The Reformed position that all labor can glorify God in contrast to Catholic and Anabaptist positions that provide unbiblical limitations is a great starting point for the weightier questions one must consider in the present condition.

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Chapter 1  
Introduction

Thesis Paragraph

In the earliest verses of sacred Scripture, God is introduced as a creative, working being. Much of what man can know about God's personality through Scripture is from His creative work and continued providence governing His creation. Since Adam, man has been charged to image God in working, being fruitful, multiplying, and contributing to God's redemptive work by using skills and gifts in accordance with his calling. Work is a core function of the human experience and man's relation to God and community. More than that, laboring is a command in the larger context of work and Sabbath. Yet work can also be a source for great joy and contribution to God's redemptive plan. Tracing the elements of work, production, and enjoying the fruits of one's labors through Moses, the Prophets, Jesus' ministry, the Apostles, and the Early Church, it becomes evident that God calls his people for a particular purpose, and be co-workers with God in his vineyard. As the early Church evolved to become the official state religion of the Roman Empire, approaches changed in how the church viewed work and spiritual service. Callings to ministerial functions in the church were interpreted by some to be a higher call while secular work was viewed as a lower call. Distinctions between types of work, their relation to God, and worth in society

were advocated by key theologians who supported these distinctions with Biblical appeals to live a life of holy contemplation rather than menial labor.

During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther's scriptural insights about the nature of work in a Christian's contribution towards his salvation and the assumptions he developed to undergird his theology of justification by faith radically impacted the discussion about holy vocations and labor. Later developments by John Calvin and his successors further redefined the Catholic two tiered structure and brought greater meaning to an understanding of work in the context of the Christian call to a sanctified life within the larger society. In the greater body of Calvin's doctrines on God's predestination, election, calling, providence, and common grace, Calvin went beyond Luther in his contribution to the global shift, giving labor greater inherent integrity as it images God's own creative work in redeeming and transforming creation.

The Reformed, Anabaptist, and Roman Catholic positions toward work and vocation are based on differing foundational assumptions about how Christians should relate to culture and what signifies fulfillment of the universal call to living a holy life of discipleship, obedience, and holiness. Christianity's spread throughout the world exposed Christians in the work environment to changing political and business frameworks from monarchy to capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, communism, empire, and globalism. In each of these, faithful Christians of varying traditions sought to fulfill God's call in scripture to work in accordance with God's moral law. This paper will examine the contribution of John Calvin to a biblical theology of vocation and consider its impact compared to that of Anabaptists. As both were responses to the Roman Catholic theology of vocation, this paper will explore their

unique contributions towards a theology of work and vocation and offer additional considerations of what may be next for Christians in a global and interconnected information age.

### Personal Interest

This topic is of great interest to me personally, and I believe its value to the church is important for both those in formal ministry as well as secular professions that are members of the corporate church body. Academically, my undergraduate studies focused on philosophy and organizational communication and my graduate work centered on global business administration. As a Christian my concern has always been attempting to understand how I can serve God with my talents and gifts, even though I do not feel called specifically to formal church ministry. This concern is not new for Christians individually or the church as an institution seeking to give guidance to its members and the culture as a whole. In my professional career, I have managed extensive geographic territories for large publically traded companies and have gained significant insights into corporate values and how they operate in different economic and cultural climates. In large corporations, with operations throughout the globe, and divisions, regions, and hierarchies that can be both complex and fluid, people often struggle to find how their daily tasks contribute to the overall strategic objective of the company. For Christians it can be even more challenging to see how one's work life contributes to God's redemptive plan in an eternal perspective.

Surveys that focus on work satisfaction often reveal negative results towards work. Lisa Cullen refers to 2007 Gallup poll which found that 77% of Americans hate their jobs and that Americans hate their jobs more recently than in the past 20 years. Fewer than half say they're satisfied with their current job. This trend does not break out Christians from the

general study.<sup>1</sup> Christians especially can benefit from an understanding of how their “daily grind” can be a part of God’s eternal plan and holy will. Differences in the responses by Calvinists and Anabaptists in this particular theology are interesting to me personally as I was raised in an Anabaptist tradition and later became reformed in my theology which caused me to reflect and question each of their unique contributions to my own understanding of God’s call in my professional career and contribution to society. Furthermore, having been born in communist occupied Hungary and immigrated to Southern California through a Viennese refugee camp, I have seen firsthand the consequences of ideas about material possessions and economic systems and how it can hinder productivity or expand freedom and wealth. Economic realities fluctuate for people in all life styles and stages. It is often during these changes that questions abound for regarding one’s calling. As entire societies undergo a macro shift, such as the current technology revolution, understanding how an individual’s contribution partakes in the result of the larger group becomes relevant. As such, vocation and meaning in one’s daily labors have been a recurring theme in the course of Christian history and continues to draw new questions as various Christian sects appropriate their traditions into a modern context.

### Value to the Larger Christian Church

Elders and Deacons often serve Church members who struggle with issues and concerns that arise out of their daily work. Unemployed church members in need of mercy

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Cullen, Time Magazine, “Three Signs of a Miserable Job,” August 21, 2007. Available from [http://business.time.com/2007/08/21/three\\_signs\\_of\\_a\\_miserable\\_job/](http://business.time.com/2007/08/21/three_signs_of_a_miserable_job/). Internet; Assessed from 21 September 2017.

ministry are a common issue before many church sessions. Emotional concerns that arise out of high stress employment, challenges with ethical issues in business, or a philosophical detachment from one's larger contribution to God's redemptive plan can be topics deacons and elders need to address with biblical wisdom and a historical understanding of a theology of vocation.

As a current Sunday School teacher with students ranging in ages from pre-teen to young adult, I know from personal experience that the question of "what do I want to be when I grow up?" is common in the lives of the youth and does not necessarily disappear when someone graduates and embarks on their career. In fact, this question often reappears in the lives of Christians specifically when trying to align physical and temporal efforts with eternal purpose. New life stages bring this question to mind afresh, as do major life adjustments, successes and failures. Along the way the church is to bear with one another in the blessing of true Christian fellowship. We are called to bear one another's' burdens and work to restore one another in the household of faith (Gal 6), and a coherent and Biblical understanding of a theology of vocation can benefit all whether they need to speak to their own hearts or others.

Elders and Deacons can be enriched by a more thorough understanding of this topic as they better understand the history of the church in defining vocation and redefining it under different governmental structures, economic realities, and the changing nature of work through history. They can guide their flock to key verses that express God's revealed will regarding obedience as well as verses that show his concern for productivity and economic justice. They can help navigate the laity to take a nuanced view towards money rather than drawing wholesale assumptions from commonly known verses that are often interpreted

outside of their proper context, such as the often quoted verse: “For the love of money is the root of all evil.”<sup>2</sup> Most Christians in the United States are employed in secular professions, and yet this area of study is often neglected or underrepresented in the larger scope of Christian literature. A deeper insight into this topic provides Christians the opportunity to explore a more focused and nuanced approach to applying Biblical pericopes to daily work and financial issues. If there was ever a time for Christians and church leadership to understand what the Bible says about vocation and how it has been interpreted in church history, it is now.

Like other important Biblical concepts, a theology of vocation does not exist in a vacuum. Philosophical presuppositions, cultural assumptions, and economic realities all contribute to formulating one’s position on the purpose and value of work and how one is called into a certain position or station in life. Work involves wealth and profit, engaging with people, social hierarchies, ethics, stewardship, ecology, faith, etc. While much has been written in the field of ethics for people engaged in business, there has been less available for Christians with an understanding of how Reformed perspectives of vocation aligns with the Biblical record on the topic and how it compares to other Christian traditions that often have a very different conclusion, such as the Anabaptist or Roman Catholic. Each perspective grew out of its own cultural and historical context and were often a response to preceding assumptions they felt failed to deliver for the new climate. In light of this, it is important to grasp that a Biblical understanding to vocation can be both unchanging, (in terms of a theology of vocation), and malleable (for contemporary relevance in application as cultures

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<sup>2</sup> I prefer the translation in the English Standard Version: “For the love of money is the root of *all kinds of* evil.” 1 Tim 6:10.

and economies change). It is appropriate to start by asking what relevant information Holy Scripture offers on the subjects of calling, labor, and wealth creation before asking what interpreters have drawn from its pages over the centuries.

## Chapter 2

### Scriptural Considerations for a Theology of Work and Vocation

#### The Doctrine of Creation

In the opening pages of the book of Genesis, much can be extracted and applied to the Reformed doctrine of vocation from the historical narrative of God's work in creation, man's first tasks in the Garden of Eden, the effects of the fall, and the first examples of God's redeeming provision and promises. The concepts, characters, and drama that unfolds in the proceeding chapters and books of Scripture cannot be comprehended outside of the structure, vision, and context laid out in the first three chapters of Genesis. From there we can glean additional insights to what God's word says about money matters, work, and calling in the wisdom literature, prophets, Jesus' ministry, and the writings of the Apostles.

Unlike surrounding ancient near Eastern religions with creation stories of their own, the Hebrew God is transcendent, wholly other, not confused with the creation itself nor a part of it, but separate and over it. Nor is the creation account one of violent struggle, accident, or rivalry among other lesser gods. In relation to man, theologian John Schneider points out the Hebrews were the first people whose religion demoted the material works from the status of divine being to that of clear non-divinity in contrast to other myths that venerated parts of

creation (sun, moon, stars, etc).<sup>3</sup> God speaks the creation into existence (*Ex Nihilo*) over the course of six days, each with beginning and end, morning and evening, and declared good. Yet in doing so, he points out they did not reduce it to the level of a mere object that can be used and abused. Rather, in God's declaration of all he created as being good (Gen 1:31), in its individual parts and cosmic whole, His creation is affirmed as something God loves, respects, and takes delight in. Even while it does not share in God's divinity, it does share in God's goodness and good pleasure.<sup>4</sup>

The author of Genesis affirms the material realm and bodily life but also establishes a need to see the totality of creation in the context of an "already" and a "not yet." Already in the sense that man is to continue to work, but not yet in that it is not perfected, and man is instructed to mirror God's creative work by also taking rest for worship. It has been often asked why God would need to take a rest from his work. God does not tire as man does, nor does his body require refreshment in the sense that humans experience after a six days of working. Rather God's pattern establishes the purpose of work in man. It is evident from the narrative of creation that matter is made, not eternal, and it derives its essence and purpose from God's will for it, not inherent in itself. Everything that was created, was created with a God-given purpose (*telos*). John Walton describes God's rest as follows:

What does divine rest entail? Most of us think of rest as disengagement from the cares, worries and tasks of life. What comes to mind is sleeping in or taking an afternoon nap. But in the ancient world rest is what results when a crisis has been resolved or when stability has been achieved, when things have "settled down." Consequently normal routines can be established and enjoyed. For deity this means

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<sup>3</sup> John Schneider, *The Good of Affluence*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press. 2007), 44.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

that the normal operations of the cosmos can be undertaken. This is more a matter of engagement without obstacles rather than disengagement without responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>

In his Sabbath rest, God's creative work is over and thus begins his providential care while man is tasked with working the earth and using his own God-given creative powers to work for God's expressed purposes. Vern Poythress, in his book *Redeeming Science*, cites the pattern of work and rest reflect God's own work, but also that the language of evening and morning indicate a pause in between each work day. When following the patter of work followed by rest, man is embedded into the creation order and prevented from abusing his purpose by overwork or not planning appropriately for the work.<sup>6</sup> Yet man does not rest in exactly the same way that God does. Poythress explains:

God rests forever from his initial work of creation, because it is "finished" (Gen. 2:1). Man rests only in a preliminary way on his seventh day, because his work is not yet absolutely finished. He will recommence work on the first day of the next week. But all his work heads toward the time of absolute and final rest of which Hebrews speak: "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest...." (Heb. 4:9-11).<sup>7</sup>

He presents rest not as an end unto itself, but as an ever-present reminder that he does not labor and work autonomously or entirely for himself. His work is to be invigorated by the future anticipation of final rest in the eschaton. While the material world and work within it is affirmed, Poythress offers an important insight to sanctify time and work because there is something greater than the results of our days of work and material gain.

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<sup>5</sup> John Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context, A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2006), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway. 2006), 136.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Richard Pratt writes: “The most dominant images in the cultures of the ancient Near East were those of kings. Throughout the ancient world, kings made images of themselves and placed them in various locations in their kingdoms. Pharaohs of Egypt, the Emperors of Babylon, and the kings of other empires used images of themselves to display their authority and power.”<sup>8</sup> The *Imago Dei* or image of God in man, represents both man’s status as vice-regent over the earth but a representative of God among creation. It is important to note that other elements of God’s creation were not imbued with his image. Nor does this image represent an intrinsically divine or semi-divine status for humans, but a status of relationship with the Creator. Michael Horton explains, “[I]t is not because of our soul (or intellect) that we are ranked higher than our fellow creatures, but because we have been created with a special commission, for a special relationship with God.”<sup>9</sup> This image and relationship entails great responsibility and stewardship in working the creation and tending the garden as was commanded of Adam in Gen 2:15 (to work it and keep creation). Horton points out that at every stage God announces his creation good because it responds appropriately to him. The “good” is teleologically defined. Likewise for humans, he writes, God’s image in man is not what they are *essentially*, but in how they respond *ethically*. The realization of man’s personhood depends on how their lives correspond to God’s intentions.<sup>10</sup> John Calvin’s increased attention to the *Imago Dei*, more so than other Reformers like Luther, is distinctive

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide To Interpreting Old Testament Narratives*, (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed. 1990), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervon. 2011), 381.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

by not finding the image in man's intellect or spirit. Calvin argues this image bearing is relational (ethical, covenantal) not ontological. He wrote, "The covenant and commission given to humanity by God marked a significant transition in anthropology from what humans are in their inner essence to their identity before God as responsible creatures in history."<sup>11</sup>

John Schneider said human dominion in Genesis ennobles us for the purpose of ennobling everyone and everything else, made not primarily to rule over each other, but to be co-workers for God's kingdom.<sup>12</sup> The use of God's creation to work, create, and delight in its results in neither excess nor extravagance, but rather work in its proper form is a precious expression of God's glory, human dignity, and the goodness of life. "In its proper form it is a sacrament to God's dominion over chaos and darkness,"<sup>13</sup> states Schneider.

The first covenant God created with Adam and Eve was the covenant of works in relationship to God, in which He requires total and perfect obedience from man to his divine rule.<sup>14</sup> Disobedience was to be punished with death. Man's first federal head Adam violated his first vocational call to be a vice-regent, explains Schneider.<sup>15</sup> In his fall into sin by not observing boundary God put in the garden to avoid the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>12</sup> Schneider, *Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money & Possessions*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 53.

<sup>13</sup> Schneider, 59.

<sup>14</sup> Gen 2:15-17; The Westminster Confession Section chapter 7, section 2, of God's Covenant with Man, states the following regarding the Covenant of Works: "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Free Presbyterian Press, 1995), Hereafter WCF.

<sup>15</sup> Rom 5: 5-21

and evil in Gen 2:17. Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit was sinful in their desire to break the boundaries God instituted for the caretaking of his creation. As stewards of the garden, Adam and Eve were given lordship with a lowercase "l" but in deciding to disobey, they dismissed God's true Lordship over creation. Sin indeed brought with it the promise of death and covenant curses. Genesis 3:17 reads:

[C]ursed is the ground because of you, in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Schneider notes:

In sum, the majesty and royal effect of human dominion seems lost. The man had been created *from* the ground, in solidarity with the ground, to have dominion over the ground. Now at his inaugural moment of triumph, he is lost in the dust of death: 'you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' In physical death, the ground arises in dominion over the man. The reversal is complete. The earth is a kingdom on the run toward ruin.<sup>16</sup>

While work itself was established before the fall as part of the goodness of creation, drawing from the Hebrew word to "keep" or "guard" creation in Gen 3:24, but now in the covenant curse, God uses the word for "toil" which has a distinctly negative tone. Subsequent generations will toil in such a way as under the curse both for the earth itself, the nature of work, and within the sinful nature that Adam would hand down to his progeny. Michael Horton writes about the integrity of creation affirming the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as now being different from man's imaging God in his own creative work. "The difference is

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<sup>16</sup> Schneider, 61.

good; it is when human beings, perversely imaging that they can reason, experience, will, and act as gods themselves that they reflect their fall from an original integrity.”<sup>17</sup>

The original *shalom* (peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility) of creation has been lost due to the fall, God did not abandon his creation nor his people to wallow in misery. Rather, he begins the process of liberation, redemption, and restoration from the *proto evangelium* of Genesis 3:15 where God takes Eve’s struggle unto himself and promises a deliverer who will crush the head of the serpent. The enmity put between the seed of the serpent and the seed of Eve becomes apparent in the narratives of Cain and Abel and the communities to follow until the earth was full of corruption and violence and God determined to destroy his creation (Gen 6:11-13). In the saving of Noah, his immediate family, and the creatures, God reveals his restoring covenant and re-establishes the cultural mandate to Noah. God blessed his creation again and proclaims that man should again, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen 9:21), and he promises “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind (Gen 8:21).” He also restores man’s image bearing state and dignity in the banning of murder when he says, “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, and by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made Humankind (Gen 9:6).” God’s relationship to man and the earth is set on a new course.

Yet as Noah’s sons’ descendants scattered throughout the earth with a re-established covenant, Gen 11 records the result of man’s desire again to elevate his own status rather than operate as a vice-regent, as seen in the narrative of the Tower of Babel. God judged their

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<sup>17</sup> Horton, 335.

efforts, which are recorded as having been anthropocentric (“let us make a name for ourselves”). Furthermore this desire to settle in one area was expressly opposite of God’s command in his new covenant to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1). While the curse at Babel would scatter people (as God originally intended) and cause confusion in communication to all nations, God would reveal his redemptive plan through one people that he calls to unity to be an example to the surrounding nations. In God’s covenant with Abraham and his offspring, God graciously works to restore that which was lost through Adam, by creating again a people for his own, reconciling them to Himself and providing a land that they can work and enjoy the results of its production.

The theme of promise continues in the book of Exodus and the liberation of God’s people by the leadership of Moses from the bonds of slavery. The Law of God at Mount Sinai established an ethical set of normative behaviors required in their life both vertically (to God) and horizontally (to man). The life of God’s people should reflect God’s own character and revealed will for communal living and worship. Further, the Holiness Code in Leviticus 11 lays out rules and parameters for God’s people in how they live economically within Israel. Many of the laws called for liberation of the poor and powerless, such as the leavening of grain and fruit for gleaners, caring for the sojourner, conducting business with just weights and measures, and protecting the vulnerable from unfair lending practices. Beyond those, the land itself was to be given a Sabbath rest every seventh year and a jubilee announced every fiftieth year, (the year following 7 years of 7). This Jubilee reminded the Israelites, “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.” (Lev 25:23). While some have argued this abdicates private

property, it can better be understood as establishing stewardship and Lordship, refocusing man's work as in cooperation with God and not independent of Him.

As God's people are on the brink of entering the Promised Land, Moses admonishes them to take care and not forget the Lord their God by failing to keep his commandments, exalting themselves for the monetary results of their labor (Deut 8:11-18). Moses describes the new land as a type of new Eden. This good land of brooks, waters, fountains and streams full of fruit and harvestable land promises them that they will eat without scarcity after longing for relief in the desert. This new generation watched their parents die in unfaithfulness and now the Lord himself will go before them to destroy the nations that currently occupy the land that is promised for their affluence and enjoyment. However, Moses exhorts the people not to attribute it to their own hard work by thinking, "by my own hand"<sup>18</sup> I got this wealth. As Schneider aptly points out, that is not the spirit of blessing, dominion, and delight that God established for man.<sup>19</sup>

As promised, if the people of Israel kept covenant with God and obeyed him they were promised a reward of great material possessions in the Promised Land to enjoy delight and rest. However, once the land was occupied, it was not long until the work of their hands were devoted to crafting idols and compromising God's call for their obedience and devotion. As a result, the covenant curses came with division in the land and ultimately captivity which ravaged their hope for covenant blessings in the Promised Land.

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<sup>18</sup> Deuteronomy 8:17

<sup>19</sup> Schneider, 74.

The worst fears of Moses for the people when he renewed the covenant at Moab had now been realized. The people were warned what would happen to them if they got rich in the land of promise and failed to remember their God, and the coming Prophets of Scripture wailed and groaned over the devastation that followed. Schneider points out, “More intensely than any group of writings in the Old Testament, the Prophets teach that, just as economic life is on balance is the measure of God’s blessing, so it is a measure and mirror of the soul.”<sup>20</sup> Much of the exile was the result of Israel’s economic morality, as called out by the Prophets. Amos specifically called out the people during times of economic prosperity for exploiting the weak in order to increase their own wealth. (Amos 2:6-7; 5:10-11; 6:4-7). Their affluence (with summer and winter homes) was rejected on the grounds of their inattention to the injustice of the poor’s oppression. The people of Israel confused their call to be fruitful with their first call to righteousness and justice.

The Book of Proverbs shows the complexity and mystery of life in the economic sphere. Two misrepresentations of the verses that expressly connect economic wellbeing with either evil or righteousness come from the proponents of Liberation Theology and the Prosperity Gospel. Liberation Theology generally believes that the poor are identified as the true people of God, struggling in a flawed system of poverty, corruption, and oppression. In their worldview, it is the wicked who prosper while the pious remain poor, but retain God on their side. The Prosperity Gospel make the opposite error, claiming the results of faith will manifest in material blessing by God. Drawing on verses such as:

- The reward for humility and the feat of the Lord is riches and honor and life (Prov. 22:4)
- Whoever trusts in the Lord will be enriched (Prov. 28:25)

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 91.

- A slack hand causes poverty (Prov. 10:4)

These errors stem from a fundamental misunderstanding of how to exegete wisdom literature promises, like the above, as descriptive rather than normative. They are not promises, but poetic expressions of perceived reality. These views fail to create a comprehensive worldview about work and vocation by not considering the brutal truth the Book of Job poses to both of these errors. Job, a righteous and rich man, received terrible poverty. This is chaos, not cosmos, describes Schneider. It seems as though in God's wisdom the life of Job stands as a reminder among the wisdom literature against easy theologies of money and blessing in some kind of closed system man can control. Additionally Schneider points out, even Ecclesiastes "presses the outer boundaries of melancholy to find gladness of heart not through optimism, or positive thinking, but through grim realism."<sup>21</sup> Further he adds the important distinction that Biblical wisdom stresses the inability for man to predict with certainty that faith will bring material flourishing and delight for often there prove to be periods (even lifetimes) of suffering for God's glory. Qoheleth laments this reality, "What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation" (Eccl. 2:22-23). "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" declares the Preacher using the word *Hebel* which has been interpreted as "absurdity," "fleeting," "unsubstantial," "illusory," or "nonsense." The absurdity of life for Qoheleth, likely King Solomon, is that toiling produces no enduring profit and does not ultimately make sense of the enigmas of life, leaving it futile "under the sun." However, it is not the material goods themselves or the labor itself that he

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<sup>21</sup> Schneider, 112.

bemoans. “Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.” (Eccl. 5:18-19). He shows that in service to God, these activities and their rewards have purpose, but without God they are pointless. “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13). For The Preacher, working outside of faith in God is indeed meaningless, but serving him in vocation is of great gain.

### The Gospels

The ministry of Jesus Christ gives several insights into God’s intent for a Christian’s approach toward the earning and use of money. The first is what can be noted from the incarnation and divine identification of Jesus entering the world not with great power, but emptying himself and being born as a man, under the law. While many have pointed to his poverty and therefore identification with the poor, others have argued that he was actually middle class. Schneider notes that while he may be considered poor by modern standards, in his own culture he would have been considered a middle class carpenter/builder (*tekton*).<sup>22</sup> Jesus’ incarnation into the role of tradesman rather than a priest, academic, mystic, or politician gives some insight into God’s perspective on the goodness of creative, productive work. Prior to Jesus’ ministry in his early 30’s, he likely took over the family building business from his father Joseph and operated as a laborer and small business man. He “became strong” and “full of wisdom” (Luke 2:40) in a commercial and economic zone that traded with Roman territories and while the Bible details very little of Jesus youth and young

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<sup>22</sup> Schneider, 109.

adult life, it can be understood from his upbringing that Jesus can identify with the dignity of daily physical work and small business management. He was not born in the slums of Jerusalem and raised among the poverty stricken and lowest class of beggars, street children, and criminals.

The misconception often cited by proponents of Liberation Theology, that the Jesus movement arose from the destitute and poor, is inconsistent with the backgrounds of the disciples themselves and from the accounts of the early church. Peter, James, John, and Andrew were fisherman and not poor according to the society of first century Galilee. They likely self-operated their family business and considered their professions respectable. “The Gospels indicate that these men had their own boats, nets, and even servants.”<sup>23</sup> They left “everything” to follow Jesus, which meant they sacrificed their material possessions. Jesus and his followers’ economic life help us to understand their view towards man’s call to work.

A plain reading of the Gospels exposes several incidents of Jesus response to questions of work and finances. Jesus’ parables both elucidate and conceal his message.<sup>24</sup> The most relevant are the parables of the rich young ruler (Matt 10:17-27), the Rich fool (Luke 12:13-21, Mt 19:16-22, Mk 10:17-22), the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the dishonest manager (Luke 16-1-9), the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27), and the parable of the talents (Matt 25: 14-40). These verses help to explain Jesus’ view of finances from which we can deduce his perspective on the work it takes to earn them.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>24</sup> Mark 4:11-12.

The rich young ruler was clearly successful from a monetary perspective. Yet Jesus' requirement for him to abandon his riches and follow him revealed a radical requirement Jesus had for his disciples. This formula seems extreme, but it is consistent with Luke's other examples of revocation of worldly treasures (Luke 12:22-23). His disciples were sent to proclaim the kingdom without staff or bag (Luke 9:3, 10:4) and they are all told "none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions (Luke 14:33). It would be easy to make the Gnostic mistake to think that Jesus was against the material world and material possessions. Surely if Jesus was theologically against such things, than the contemplative life, monasticism, and asceticism would be ideal, and engaging in work for material gain would be a lesser state. However, if we understand Jesus' life and message in the context of compassion and delight as Schneider argues, we can better understand his demands of his followers.

In his threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus' incarnation brought a fulfillment of the Old Testament vision (dominion and delight), not a renunciation of it. Unlike John the Baptist, the "Son of Man has come eating and drinking." (Luke 7:34). He celebrated festive meals, conducted table fellowship, and participated in a "great banquet" at Levi's house. He was not a monk fasting in isolation (Luke 5:29-34), but his appearance was akin to "new wine" in the company of Jewish piety (Luke 5:36-39).<sup>25</sup> Several episodes in Jesus' life reveal him as the Christ of delight. "At the wedding feast at Cana, when the hosts ran out of wine (John 2:1-11), Jesus rescued them from humiliation (at his mother's

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<sup>25</sup> Schneider, 132.

insistence) by turning the six purification vats of water into about 180 gallons of the very best wine.<sup>26</sup>

Jesus was rebuked by Judas for letting a woman of ill repute “waste” luxurious perfume on him (Mark 14:3, John 12:3), but Jesus supported it, despite Judas call for it to be sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus likewise could have asked those who “provided for them out of their resources” (Luke 8:1-3) to give their funds to the poor instead. Mary, Martha and Lazarus, had property and possessions for Jesus’ use. Peter’s mother-in law owned a large house with servants. They clearly did not believe that in order to follow Jesus they had to sell all of their possessions and enter a life of poverty. They kept working in their places of employment and supporting Jesus’ movement from their resources. Peter too, after Jesus’ death, went back to fishing, which means he likely held on to his working capital (boat, nets, and equipment). Unlike the rich young ruler, Jesus did not instruct Zacchaeus to give up all of his possessions, though much of it was gained sinfully. He paid restitution and reparations but remained in his occupation once his heart issues were corrected. The Zacchaeus archetype represents those who continue to use possessions and position to the furtherance of the redemptive mission of Christ. The narrative of the rich fool reminds the readers that those who sacrificed or “left everything to follow him” are promised much more in the age to come. (Luke 18:28-30). Schneider argues, “This was not a simple formula for health and wealth without suffering, but neither was it a theology of servant hood without Lordship.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 143.

The rich fool gives occasion for Jesus' important statement about the lilies and ravens having homes, while he does not. Storing up treasures for oneself and not being rich toward God is overtly rebuked and the admonition to be on guard against greed is prompted. This rich fool, however, appears as a thrifty and practical worker, laboring and saving as would be responsible. Jesus' addresses his worldview. The fool believes that the security in the stored up grains was the extent of life's purpose. Work and its material results are not the end goal, God's glory is. The rich fool was not a fool for earning and saving, but a fool for being an idolater, thinking his salvation was his wealth.

The rich man and Lazarus parables showed the juxtaposition of a poor man Lazarus and a rich man in the afterlife, and offers the chilling comment, "During your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner received evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony."<sup>28</sup> If the simple interpretation is that God will reverse the fortunes of the rich and poor, then surely it can be understood that being rich is not a position one wants to be in from an eternal perspective. The rich man who ignored the poor (Lazarus) had the law and the prophets but failed to live the vision God represented within them, of compassion and justice. His disposition was not one of God-centered wealth, but self-focus. His moral proximity to the need received no response. "Moral location generates moral conditions and moral obligations," argues Schneider.<sup>29</sup>

In Luke 16, the dishonest manager's concluding lesson is the reminder that man cannot serve both God and mammon (wealth). Yet the dishonest manager redeems himself

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<sup>28</sup> Luke 16:25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

through honest use of wealth, which shows that it is not the wealth itself that is the issue (and by deduction it's earning), but the heart of the individual to whom the wealth has been entrusted by God. Verses 9-10 add to this theme by Jesus' words, whoever is faithful in much will be given more.

The parable of the talents (or pounds) in Matt 25:14-40, adds to the theme of Jesus' lesson in the Zacchaeus example of using wealth according to God's calling to serve him will all of one's life, not to compartmentalize one section to godly living and others to the secular. The manager who hid his money and failed to deliver a return appears rather pious. He feared to lose the master's money. However, as Jesus rebukes him, he reveals his intent for using finances to grow his kingdom, take risk, and be brave in faith. This falls in line with the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth and subduing it. One cannot do that in isolation, asceticism, or fear of risk.

Jesus' great commission in Matt 28:16-20 expressly calls his disciples to go into all the world, making disciples among all the nations and baptizing them. Similar to the call for man to fill the earth and subdue it, given twice already in the Garden of Eden and after the flood, this new call requires man to take up a significant task that cannot be done alone. Some would need to preach, baptize, and do other work of spiritual nourishment. Others would be called to serve tables, as we see in Acts 6:2 so that the ministry of the word would go forth unhindered.

### God's use of Wealth in the Early Church

Financing the efforts, organizing the missions, and executing this larger ministry strategy would require a variety of gifts and callings to become the church of Christ through

the ages. The church that grew throughout the centuries, was one that honored those who work in secular vocations. “The Pauline church did not arise among the poor or proletariat...business people were the backbone of the church, not objects of its contempt.”<sup>30</sup>

Paul seems to recognize God’s gifting of his church with different types of callings to serve.

To the Ephesians he writes:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ<sup>31</sup>

Paul does not explicitly state that God calls some to be workers in manual labor, but the work of ministry would not be sufficiently supplied by ministerial callings alone. This would be consistent with his understanding of the many body parts making up the one church in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, where Paul exalts the lesser seen and perhaps most lowly parts of the church’s mission:

The parts that we think are less important we treat with special honor. The private parts aren’t shown. But they are treated with special care. The parts that can be shown don’t need special care. But God has put together all the parts of the body. And he has given more honor to the parts that didn’t have any. In that way, the parts of the body will not take sides. All of them will take care of one another. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part shares in its joy.<sup>32</sup>

Os Guinness, in his book *The Call*, defines calling this way: “Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>31</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 12: 23-25.

everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism and direction lives out as a response to his summons and service.”<sup>33</sup>

Os Guinness points out that to be *called*, is to be *named*. In Genesis 1, God’s naming of the light ‘day’ and the darkness ‘night’ was more than labeling something. It was a form of making. This naming-calling he points out is a fusion of being and becoming. In the New Testament, Guinness further connects calling with salvation. As with Israel in the OT being called into a relationship with God, Christians in the NT were called by Jesus to be his disciples. This calling is beyond a casual suggestion, he writes, “discipleship is the natural and rightful response of the Lordship of Christ.”<sup>34</sup> His further distinction that we are not simply called to “to something” such as a career or station in life, but we are called “to someone.” He defines that as the primary call to be followers of Christ. Occupational choices and the fruit of mans’ labors are secondary callings that should reflect the primary calling to be reconciled to God and be an outpouring as a response to this reconciliation. Guinness’ distinction poses challenges for the Christian to make sure that the primary calling always comes before the secondary calling but also that the primary call “leads without fail” to the secondary call. He explains, “The Church’s failure to meet these challenges has led to the two grand distortions that have crippled the truth of calling. We may call them the ‘Catholic distortion’ and the ‘Protestant Distortion.’”<sup>35</sup> To gain a meaningful understanding of these two distortions, we must go back to the early church and trace these concepts from

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<sup>33</sup> Os Guinness. *The Call*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson), 2003, 29.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Guinness, 31.

their origins in early church history, to the Sixteenth Century Reformation's contribution, and beyond to the present.

## Chapter 3

### The Development of Theologies of Vocation (A Literature Review)

The Latin word “vocation” means simply “calling,” which has been a constant theme of Christian communities and thinkers throughout the history of the Church. Yet another constant is the diversity with which it has been interpreted, culturally appropriated, reinvented, and yet as a concept not totally abandoned. Christians have always given concern for how to live their lives in accordance with God’s purpose for them. William Placher offers a historical review of the four broad periods when Christians approached the concept of vocation in his 2005 work *Callings*. He reviews life in the early church, where as outsiders, Christian identity was foremost in determining occupation and station in life. After Emperor Constantine’s conversion, Christians no longer faced overt persecution. Rather, being a Christian was now *en vogue* and culturally advantageous. At this time some sought to preserve the risk of Christian calling, and some sought refuge in the desert as nuns or monks, “living lives of radical self-denial that preserved the dramatic challenge of Christianity.”<sup>36</sup>

The Reformation’s emphasis on justification by faith alone, apart from works, called Luther to reinvent works in relationship to a Christian’s standing before a holy God. The cultural dynamic of increasing societal complexity and the work required to keep it together

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<sup>36</sup> William Placher, *Callings*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 2005), 6.

offered more choices than was available in the earlier middle ages. As Luther proclaimed the “priesthood of all believers,” options were opened up for Christians to serve God in a different way. As Placher wrote, “One could be called to a life of preaching, but alternatively to government, commerce, crafts, farming, or anything else.”<sup>37</sup>

Roughly four hundred years later another dramatic shift is occurring which Placher identifies as the post-Christian age. In this period, a Christian majority in society cannot be assumed, rather, living out a Christian calling goes against the grain of the larger societal value system. Options have become vaster, oftentimes people are less connected to their work, experiencing what Karl Marx called “alienated labor.” Jobs and career seem divorced from one’s “true calling,” which can be found in other forms of expression.

While vocation as a concept has shifted in each of these periods, in terms of seminal moments that advanced the shift: the conversion of Emperor Constantine, the rise of monasticism as a response to “cultural Christianity,” Luther’s spark that enflamed the Reformation, and ultimately post enlightenment culture that has rejected much of Christianity have been used as macro concepts within which to understand writers of those periods.

It should be noted, since Placher’s writing new developments in technology and culture raise the question if we are entering a fifth age, to be distinct from the post-Reformation age. In this age, the immediacy of information through multiple communication channels has opened the door for people to seek a greater sense of authenticity in what they consume, who it affects, and how their daily decisions carry moral weight. In ages past, moral decisions may have had immediate personal repercussions, but in this fifth age, with

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<sup>37</sup> Placher, 7.

everyone so intricately interconnected, everyday decisions can carry a global impact to people we may never meet. In this next era, there is reason to be optimistic as consumers seek greater authenticity in their economic lives. This shift can be seen in the rise of interest by consumers about the origin of their goods. The 1990's produced significant interest in buying products that were guilt-free, or not involved in sweat shops. Guilt-free engagement ring diamonds, cage free chicken products, and farm-to-table vegetables all reflect an interest to connect a purchase decision with a moral stance. Likewise, people in this era are engaged and concerned with how their production impacts others. This may be a new opportunity for the church to break the secular/sacred distinction when it comes to one's daily work.

To explore this concept in its entirety one must understand three streams of thought flowing through six historical eras per the table below. In the early church, the main contributions to vocational theology were Roman Catholic, while the Middle Ages began to have streams of pre-reformed and Reformed thought. During the Reformation, the primary contributors for new thought were Reformed and Anabaptist that rivaled the Catholic position that remained largely unchanged. In the Post Christian and Information ages all groups are contributing noteworthy developments to respond to the shifting cultural and economic realities, the totality of which would be beyond the scope of this paper to capture fully.

Table 1.

	Periods of History				
	Early Church	Middle Ages	Reformation	Post-Christian	Information Age
Roman Catholic	X	X		X	X
Reformed		X	X	X	X
Anabaptist			X	X	X

## The Early Church

Author John Schneider details the “identity crisis” many evangelical Christians face today when considering the high call of Christian service in formal church capacities, and their very human drive for material delight. He and others point out that beliefs about economic life are primarily moral beliefs. Therefore they ought to be formed with utmost care, to the extent that they can be within one’s sphere of control. To understand why Christians throughout the ages have struggled to reconcile their larger calling to faith in Christ with other calls they experience; he details the historical struggle for Christians from the early roots of church. Many Christians in the first two centuries tried to separate themselves from work, withdrawing from the marketplace and often embracing negative views of possession and material reality.<sup>38</sup> One extreme sect during this time, blended neo-Platonic philosophy with Jewish mysticism and some Christian teaching and formed Gnosticism. They held the view that the material world itself was evil and in part from this position, articulated other dangerous heresies that the early church had to contend with and formulate a counter-response. Gnostic beliefs found in the Nag Hammadi texts reject the flesh and emphasize a spirit similar to Neoplatonic ideals. Early Christian thinkers routinely found the need to respond to these opposing ideas and emphasized the value of God’s creation and man’s place in the material realm in his flesh. The theme that creation was good, the body would be resurrected, and creation restored, would all be arguments against Gnostic and post-Gnostic remnants in other’s thought by early Christian apologists and thinkers.

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<sup>38</sup> Schneider, 25.

Since the formulation of the Apostle's Creed (approx. 390 A.D.),<sup>39</sup> which affirms God's purposeful creation of the material world, the church has positively moved forward in acceptance of creation as good for Christians. Schneider writes that in the phrase "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth," the "essence of Gnosticism was defeated, the essential goodness of the material world redeemed."<sup>40</sup> The early Christian father Eusebius wrote *Demonstration of the Gospel* and began to develop what would become the Roman Catholic position. His dualistic "two ways of life" separates a perfect life from a permitted life. The perfect life is defined by a high level of spiritual contemplation whereas the permitted life is in the secular realm of other labors. This dualistic thinking of pitting high and low, secular and sacred lifestyles against one another became dominant in the thinking of later influential theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas.

Augustine's contribution to a theology of matter helped to formulate the mainstream Catholic position. Much of the early church experienced suffering, castigation, and marginalization from both Jewish and Roman communities. However with the rise of Christianity to a position of the official civil religion in the Roman Empire under Constantine, some Christians resented the mainstreaming of what began as a movement of separation from the larger culture and suffering together for the cause of Christ. Guinness explains, "Monasticism began with a *reforming mission*- it sought to remind an increasingly secularized church that it was still possible to follow the radical way of life required by the

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<sup>39</sup> The Apostles Creed likely written by Ambrose of Milan is a summary of beliefs core the Apostle's teaching about the Trinity. "Apostles' Creed," *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (Oxford University Press. 2005), 90.

<sup>40</sup> Schneider, 26.

gospel.”<sup>41</sup> Augustine was key to codify a Christian view of creation and material goods. His approach was not one of total separation from the surrounding culture, but Christian engagement with it, though he would not view all engagement options as equally laudable.

As Schneider details:

Augustine made two important distinctions that enabled him to develop his theory of ownership and Christian economic life in the world. First he drew a line between material things themselves and the possession of those things.<sup>42</sup>

This important distinction helped define the understanding between enjoyment and use of an object. By doing so he established a theological position that man’s delight should not be in the goodness of the goods in themselves inherently, but instead in using the goods to further enjoy God. This broad outline established a Christian framework of utilitarianism towards material goods to meet temporal needs. His second distinction helped lay the groundwork Reformers would later work to unravel in Catholic thoughts. In creating a distinction between moral obligations and acts of supererogation, he crafted a two tier structure towards wealth which elevated the position of living in poverty, in imitation of Christ, though not requiring it from all believers. Adopting this life of suffering was not required, but freely choosing it for Christ would be considered more virtuous. Augustine drew from Jesus’ teaching about Mary and Martha as biblical archetypes of the active and contemplative life, associating Mary with the ideal of contemplation and Martha as the current reality for most people who must labor throughout life.

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<sup>41</sup> Os Guinness. *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling The Central Purpose of Your Life*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson. 2003), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Schneider, 28.

## Medieval Period

Scholastic medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas furthered the idea that the contemplative life was “better than a life of action,” in context of “medieval social divisions between those who pray (priests, nuns, and monks) and those who fight (nobles) and those who work (mostly peasants in the fields).”<sup>43</sup> For Aquinas, even participation in a just war could be meritorious, but participation in trade and commerce ranked even lower than fighting on a medieval battlefield. Placher noted, “Aquinas worried at length over whether it is intrinsically dishonest to sell something for more than the price for which you bought it.”<sup>44</sup> His views, like his contemporaries’ views towards usury, limited participation in economic activity or the type of commerce that was starting to grow at that time. In his masterwork *Summa Theologica*, (1265–1274) Aquinas writes, “Hence trading, considered in itself, has a certain debasement attaching thereto, in so far as by its very nature, it does not imply a virtuous or necessary end.”<sup>45</sup> Aquinas’ perspective, drawn out as responses to “The Philosopher,” reveal his synthesis of Aristotelian thought and biblical revelation. The ancient Greeks had long argued that the life of philosophical reflection was more excellent than physical labor. Aristotle likewise argued that the contemplative life was the highest calling. Similarly, Aquinas justifies his rationale for the same with eight reasons listed below from *Summa Theologica* Q182, a.1: which asks whether the active life is more excellent than the contemplative. Table 2 details the subsequent reasons:

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<sup>43</sup> Placher, 107.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*. Translated and Edited by A.M. Fairweather. (Philadelphia, Westminster 1954).

Table 2.

Reason 1	“The contemplative life becomes man according to that which is best in him, namely the intellect, and according to its proper objects, namely things intelligible, whereas the active life is occupied with externals.”
Reason 2	“The contemplative life can be more continuous, although not as regards the highest degree of contemplation...”
Reason 3	“Because the contemplative life is more delightful than the active.”
Reason 4	“Because in the contemplative life man is more self-sufficient, since he needs fewer things for that purpose.”
Reason 5	“Because the contemplative life is loved more for its own sake, while the active life is directed to something else.”
Reason 6	“Because the contemplative life consists in leisure and rest, according to Psalm 46:10, ‘Be still and know that I am God.’”
Reason 7	“Because the contemplative life is according to Divine things.”
Reason 8	“Because the contemplative life is according to that which is most proper to man, namely his intellect, whereas the works of the active life the lower powers also.”

For medieval theologians, the active life hindered the contemplative, and therefore must have been a lesser calling for the Christian. The distinction between the clergy and the laity created a hierarchy of holiness. The primarily contemplative work provided by those in monasteries quelled the bodily passions that could hinder divine contemplation, and as such, these distractions must be removed in order to truly focus on God’s purposes for life. While monks provided much of the manual labor in their life setting such as food cultivation, manuscript production, and other physical tasks, these were seen as means to the higher spiritual ends of vigils, prayer, and the rites of the Eucharist that dominated their daily routines.

The true purpose for Aquinas was to live a life of charity, which consisted of love for God first, then love for neighbor. He is definite about business as a lower activity, yet makes

exception per Rom 16:1-2 which Paul writes regarding Phoebe, “that you assist her in whatsoever business she shall have need of you.” Aquinas argued:

We must conclude therefore that it is unlawful for either monks or clerics to carry on secular business from motives of avarice, but from motives of charity, and with their superior’s permission, they may occupy themselves with due moderation in the administration and direction of secular business.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, during this centuries long development in the middle ages, the flip side of the monastic life was the denigration of lay life since the laity were those not consecrated to service of God.<sup>47</sup> Increasingly, the monastic life became the ideal and lay people looked to it as the perfect model for what it meant to be a Christian saint.

Even before the Reformation, we know that several others were precursors to Martin Luther that were critical of Roman Catholic positions regarding many issues that would be up for argument in the sixteenth century. The ministry of Czech reformer John Hus and the works of classical humanist theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam, whom Luther would later respond to in his key 1525 work *Bondage of the Will*, the cultural shifts were already underway to give rise to the Reformation. The ideas regarding vocation were starting to be reconsidered as well. Catholic author Thomas Kempis’ 1418 devotional work, *The Imitation of Christ* introduced laypersons in the church to how they can serve Christ in their daily lives, beyond the rites of the Church.

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<sup>46</sup> Placher, 174.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Hannenberg. *Awakening Vocation: A Theology of Christian Call*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press. 2010), 7-9

## Reformed Approach

The Protestant attack on monasticism and its vow of poverty must be understood in light of other theological presuppositions the Reformers took as they formulated a theology of vocation. Vocation was the outgrowth from their larger contribution to work in a salvific sense against faith. Luther responded to Rome on the larger issue of justification by faith, not works; but this position forced a reconsideration of all of man's works, for salvation and daily living. Luther denied that the monastic life was superior to life in the world because it did not contribute to salvation or godly living. "They came to believe that monasticism was in essence a desperate effort to whip oneself into shape before God...God does not call us away from our secular work to a separate arena of spiritual athleticism."<sup>48</sup> In his seminal work *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* in 1520, Luther called for the abolition of all monastic orders. As an Augustinian monk himself, Luther struggled to see how he, a sinner, could ever merit a justified position before a holy God. In time he began to believe that the contemplative life had no Biblical warrant. The system itself, he felt, created a "conceit and a contempt of the common Christian life,"<sup>49</sup> because it had to reject the basic life to take up the vocation within the confines of the church or abbey walls. Luther insisted that God meets people where they are, be they butchers, farmers, or civil officials. Rather than esteem the saints in the monastic system, Luther and other Reformers attacked the system itself that created it and began to see it as religious escapism. Rejecting Augustine's view of supererogation led to their critique of monasticism and embrace of secular work and

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<sup>48</sup> Schneider, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Guinness, 33.

enjoyment of material possessions. Luther, known for his scathing critiques went on to explain that menial labor, housework, and simple work was more acceptable to God than the fasting and prayer of priests or monks because the monks and priests lacked faith. For Luther, the dualistic distinctions laid out in Eusebius, Augustine, Aquinas were unscriptural, and he argued for the emphasis to be placed on what a believer does out of faith for the glory of God. Writing about the *Estate of Marriage* in 1522, Luther declared that God and the angels smile when a man changes a diaper.<sup>50</sup> Giving dignity even to such lowly tasks led later Reformed theologians to expand this concept and reconnect the proper relationship between faith and works that was lacking in the Roman Catholic understanding of vocation. This derived directly from Luther's broader theology of works but went further in Calvin's understanding of the third use of the law in Christian good works, as opposed to Luther's two.

Gustaf Wingren's 1957 classic, *Luther on Vocation*, puts the matter very simply. Luther believed that "God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does."<sup>51</sup> Another way to look at it, is that Luther believed one should stop asking what their particular vocation is, when it is standing right in front of them. Kolden writes of Luther's position. "Everyone has a calling, for every legitimate *Stand*<sup>52</sup> touches the life of another."<sup>53</sup> Theologian Darrell Cosden, in his 2006 book *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, points out Luther's

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<sup>50</sup> Guinness, 34.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Hahnenberg, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Luther's position used of the word "stand" should be understood as someone's station or position in life where God has placed them.

<sup>53</sup> Marc Kolden, *Luther on Vocation*. Journal of Lutheran Ethics, [www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1015](http://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1015), 10/01/2001.

reevaluation of the doctrine of justification by faith and the effect it had by reforming all of faith, and as a result, all of Christian ethics. The starting point for Luther was the priesthood of all believers arising out of his disdain for the Catholic ecclesiology. Darrell Cosden noted, “This obviously undermined the whole system of piety claiming that acceptance by God was guaranteed only to the few who could spend their lives ‘at work’ devoted to such eternal matters.”<sup>54</sup> Given the nature of his new understanding of justification, no calling or work should be considered higher or lower since no one can contribute anything of spiritual value to eternal salvation. Luther’s “rallying point” became 1 Corinthians 7:17 which he translated “remain in the calling (work/station) you were in when you were called (to salvation). Working out his theology further in his 1520 edition of *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther creates his own distinction when considering faith and works. The result was a framework for piety and ethical living ordered around two kingdoms (governments). These two spheres are both under God, yet for Luther they are as opposite from one another as faith is from works and heaven from earth.<sup>55</sup> Cosden declares that Luther’s great contribution here is the reorientation to reshape piety by starting with eternity, and the new creation. All of life should be ordered to and take its direction from the Christian’s eternal destiny in heaven. This approach released man from his burden of acquiring salvation through works and released works to be done to glorify God rather than appease his justice. Cosden writes, “[I]f we don’t approach our life and work with the belief that our existence has already been

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<sup>54</sup> Darrel Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, (Peabody: Hendrickson. 2006), 40.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

justified by God, then it will be extremely hard to avoid the temptation of trying to justify ourselves by what we do and accomplish.”<sup>56</sup>

Wingren details Luther’s view on vocation and the two kingdoms<sup>57</sup> as well as helps to define how this view came from his earlier and important distinction between Law and Gospel in his 1525 *Lectures on Galatians*. Kolden writes:

Vocation belongs to our situation between baptism and the final resurrection - a situation in which there are two kingdoms (earth and heaven, in Luther's terminology), two contending powers (God and the devil), two antagonistic components within the Christian person (the old self and the new self), and when Christians are involved in constant struggle. Vocation is our calling in our situation in life, through which we serve God's creative work by being under the law. It is the place in which the person of faith chooses sides in the ongoing combat between God and Satan<sup>58</sup>

Luther’s distinction between law and gospel spells out that for Christians there are two uses for the law, first civil and second accusing. The law both contains the evils of society as well as draws the sinner to Christ. For Luther once a believer has faith in Christ, faith spontaneously springs into acts of love. The gospel frees the Christian from the law in one sense and returns them to the law in another, for the good of our neighbor.

Just as God's redemptive act in becoming incarnate affirms that salvation is not an escape from creation but a restoration and fulfillment of it so also the Christian life will not be an escape from creaturely life but a calling to it. The call to follow Christ leads not to any religious vocation removed from daily life, but instead it transforms the attitude and understanding one has of the situation in which one already is.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>57</sup> Luther’s two kingdoms has also been referenced as two kinds of righteousness in the *Book of Concord* compiled in 1580. Luther argues that while God rules the worldly (left-hand kingdom) through secular government, by means of law/his sword; and the heavenly or (right-hand kingdom) is the spiritual kingdom. They are both God’s hands in sovereign control, but Luther uses Romans 8 to justify his distinction here between flesh and spirit.

<sup>58</sup> Kolden, 385.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 387.

For Martin Luther, following one's calling was so essential to a life of faith that he writes, "To leave one's own calling and to attach oneself to alien undertakings, surely amounts to walking on one's ears, to veiling one's feet, to putting a shoe on one's head, and to turning everything upside down."<sup>60</sup> This attachment of vocation to a comprehensive life and worldview is seen in the thought of John Calvin who contributed to the Reformation's revision of vocation.

By 1536 when Calvin first arrived in Geneva, the roots of the Reformation were already in place under William Farel and Calvin well understood Luther's position and mostly agreed with his interpretation of vocation against the Roman Catholic standard at the time. He likely was exposed to Lutheran ideas even while at the University of Paris in his teenage years. His contribution to a theology of vocation would not merely echo Luther, but go beyond him in developing a theology that affirms the world and man's place working within it.

Roland H. Bainton remarked, when Christianity takes itself seriously, it must either renounce or master the world.<sup>61</sup> Calvin returned to the affirmation of the world he saw in Genesis and ignited an urgency for Christians to engage secular society. Later the Anabaptist reformers sought an approach to renounce the secular world and stage a quiet protest of a simple life, unwilling to wait for the world to arrive at the heavenly life they sought to establish in the here and now.

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<sup>60</sup> Martin Luther, "Gospel for the Sunday after Christmas, Luke 2:33-40." Quoted in Placher, 206.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Alistair E. McGrath. *A Life of John Calvin*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 1993), 219.

When Calvin penned his first edition of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* the Lutheran position was accepted in Reformed circles against monasticism. Expanding on the five *Solas*<sup>62</sup> of the Reformation in his greater theology, Calvin's concept of vocation drew on points he made to explain his other more notable doctrines. He developed theologies of predestination, election, providence, and common grace. Further, arguments he made against the Libertines of expounded the Reformed view of Sabbath and eschatology, which all help form Calvin's view and influence later contributors to further develop the thought of how to actively immerse oneself into the secular sphere without passively allowing themselves to be submerged by it.<sup>63</sup>

Calvin's thought cannot be presented without the overarching theology of grace. To receive grace from God was to be transformational in the recipient. To receive it is to be renewed by it and therefore a Christian's response is to be motivated to perform good works in return. McGrath writes, "Good works were seen as the outward and visible sign of the presence and activity of grace within the believer."<sup>64</sup> This understanding however creates a conflict within Christians that was uncommon for Roman Catholics. Whereas the Catholic tradition involved membership in the visible church through baptism, penance, and absolution, reformed Christians would struggle with assurance of salvation. Calvin writes

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<sup>62</sup> *Sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone"): The Bible alone is the highest authority.

*Sola Fide* ("faith alone"): We are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

*Sola Gratia* ("grace alone"): We are saved by the grace of God alone.

*Solus Christus* ("Christ alone"): Jesus Christ alone is the only Lord, Savior, and King.

*Soli Deo Gloria* ("to the glory of God alone"): Christians should live for the glory of God alone.

<sup>63</sup> McGrath, 222.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 239

that a struggle with unbelief is a permanent feature of the Christian life.<sup>65</sup> Yet, for the true Christian, good works are not the grounds for their salvation, they nevertheless can be the grounds of assurance. In Book III of his *Institutes* Calvin described that good works function as a testimony of faith, demonstrate adoption, and are a testimony of God “dwelling and ruling within us.”<sup>66</sup> Christians’ work, good works towards one’s neighbor, does not cause salvation, but are its necessary consequence. This development of how grace plays out in the life of a believer is different than Luther. As Alistair McGrath points out in his biography of Calvin, this development contributed to a vital psychological pressure for Christians to demonstrate their election by exhibiting its signs by wholeheartedly laboring in the world.<sup>67</sup>

The concept of calling for Calvin must be understood under this framework where secular work was not just permitted, it was to be performed in such a way as to demonstrate one’s larger divine calling to Christ. In this new context, the Lutheran view that still held to some medieval concepts, such as usury being evil, would be transformed to affirm not just secular work, but wealth creation. Luther was strict in this view that Christians should remain in the position that they are in, not to seek social mobility, whereas Calvin presented an opportunity for transforming the social order. Luther’s view was reflective of the agrarian university town of Wittenberg he knew, while Calvin’s perspective was shaped by the bustling and growing crossroads trading city of Geneva. Calvin allowed for social agility, moving from one job to another and even pursuing a cause as a call which was progressive

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<sup>65</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated by Henry Beveridge. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. 2008), 17-18.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*,. xiv, 6-18.

<sup>67</sup> McGrath, 241.

for the culture of his day. In his *Institutes*, Calvin writes that some government officials had “a calling to stand up for the rights of the people against the wishes of tyrants.”<sup>68</sup> Calvin also shifted somewhat from Luther in his emphasis on activity. His own Geneva was an example of the turning cultural effects of banking and the move beyond the feudalism of the medieval period.

Calvin’s doctrine of predestination also underscores his theology of vocation. This belief that God predestines some to life and others to damnation is central to working out its ethical consequences. Calvin writes:

We are God’s: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God’s let his wisdom and will therefore rule out actions. We are God’s, let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal (Rom. 14:8, 1 Cor. 6:19). O, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God!<sup>69</sup>

God’s calling for Calvin gives meaning to man’s labors and station in life. By acknowledging that the Lord has put him there, one has no need to wander through life without destination. He also believes that this calling, both to faith and to good works, provided a harmony for all the parts of life.

Herman Bavinck draws out Calvin’s view of common grace as showing that while man without Christ is totally depraved with regards to understanding God or himself, he nevertheless has been gifted with certain blessings, namely reason and judgement, which raises him above the animals. Beyond that some unbelievers are blessed with gifts that are

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<sup>68</sup> Calvin. *Institutes*, 15-19.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Book III, 7.

industrious and contribute greatly to the economy, arts, and culture. As such, these gifts are not to be despised, but recognized as God's common grace for His creation. Bavink writes,

Calvin affirms, it is true, that the virtues of the natural man, however noble, do not suffice for justification at the judgment-bar of God, but this is due to his profound conviction of the majesty and spiritual character of the moral law. Aside from this, he is more generous in his recognition of what is true and good, wherever it be found, than any other Reformer.<sup>70</sup>

In every corner of the earth, Calvin finds God's goodness and as such the Christians are imbued with liberty to devote their lives in service of God. If all of creation is under God's rule, and all of his creatures are given some measure of divine grace, then all of life requires a God oriented activity and all objects are to be consecrated to his service. The comprehensiveness of Calvin's theology flows into his acceptance of a wide range of commerce and financial participation. Morally dubious professions aside, participation in a wide array of work is now open to the Christian as long as it is done to the glory of God from a heart of gratitude.

Liberty in this worldview, is not antinomian, or against the law. Calvin's apportioned a third use of the law against Luther's two. For Luther, God's law restrained evil and drew one to Christ. Calvin believed in the first two uses, but added a third use, where the law is used in the life of the Christian as a means of good works in sanctification. This ethical use was the basis for Calvin's writings against the Libertines of his day who argued that man can do whatever he wishes without hesitation. The Libertines believed that there is only one immortal spirit in all creatures eliminating the distinction between the human will and God's

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<sup>70</sup> Herman Bavink, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Princeton Theological Review* 7 (1909): 437-465.

will. They held that restraining their own will restrained God's will in their lives.<sup>71</sup> As such, Calvin notes, they eliminated the ability to distinguish what is lawful and the ability to condemn evil. His response was not to deny that God is indeed sovereign, or that his will can be thwarted, but rather that the mystery of God's secret will is His alone, yet his revealed will is clear to all creatures in the form of his commands and decrees. In responding, Calvin drew a clear distinction between man's liberty in vocation and his ethical restriction to limit his activity to God's revealed will in Scripture, respecting the fences and restrictions by the moral law. Man's calling in vocation cannot contradict God's call to be faithful stewards of His gifts and blessings.

### Post Reformation

There continued to be greater divisions in the Post-Reformation era and options for understanding vocation in the centuries ahead. The philosophy of empiricism grew from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the writings of John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume. Their approach appealed to direct and personal experience which led many to consider sense-experience as a way to knowing. The Pietists of Germany, and Puritans of England and Holland detailed their personal religious experiences and their understanding of calling. Fellow reformers William Tyndale, Bishop Thomas Becon, and Puritan theologian William Perkins, wrote positively about the lowly occupations that give glory to God and spoke of Jesus and his followers in their less than glamorous daily jobs as carpenter, fishermen, and tent-maker. Experiencing God in deep religious experience following one's

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<sup>71</sup> John Calvin, "Treatises Against the Anabaptist and Against the Libertines," trans and ed Benjamin Wirt Farley, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1982. Also, see "Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines Who Are Called 'Spirituals,'" 187-326.

personal calling, even for the peasants and laborers was highlighted by these writers. Key works, such as William Perkins, *A Treatise of the Vocations*, Richard Baxter's *Directions about our Labor and Callings*, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and Johnathan Edward's *Personal Narrative* all share in this common account of personal experiences of the religious life, which is often in daily activities and work, not exclusively in religious events.<sup>72</sup> Becon in particular was key in developing further the Lutheran distinction of spiritual vocation and external vocation into more Puritan terms of a "general call" to salvation and "particular calls" to various stations in life and society.<sup>73</sup>

As Os Guinness summarizes the Reformed summary of vocation in William Perkin's *A Treatise of the Vocations and Calling of Men*, he explains that God considers our work good, when we do it for his glory. Giving dignity and spiritual significance to such lowly work was an explosive cultural and theological construct at the time since the monastic system reigned under the medieval structures of hierarchies and power. To dismantle these systems would shift power to the lowly. As monarchies gave way to new political systems in the coming centuries throughout much of Europe and the new world, a power shift occurred downward, empowering classes of people who were previously not afforded systemic power. Guinness and others writing centuries later saw how the change in understanding one's vocation or calling pushed for the development of democracy and capitalism. Guinness states, "Calling gave to the endeavor to make Christ Lord of every part of life a fresh force that transformed not only the churches but also the worldviews and cultures of the

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<sup>72</sup> In William Placher *Callings*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 2005), 262-310.

<sup>73</sup> Hahneberg, 20.

Reformation countries.”<sup>74</sup> Not glamorizing poverty as the Roman Catholic system did in service to the church, the Reformed approach rather rehabilitated material life as part of Christian obedience to God in faith. David Hall and Matthew Burton, in their work praising Calvin’s contribution to commerce five hundred years later, write that the Calvinist diaspora was the seedbed of the capitalist economy.<sup>75</sup> The Reformation triggered a revolution in terms of thinking about work, and the subsequent “protestant work ethic” appeared alongside this eruption of capitalism. “While Calvin himself did not write a formal economic treatise, we suggest that the worldview encased in his writings and interpretations has more lasting value than many short-lived economic fads.”<sup>76</sup> Burton and Hall show how Calvin’s teaching and further development of his thought by his successors, “liberated believers to use the market for God’s glory.”<sup>77</sup> Hall and Burton continue to point out that Geneva was transformed under the time Calvin served there and its economic development was spurred in large part to Calvin’s contributions in founding the academy and early financial institutions which were the perfect opportunity to export his work ethic reforms.

In fact much has been written about the dynamics of Geneva as having as much to contribute to the success of capitalism as Calvin himself. While a *laissez-faire* approach was opposed by the city council,<sup>78</sup> other historical circumstances were favorable to the

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<sup>74</sup> Guinness, 35.

<sup>75</sup> David Hall and Matthew Burton. *Calvin and Commerce*. (Philipsburg NJ: P&R. 2009), xiv.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>78</sup> McGrath, 229.

development of a dynamic capitalism, such as the large influx of immigrants seeking refuge and the cities inherent need for political independence from nearby Berne. Alister McGrath argues that capitalism was born more out of economic necessity for Geneva's survival rather than merely religious instigation.<sup>79</sup> However, the attitude shift Calvin encourages in his Institutes such as each believers summons to a vocation, even the mundane,<sup>80</sup> lending a new meaning to the monastic slogan "to labor is to pray."<sup>81</sup> And yet as Calvinism spread, so did Capitalism and the two flourished together. McGrath highlights this point by pointing to two areas over a two hundred year period. The area of Flanders was Calvinistic and as such they were industrial and developed their capital potential. The Catholic areas of Spain and France remained Catholic and the areas were more depressed and unproductive.<sup>82</sup> For Max Weber, it became a demonstrable premise, that areas that adapted Calvin's view toward work would ultimately become capitalistic as their good works became signs of the presence and activity of God's grace working within the life suof the believer (sanctification). As McGrath points out, "There was thus a significant psychological pressure to demonstrate one's election to oneself and the world in general by exhibiting its signs among which was the wholehearted commitment to serve and glorify God by laboring in his world."<sup>83</sup> Work became a profoundly spiritual activity in areas where Calvinism spread. Richard Baxter instructed Christians with

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>80</sup> Calvin, 10, 16.

<sup>81</sup> McGrath, 233.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 241.

“Directions for Redeeming or Well Improving of Time,” during the cultural shift when production was becoming more mechanized and the fruit of work expanded. As the Calvinist work ethic had pervasively penetrated the cultures around it, in time it would be secularized and the founding theology that gave birth to it largely forgotten. At a time when the result is seen but the root unknown, there is need to reinvestigate the causes and understand the theology on which it is established.

### Reformed Confessions on Vocation

By the time Reformed thought would be codified in several confessional statements, the words trade, employment, occupation, calling, and vocation would become interchangeable.<sup>84</sup>

The Confessions that arose from Reformed communities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries such as the *Luther’s Small Catechism* (1529), the *Augsburg Confession* (1530), the *Genevan Confession* (1536), the *Second Helvetic Confession* (1562), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) *Canons of Dort* (1619) the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) summarize key aspects of theological positions, but do not propose a theology of vocation per se. They address key aspects of salvation by grace, effectual calling, providence, predestination, and work as it relates to good works, and the Christians’ response to God’s grace. However, a stance about vocation can be deduced based on other positions that are more explicitly defended with Biblical proof texts. D. G. Hart explains it this way:

Confessional silence about vocation may explain Veith’s lament that it is one of the Reformation’s lost teachings. At the same time, nothing could be more Protestant than the way the Reformers came to understand the ordinary life of the average

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

believer. That Protestant outlook fueled the engines of political democracy and market capitalism. But it was far more important for recovering biblical teaching about the goodness of creation and the manifold ways in which God cares for his creatures. Recognizing the value of human work was one of the Reformation's greatest achievements.

Each confession was composed in a unique context responding to detractors. Luther's Small Catechism's of 1529 offers Eph 6:5-8 as guidance for laborers and servants.<sup>85</sup> Knoll writes:

Be obedient to those who are your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with singleness of heart, as to Christ; not by way of eye-service, as man-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

The *Augsburg Confession* presented to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1530 condemns the Anabaptist renunciation of civil government and instead recognizes that its establishment and institution is of God. It states, "The Gospel does not overthrow civil authority, the state, and marriage but requires that all these be kept as true orders of God, and that everyone, each according to his own calling, manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station in life."<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, section 18 titled "Freedom of the Will" affirms man's freedom to labor in the fields, engage in trade, or do whatever else is good and profitable, as all these things cannot exist without God.<sup>87</sup> The condemnation of monastic vows are confessed and defended, showing how this life diminishes the glory and honor due to Christ, and are laws of men, not God. It confesses, "They [monks] were unable to understand that one is to serve God by observing the commandments God has given and not

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<sup>85</sup> Mark Knoll. *Reformed Confessions and Catechisms*, (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing. 2004), 80.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

by keeping the commands invented by men. Inasmuch as all these things are false, useless, and invented, monastic vows are null and void.”<sup>88</sup> In 1536, having codified in the Reformed perspective confession against monasticism, and the theology the system represented, the *Genevan Confession* would be presented to the city fathers of Geneva by John Calvin and William Farel. While short on any overt discussion on monasticism and vocation, it does address good works as being the result of God’s good work and not having any justifying merit on their own. They add:

Nonetheless our Savior in his goodness, having received us into the communion of his Son Jesus, regards the works that we have done in faith as pleasing and agreeable; not that they merit it at all, but because, not imputing any of the infection that is there, he acknowledges in them nothing but what proceeds from his Spirit.<sup>89</sup>

In a more extensive *Second Helvetic Confession*<sup>90</sup> written by Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich in 1562, he adds significant Biblical survey in responses to both Catholics and Anabaptists. Good work should be actively pursued, as long as it is motivated by God, which can only grow out of a living faith by the Holy Spirit. It reminds the reader, "Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control... (2 Peter 1:5)." And also the Apostle Paul’s admonition. "This is the will of God, your sanctification that you abstain from immorality..., that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in business" (1 Thess. 4:3)." Careful to ensure that it is understood that no one is saved by good works alone, however they add, “Works necessarily proceed from faith. And salvation is improperly attributed to them, but is most properly ascribed to grace. (Rom

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>90</sup> Found on <http://www.creeds.net/helvetic/> Internet, accessed on 21 October, 2017.

1:6).”<sup>91</sup> These two sections list good works to a very high station, aside from any salvific purpose, but reappropriates them to the life of the believer seeking to please God and enjoy its earned rewards. The writers continue:

Now the works which we do by faith are pleasing to God and are approved by him. Because of faith in Christ, those who do good works which, moreover, are done from God's grace through the Holy Spirit, are pleasing to God. For St. Peter said: "In every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:35). and Paul said: "We have not ceased to pray for you...that you may walk worthily of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work" (Col. 1:9 f.)<sup>92</sup>

For we teach that God gives a rich reward to those who do good works, according to that saying of the prophet: "keep your voice from weeping... for your work shall be rewarded" (Jer. 31:16; Isa., ch. 4). The Lord also said in the Gospel: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:12), and, "Whoever gives to one of these my little ones a cup of cold water, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (ch. 10:42).<sup>93</sup>

The *Heidelberg Catechism* was a source of Christian education designed with a question and answer format. Of the 129 Q&A's, 86 relates to work in the context of gratitude and good works for the believer.

Q. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why then should we do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, is also restoring us by his Spirit into his image, so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits,(1) so that he may be praised through us,(2) so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits,(3) and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Second Helvetic Confession* Section Chapter XVI Of Faith and Good Works, and of Their Reward, and of Man's Merit.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Section: "Good Works Please God."

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. Section: "God Gives a Reward for Good Works."

<sup>94</sup> Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 86.

The *39 Articles of Faith* for the Church of England of 1562 further reject works before justification as worthless, and supererogation arrogant,<sup>95</sup> while affirming good works that are the result of faith, they wrote:

Albeit that good works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively, Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit<sup>96</sup>

The *Canons of Dort* were an exposition of the five points of what would be known as the core of Calvinist doctrine, also referred to as T.U.L.I.P.,<sup>97</sup> or the Doctrines of Grace. In 1618-19, this Dutch synod of Reformed churchmen further connected good works to reduce the tension caused by a lack of assurance that even Calvin admitted was a byproduct of his theological system:

This assurance of perseverance, however, so far from making true believers proud and carnally self-assured, is rather the true root of humility, of childlike respect, of genuine godliness, of endurance in every conflict, of fervent prayers, of steadfastness in cross-bearing and in confessing the truth, and of well-founded joy in God. Reflecting on this benefit provides an incentive to a serious and continual practice of thanksgiving and good works, as is evident from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.<sup>98</sup>

The English Parliament called an assembly in 1643 for the purpose of producing the *Westminster Confession* and a long and *Shorter Catechism*. While most of the confession speaks to constructs of soteriology and ecclesiology, in chapter 23 it addresses the issue of Christian's participating in the civil magistrate.

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<sup>95</sup> *39 Articles of Faith for the Church of England*, Sections xiii, xiv. In Noll, 211.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>97</sup> T.U.L.I.P. is an acrostic for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. These were the responses of Dort against the Remonstrance but the whole of Calvinism (which is broad) cannot be reduced to TULIP alone (which is narrow). Followers of Jacob Arminius who provided their own statement of remonstrance against Calvinist doctrines.

<sup>98</sup> *Canons of Dort*, Article 12: The Assurance as an Incentive to Godliness.

I. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, has armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.

II. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto: in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth; so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war, upon just and necessary occasion.<sup>99</sup>

The Westminster Larger Catechism takes a maximal approach to the obedience required of Christians in expounding on the Ten Commandments. Regarding the fourth commandment to honor the Sabbath day, the Westminster divines do what Moses did in Leviticus 5 by clarifying how the spirit of the law is to apply in other parts of one's life to be consistent in one's worldview regarding that law's application. Question 117 reviews how the Lord's Day or Sabbath is to be sanctified. The Catechism responds part of our duty is to "prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day." Proper keeping of the Lord's Day involves proper diligence to work on the days designed for labor, so that the rest may give God more glory.

Question and Answer 140 regarding the Eighth Commandment against stealing, the Westminster Divines list the duties required to include the following:

The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man; rendering to everyone his due; restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof; giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods; a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition; a lawful calling, and diligence in it; frugality; avoiding unnecessary lawsuits, and suretyship, or other like engagements; and an

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<sup>99</sup> WCF, Section xxii. "Of Adoption."

endeavor, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.<sup>100</sup>

What is key here, especially when read in conjunction with the duties required for proper Sabbath keeping, is the requirement to make proper use of money and work. The Divines go beyond previous requirements in adding “a lawful calling and diligence in it” as part of the requirement to not steal. The Divines understood that improper use of wealth is a form of theft against God and man. Moreover, they require Christians to use all lawful means to grow wealth for themselves and others and to not do so is to be negligent in obedience to God’s giving of the resources. The very next section regarding sins included in the Eighth Commandment include unlawful callings within the list that included misuse of wealth through fraud, injustice, oppression, and coveting. Idleness is also called out among the sins that defraud the Christian’s due use and comfort of the estate in which God has put him. In these sections it is clear that Puritan England, as reflected in the Westminster Larger Catechism sought to codify a worldview regarding not only the use of wealth, but its cultivation and expansion within a Christian ethical framework, giving Christians an opportunity to see how labor can be used to glorify God and also how misuse of one’s time and efforts are sins that violate the moral law of God.

So we see that within one hundred years since Luther’s first works enflamed the Reformation, synods, councils, confessions, and catechisms are responding to the established Catholic dogma with Reformed positions on how man is saved and how good work, an active life, can be pleasing to God aside from monasticism. These views would continue to drive change in the coming centuries.

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<sup>100</sup> WCF LC, 140-142.

### Anabaptist Contribution

As Luther and Calvin's reforming movements grew in scale and power, groups arose in response to what they saw as corruption in both the Roman Catholic establishment and the Reformed opposition. They came to be called the Radical Reformers and include Thomas Munster and the Zwickau prophets, who took a violent approach, as seen in the peasant war of 1525, and Anabaptists who took a nonviolent approach for their own reforming efforts.

The traditional Anabaptist theology on vocation represents a third way, distinct from the Roman Catholic and Reformed positions. Most commonly known for their stance against the Roman Catholic and Reformed view on infant baptism, offering voluntary church membership and believer's baptism as a response, they also differ on vocation and calling. The other key positions that form their religious community framework all relate to their theology of vocation and culture. Key differentiators of their beliefs include, freedom of religion, liberty of conscience, separation of church and state, nonconformity to the world, pacifism, and the priesthood of all believers, a less formal approach regarding the role of clerics in their ecclesiology, systematic theology and church structure in general.

While the Anabaptists had a general appreciation of Luther's contribution to a theology of vocation away from Rome, they were also suspicious of the openness to civil positions. Given the religious tension during the Reformation that led to political tensions and conflict, they were suspect of any occupations in civil roles that included the spread of conflict and violence. An Anabaptist group known as the Swiss Brethren composed The *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527 which lays out their opposition to "the sword" as being "outside the perfection of Christ."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *Schleitheim Confession of Faith* 1527. In Noll 47.

They point to their heavenly citizenship while the magistrate is merely for rule on the earth. While they agree that the state is a divinely instituted order, they argue it has been corrupted by sin and violence and hence it is beneath the dignity of a true Christian's participation. As government and commerce developed further and overlapped, some Anabaptists leaders urged their followers away from engaging in trade and commerce other than marketing their own crafts and creations in humble fashion.

The former Catholic priest and Anabaptist leader Menno Simons contributed to the theology of vocation for Anabaptists in his book, *True Evangelical Faith*, where he quoted an Apocryphal text in positive light to condemn worldly labors. "A merchant can hardly keep from doing wrong, nor is a tradesman innocent from sin. (Ecclesiasticus 26:29)."<sup>102</sup> Few early Anabaptist leaders such as Balthasar Hubmaier opposed this view. He argued for Christian service in courts, trade, or civil arenas since they can do God's work there and they ultimately will have to personally give account to God for their all their actions. Yet it was Simons' approach that won that day and continues in Anabaptists traditions like the Hutterites, Amish, Mennonites, and Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarene), in which I was raised.

Anabaptists were ostracized by both Roman Catholic and Reformed communities, often being martyred under the eyes of clergy of their established church. As a result, they became very anti-clerical and ultimately disestablished formal hierarchies of clergy in their church system, embracing the priesthood of all believers. In *Transforming Vocation: A Mennonite*

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<sup>102</sup> Menno Simons, *True Christian Faith*, available from <http://www.mennosimons.net/ft022-truechristianfaith.html>; Internet. accessed 14 October, 2017.

*Perspective*, Keith Graber-Miller points out the Anabaptist distinction from the Reformed position:

Overall, in several key respects, Anabaptists were out of step with their Reformation peers on the concept of vocation. They were troubled by what they saw as a fusion of God's will and calling with existing political, economic, and spiritual arrangements. They wanted the primary vocation or calling of Christian discipleship to either transform or limit the practice of all occupations and profession.<sup>103</sup>

Richard Valantasis argues that this approach to vocation is yet another form of asceticism. Simons' theology is ascetic by Valantasis's definition since it used these methods to restructure Anabaptists' relationship with 'worldly' society.<sup>104</sup> While it is not an escape into the desert, as the early monastics approach, it was a withdrawal from society in order to mortify the flesh, that through self-denial, they can be "true" Christians. In Hutterite communities under the leadership of Peter Reidemann, engaging in business as a merchant was forbidden and labeled sinful. Buying and selling for a profit was seen as making things more expensive for the poor and hence stealing. While many early Anabaptist leaders were educated and city dwellers, due to persecution within two generations they were driven to rural areas and adapted an agrarian lifestyle in an insular or closed communal setting. With a more collectivistic cultural perspective in these communities, sharing is stressed

For three hundred years, the lifestyle of farming and simple living became indispensable from their theology. Graber-Miller argued, "Mennonites believed it would be impossible to survive as Mennonites in the cities, or that living in such settings would force them to

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<sup>103</sup> Keith Graber-Miller, *Transforming Vocation: A Mennonite Perspective*. Available from <https://radicalsending.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/graber-millervocationmennonite-article.pdf>. Internet. accessed 3 November, 2017.

<sup>104</sup> Lawrence J. Altepeter, "The Asceticism of Menno Simons," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 1998, 72: 69-83.

compromise their Christian principles.”<sup>105</sup> The shift for the American Mennonite communities from farming to crafts, and now to professions in an office setting has been dramatic, leaving only 12% of Mennonites in their traditional farm settings according to Grabber-Miller. He continued, “The shift toward professionalism, often associated with the move toward suburbia and urban centers, became a serious point of tension among American Mennonites in the middle of the twentieth century.”<sup>106</sup>

Resolving the tension, Mennonite leaders like E.E. Miller encouraged young Mennonites to view their own professions as a Christian calling, and go forward into the world sharing Christ and their distinct ethics. Others appealed to Scripture’s lack of examples of people being called to secular jobs as a reason to work for sustaining life, but not to consider this part of God’s calling into any particular field of work. Grabber-Miller lists six points of continuity contemporary Mennonites should consider as they enter the complex business world and need to give account of their vocation or calling. First, he writes that Calling should be understood primarily and fundamentally as being a follower of Jesus Christ. In this way their position is similar to the Reformed position. Stating there is God’s general call (to salvation) separate from a particular call (to a station in life).

Unlike the Calvinist position, Mennonites do not carry the concept of vocation into their position in work. Grabber-Miller explains, “When asked his vocation, an early Anabaptist reportedly said, ‘My vocation is to follow Christ. To make a living, I’m a tailor.’”<sup>107</sup> He points

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<sup>105</sup> Grabber-Miller, 35.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 43.

out since most North Americans move in and out of jobs every five to seven years, it hurts the greatness of the call to be a Christian to also argue that someone is called to be a gas station clerk for a few years. They argued that one is not just called to be a Christian but to be a Christian in specific places. “When vocation is rooted in discipleship, vocation is about more than making occupational and educational choices; it is also about what sustains and nurtures Christians in those roles.”<sup>108</sup> Mennonite theologians wrote of reclaiming the doctrine of vocation by implementing their ethics into each position and enter professions and business with a “strategy of creative subversion,”<sup>109</sup> focusing on what they can accomplish for Christ’s church rather than for the position itself or company in general. This is a departure from Luther’s call to be best at the work one does to glorify God. It is certainly far from Calvin’s claims affirming all of God’s creation. In a sense it seems to create another dualism between doing work and ministering by example. Sharing faith verbally and through direct acts of discipleship rather than God being glorified in the creative act of work as an end in itself. These Anabaptist traditions often accept manual physical labor (such as farming) and mercy work (healthcare related occupations) but hold other more financially motivated endeavors to suspicion.

### Post Reformation

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the industrial revolution fundamentally changed the way many throughout the world worked, exchanged in trade, and how they viewed their

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>109</sup> See John H. Yoder *Body Politics* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 1992) and *The Royal Priesthood*, (Harrisonburg, Herald Press, 1998), as well as Calvin Redekop and Urie Bender *Who Am I, What am I: Search for Meaning in Your Work?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) for additional readings in Mennonite views toward a theology of vocation.

work. As Calvinism spread, so did free markets and the material success that came with increased freedom and trade, although the dark side of this shift was the separation of man from the fruit of his labors. Visions of miserable factory working conditions, assembly line workers conducting repetitive and seemingly meaningless tasks define part of the industrial revolution as well. The birth of a technological revolution increased productivity but also led to cultures of work that prioritized striving and work to the status of an idol, revered above all else, where this drive for success left many with less time for God, family, and church. As Placher notes, “In such a context, to urge people to think of their job as the call from God that gives their life meaning may be to push them in exactly the wrong direction, toward centering their lives even more on jobs that already obsess them.”<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, a new set of questions gave Christians the need for reflection on those who do not work. What about Christians who are disabled and therefore cannot work or those who were in a position without need to labor daily?

In this post-Christian period of history, even many Christians began to question if calling and vocation in this construct were Biblical. Placher in *Callings* points out several prominent contemporary theologians that way on the ongoing concern here. Baptist James Y. Holloway writes that the Bible never elevated jobs and professions to the level of calling.<sup>111</sup> Stanley Hauerwas<sup>112</sup> described work as a hedge against boredom that rises to the level of demonic activity when it becomes idolatrous. This approach highlighted the negative connection of work and God’s calling and began growing among key thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth

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<sup>110</sup> Placher, 327.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 328.

centuries such as Max Weber, Karl Barth, and Miroslav Volf. Roman Catholic positions shifted, in some ways adopting a more Reformed position, even while the broader evangelical church moved away from them.

Max Weber wrote in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) that Calvinists confused earthly prosperity as a sign of divine blessing. Exploring the relationship between religious belief and economics, Weber developed a thesis that the asceticism and thrift of Calvinists lead to capitalism through their dedication to hard work. This influential work also made some strong critiques of the situation. As he develops his argument, Weber writes, “In fact the whole history of monasticism is in a certain sense the history of a continual struggle with the problem of the secularizing influence of wealth.”<sup>113</sup> Drawing on John Wesley’s revival of Methodism as an example of such a monastic reform, Weber states that the intensity of the search for a Kingdom of God on earth led to economic virtue, but as the roots in the religious experience died out, what was left was pure economic worldliness:

A specifically bourgeois economic ethic had grown up. With the consciousness of standing in the fullness of God’s grace and being visibly blessed by Him, the bourgeois business man, as long as he remained within the bounds of formal correctness, as long as his moral character was spotless and the use to which he put his wealth was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interest as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so.<sup>114</sup>

Weber saw an “inner-worldly asceticism” in the Puritan work ethic, employed with religious fervor, which by Benjamin Franklin’s era had separated from its origins in Calvinism. He points out that the Puritan wanted to work for his calling, while modern man is forced to work. This

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<sup>113</sup> Placher, 374.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 375.

machine was created when asceticism was drawn out from monastic cells and into daily life, dominating the world morality about work. Weber claimed, “Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained and increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history.”<sup>115</sup> He developed his concept described as an “iron cage,” that traps the Calvinist capitalist in an immoral paradigm by addicting them to its benefits. Seeing the challenge of Christian vocation in business in the contemporary context is shared by many others that point to the dangers of materialism, idolatry, and other ethical questions that arose from the expansion of capitalism.

### 20<sup>th</sup> century Perspectives

As Reformed orthodoxy was challenged by Post-Enlightenment thinking shifting to the authority of science over revelation, liberal theologians began to look back at the Reformed basis for their theology of work in the pages of Scripture and questioned their assumptions and resulting conclusions. Having a fundamentally different view of Genesis 1 and 2 as being poetry and myth, Liberal theologians considered their own conclusions for how man is an image bearer of God and how his work participates in redemption. In her post war religious essay *Vocation in Work*, Dorothy Sayers points out the rise of the artist who works so they can work more, rather than the laborer who labors in order to live by enjoying other people’s labors. She also points out the inevitable inclusion of women in the workforce and other factors of life in the twentieth

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 377.

century post war work place that would become the zeitgeist to address for other writers to come.<sup>116</sup>

Two movements that have grown in the twentieth century that have taken a different approach to wealth and the Christian's involvement with work and its monetary reward are the Liberation Theology movement and the preachers of the Prosperity Gospel. In a very general sense theologies of liberation stress God's relationship to the poor often espousing Marxist doctrines against wealth and capitalism while the Prosperity Gospel takes the other extreme, placing God and his blessing on the side of the healthy and wealthy. In both cases, they should be considered as extremes that make the Reformed, Anabaptist, and Roman Catholic positions look much closer to one another in their mediating the situational verses of God's favor to the poor or rich on which these two views interpretive positions hang.

Karl Barth's life's work, *Church Dogmatics* (1967) defines his position toward a theology of vocation written during the Nazi movement he escaped in his native Germany:

Our premise is that the word "vocation" is not known to the New Testament in its present meaning, i.e., in the narrower technical sense in which it denotes the definite area of man's work. In the New Testament *klesis* always means quite unambiguously the divine calling, i.e., the act of the call of God issued in Jesus Christ by which a man is transplanted into his new state as a Christian, is made a participant in the promise (Eph 1:18; 4:4) bound up with this new state, and assumes the duty (Eph 4:1; 2 Pet 1:10) corresponding to this state. This calling is holy (2 Tim. 1:9). It is heavenly (Heb. 3:1). It comes therefore from above (Phil. 3:14).<sup>117</sup>

Barth understood the need to revolt against the Catholic concept of vocation and opposed the internal schism the Roman Catholic structure created, which designated first class and second

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 405-412.

<sup>117</sup> Placher, 431.

class Christians between those who had calling and those that did not. Yet he felt the Reformation did a disservice to the concept of *Klesis* by devaluing it because it became up to men to define their vocations rather than recognizing that it comes from above. Barth adds, “When we see the vocation of a man as his destiny already disclosed and imposed as the will and law of God, so that he needs only an inner call to recognize and apprehend it, to what purpose is the calling of God, Christ or the Gospel?”<sup>118</sup> Barth understood that work is part of something larger in the life of a servant of Christ. Unless someone is co-operating with God within the Christian community, they cannot understand the meaning of the work they are summoned to. He states, “Without faith and its obedience, man’s work will always stand under the shadow of the most profound uncertainty.”<sup>119</sup> It is not a system of Christian ethics that can define vocation, but God must in his own good time, reveal it to believers through illumination. He acknowledges that Paul commands people to work in 1 Thess. 4 and highlights that Paul includes, “In the Lord Jesus.”

Placher writes that Jurgen Moltmann was influenced by the theology of Karl Barth and developed a form of Liberation Theology, which posits God suffering with his people. Under the teaching of Moltmann at the University of Tübingen, Miroslav Volf would become one of the key proponents of a theology of work in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Volf’s doctoral dissertation on the relationship between Christian faith and economics, specifically the nature and purpose of everyday work, provides a contemporary critique of Calvin for the present reality of life after the industrial revolution. His approach focused on ecclesiology (church) and eschatology

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<sup>118</sup> Placher, 433.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 437.

(consummation) which culminated in his pneumatological (Holy Spirit) approach in the 1991 book *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*.<sup>120</sup>

Volf was also the key drafter of the Oxford Declaration on Faith and Economics in 1990 which incorporated over a hundred contributions from theologians and economists, ethicists and development practitioners, church leaders and business managers. It produced our positions on key distinctives of the Christian faith and practice toward economic realities and ends with the following statement:

We urge all people, and especially Christians, to adopt stewardship and justice as the guiding principles for all aspects of economic life, particularly for the sake of those who are most vulnerable. These principles must be applied in all spheres of life. They have to do with our use of material resources and lifestyle as well as with the way people and nations relate to one another. With girded loins and burning lamps we wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ when justice and peace shall embrace.<sup>121</sup>

Within the framework of the declaration, the Biblical concepts established over the centuries from Reformed perspectives towards a theology of work were reaffirmed and causes of using wealth to pursue justice for the poor established. The final framework broke out the sections and subsections in the table listed:

Table 3.

A. Creation and Stewardship	God the Creator Stewardship of Creation Stewardship and Economic Production Technology and its Limitations
B. Work and Leisure	Work and Human Nature The Purpose of Work Alienation in Work Rest and Leisure
C. Poverty and Justice	God and the Poor Causes of Poverty

<sup>120</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Towards a Theology of Work*, (New York: Oxford 1991).

<sup>121</sup> *Oxford Declaration on Faith and Economics*. (Oxford University. 1990).

	Justice and Poverty Some Urgent Contemporary Issues
D. Freedom, Government, and Economics	The Language of Human Rights Christian Distinctives Democracy The Concentration of Economic Power Capitalism and Culture The Role of Government Mediating Structures

Broadly evangelical in its scope, and largely consistent with other Reformed positions expressed by preceding positions towards work, this document was also a step into a more modern framework where issues not previously considered were brought to light. Key areas of environmental stewardship, materialism as a result of economic expansion of capitalism and democracy, systemic poverty, government structures, global effects of trade, and technology are all areas that thinkers in this era addressed in a contemporary context. For example, with the expansion of Capitalistic economic systems to the corners of the globe, it has also come a necessary statement that stewardship requires dominion, but not domination. The Declaration argues:

Much of human aggression toward creation stems from a false understanding of the nature of creation and the human role in it. Humanity has constantly been confronted by the two challenges of selfish individualism, which neglects human community, and rigid collectivism, which stifles human freedom. Christians and others have often pointed out both dangers. But only recently have we realized that both ideologies have a view of the world with humanity at the center which reduces material creation to a mere instrument.

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<sup>122</sup> *Oxford Declaration on Faith and Economics*, Stewardship of Creation, 4.

Looking back at over two hundred years of capitalism and its effects at a global level, the Oxford Statement reaffirms that the Biblical life and world view is not centered on humanity, rather it is God-centered. It continues:

Non-human creation was not made exclusively for human beings. We are repeatedly told in the Scripture that all things-human beings and the environment in which they live-were "for God" (Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16). Correspondingly, nature is not merely the raw material for human activity. Though only human beings have been made in the image of God, non-human creation too has a dignity of its own, so much so that after the flood God established a covenant not only with Noah and his descendants, but also "with every living creature that is with you" (Genesis 9:9). Similarly, the Christian hope for the future also includes creation. "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).<sup>123</sup>

With regards to technology, which increasingly plays a greater and greater role in both work and leisure, the Declaration lists four criteria from the Christian faith to help evaluate the development and use of technology:

First, technology should not foster disintegration of family or community, or function as an instrument of social domination. Second, persons created in the image of God must not become mere accessories of machines. Third, as God's stewards, we must not allow technology to abuse creation. If human work is to be done in cooperation with creation then the instruments of work must cooperate with it too. Finally, we should not allow technological advancements to become objects of false worship or seduce us away from dependence on God (Genesis 11:1-9).<sup>124</sup>

Unlike theologies toward work which were largely ethical and communal in scope, as globalism spread, new approaches had to be created to foster a greater call for international cooperation between individuals, private organizations, and nations to promote responsible action in the arenas that have global overlap such as environmental protections, protections for refugees, and

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., Technology and its Limitations, 9.

government structures that help promote human freedom rather than restrict it. The Declaration also contained an eschatological approach toward human work:

Human work has consequences that go beyond the preservation of creation to the anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world. They are, of course, not ushering in the kingdom of God, building the "new heavens and a new earth." Only God can do that. Yet their work makes a small and imperfect contribution to it—for example, by shaping the personalities of the citizens of the eternal kingdom which will come through God's action alone.<sup>125</sup>

Over the last century as more women have entered the work force and globalization has blended many cultures, the need to address attitudes and structures to restrict sexism, harassment, and racism from a Christian perspective were necessary. Marginalized groups of all types were mistreated in systems where people were treated as means to an end (profit), rather than the dignity required as God's image bearers. They call for a greater measure of equal justice and dignity and social and economic structures, of which business plays a key role. Recognizing that the deepest meaning of human work, that God established human work as a means to accomplish His own work in the world, requires Christians to reevaluate God's word toward these situations and respond with Biblical ethics as contemporary and future issues arise,

The Declaration also recognized the global scale of neglect of the poor that often flows from greed. "Furthermore, the obsessive or careless pursuit of material goods is one of the most destructive idolatries in human history (Ephesians 5:5). It distracts individuals from their duties before God, and corrupts personal and social relationships." The Declaration is not alone in recognizing the negative effect materialism has had on Christian communities as a byproduct of the spread of capitalism. Works on business ethics by Wayne Grudem, R.C. Sproul Jr, Timothy

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., The Purpose of Work, 18.

Keller and others,<sup>126</sup> that defend Capitalism as Biblical in general, are also quick to denounce the temptation of materialism and idolatry that often results from the culture it creates.

We recognize that poverty results from and is sustained by both constraints on the production of wealth and on the inequitable distribution of wealth and income. We acknowledge the tendency we have had to reduce the causes of poverty to one at the expense of the others. We affirm the need to analyze and explain the conditions that promote the creation of wealth, as well as those that determine the distribution of wealth.<sup>127</sup>

In terms of some urgent contemporary issues, Oxford recognized inequitable international economic relations that aggravate poverty in poor countries as a result of international monetary instruments that negatively burden them with debt. When financial systems collapse, the poor disproportionately are negatively affected in their quality of life. Even as they call for greater responsibility the poor, marginalized, and disenfranchised, they argued the solution is not governmental barriers to the flow of goods. Greater freedom, they stated was the key to increase trade and reduce global poverty. Other areas that required a Christian response at the time of their writing were massive global military expenditures, particularly at the time of the Cold War's end, economic structures that favored the privileged, and the rise of drug trafficking.

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<sup>126</sup> Some key works I found in this area that I found helpful include:

- R.C. Sproul Jr., *Biblical Economics: A Commonsense Guide to Our Daily Bread*. White Hall, (WV: Tolle Lege Press. 2008).
- Wayne Grudem. *Business for the Glory of God: The Bible's Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business*. (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2003).
- Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters*. (New York, NY: Dutton. 2009).
- John R Schneider. *Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money & Possessions* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press. 1994).

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., Causes of Poverty, 36.

## Roman Catholic Evolution

Roman Catholic thought has also evolved and adapted to cultural shifts though not at the same speed as in the Reformed and Anabaptist communities. The Council of Trent was called in 1545 to address the issues brought to light by the Reformation. It was staunch in its stand against Lutheran ideas on vocation and vigorously restated the monastic ideal and defended the clerical system of ecclesiology. Along with all the condemnations of the Reformers, it also condemned anyone that denied that celibacy or consecrated virginity was superior to marriage.<sup>128</sup> However, one Catholic reformer who stood closer to the Reformers on vocation was St. Francis de Sales, whose major works *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1608) and *Treatise on the Love of God* (1616). He directed the layperson how to live out their faith in the secular realm, writing to soldiers, shop keepers, municipal workers, and married people who sought devotion to Christ. According to Hahnenberg, this stemmed in part from his theology of predestination being grounded in the same concepts of divine grace as Calvin.<sup>129</sup>

The First Vatican Council (Vatican I, 1864-1870) responded to issues that the church needed to respond to including the rise of rationalism, liberalism, materialism, and issues of Church structure. The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II, 1962-1965) called to address the Roman Catholic Church's response to issues pertaining to the modern world in 1962-1965, including the rise of globalism, varying economic structures like capitalism and socialism, ecumenism, and the consecrated life. It was unique in the amount of attention given to

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<sup>128</sup> Edward Hahnenberg, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press. 1996). 27.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 30.

laypeople's activities and its impact on the church. The call to holiness as the essential basis for the Christian life can be found in several sections including this statement from Pope Paul VI.

We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ. The Second Vatican Council has significantly spoken on the universal call to holiness. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church by a Council which intended to bring a renewal of Christian life based on the gospel.<sup>130</sup> (CL 16)

Another key development was the overt tendency to consider diversity in vocational callings according to different stages of life. Carol Olson points out one of the principle documents of Vatican II, the *Lumen Gentium* (LG) of 1964 indicates the vocation of Christians for their Christian mission as they engage in temporal work. Like Anabaptist thought for laypersons in secular occupations living a holy life, they are called to a “sacred subversion by which they, grounded in holiness and filled with the Holy Spirit, change the world from the inside, permeating it with truth and light.” Olson notes:

But by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. . . . It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer. (LG 31)<sup>131</sup>

Further Olson points us to LG31 for another example:

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<sup>130</sup> Second Vatican Council, CL16. Available on [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm). Internet, accessed on 11 November, 2017.

<sup>131</sup> Carl E. Olson. The Role of the Laity: An Examination of Vatican II and *Christifideles Laici*. Available on <http://kinoinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/The-Role-of-the-Laity-Olson.pdf>. Internet. Accessed on 2 Dec 2017.

We cannot overstate the importance and centrality of the laity in this most pressing mission. According to *Lumen Gentium*, it is the laity's "special vocation . . . to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. . . . There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. . . . It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer" (LG 31).

In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (LE) in 1981, Pope John Paul wrote what could have earlier been attributed to a Reformed thinker according to Placher: "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 a human being.'"<sup>132</sup>

On the one hundred year anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*,<sup>133</sup> that was circulated to Catholic leadership to address the situation for working class people, capitalism, socialism, and promoted social justice against the class warfare and conflict of the time, Pope John Paul commemorated its memory by circulating his own encyclical: *Centesimus Annus*. In his commentary, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, Richard Neuhaus says the work is "not hard on Capitalism, but hard on capitalists,"<sup>134</sup> as it puts forward a notion of shared responsibility and social justice. John Paul sought in part to resolve the issue that many Catholics at the time spent fifty to seventy hours a week in secular occupations each week

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<sup>132</sup> Placher, 332.

<sup>133</sup> Latin for "Of Revolutionary Change" or "Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor."

<sup>134</sup> Richard Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, (Random House: New York, NY, 2012). 222.

“bracketed off from their understanding of their faith.”<sup>135</sup> While these Roman Catholic doctrines and explanations do not reverse the long held tradition of holding religious vocations in higher regard than secular work, I believe they do show a softening position as they recognize the moral nature of work and structures of faith for Christianity’s responsibility for the right ordering of society. As such, it takes a more direct approach to ordering society and work in such a way to bring about a Catholic vision of redeemed society rather than subversively approaching work to win souls.

Contemporary Catholics can embrace Vatican II’s call that everyone has a vocation in light of its universal call to holiness and that an active life in the world can offer a positive value to the larger mission of the church. In his 2010 book *Awakening Vocation*, Edward Hahnenberg puts forward a modern Catholic theology of vocation within the context of the dualistic understanding of the nature-grace relationship. As Catholic theology in general “abandoned this approach in the middle of the twentieth century, replacing it with a richer theology of grace that affirms God’s pervasive presence in the world.”<sup>136</sup> He argued God’s *call* should be understood against the conventional contemporary concept of *choice*. Pointing to Ignatius of Loyola as the most influential voice for a modern spirituality of discernment, against the dualistic approach of the past. He writes:

Ignatius’ own vision was frustrated by a nature-grace dualism that entered into post-Reformation Catholic theology. Thus the prayerful attention to the subtle movements of God within the soul that was so crucial to Ignatius was transformed by later theologians into an anxious search for some ‘secret voice’ telling them what to do.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>136</sup> Hahnenberg, xii.

He cites Ignatius' shift from institutionalization to internalization. Similarly the Reformed and Baptist movements after the Reformation experienced dualism's creep back into the common understanding of vocation. To avoid this slide back into dualistic thought, one must look at applying a theology of vocation in practice since that which is habitual can often move the intellectual as much as the reverse.

## Chapter 4

### Applying Theologies of Vocation

Calvin's assessment of Scripture's position, that God, having created the world and called Adam into a relationship to Himself alongside work in the world, leaves contemporary Calvinists to accept that work is a mandate and central obligation in life. Work offers both delight and dignity, while also reflecting the effects of the fall, posing challenges as Christians engage secular culture and spiritual battles both internal and external. The Reformers influence toward work and material gain spread the positive effects of wealth creation in a free society, however, the negative effects of materialism (idolatry consumerism, and insatiability) also progressed alongside it. According to Miroslav Volf, while these sins were not the intended outcomes of a

Calvinist view of vocation, they were exploited by the system of capitalism.<sup>137</sup> The creation mandate must be understood and applied comprehensively alongside the primary call to image God. Transactions must not be viewed as morally neutral but engaged in way to glorify God, with the right attitude of heart. While Luther and Calvin framed their theologies of vocation into the context of God's design unveiled in the creation account, expressing man's royal dominion, calling, and purpose, other important questions have since been raised. Contemporary application requires engaging current voices that have raised concerns that the Reformers approach did not consider the contemporary context of information and awareness. Had the Reformers not freed vocation from the confines of the church's walls, Christians today may not be asking themselves how, as workers in an ever expanding global economy, they can contribute towards God's work. They may fall into the error of viewing their production in isolation from their faith and call.

Steve Garber's book *Visions of Vocation* (2014) poses the question to Christians how they will engage with the world when they have the burden of knowledge about the world's problems and their role in history. He reminds us of Otto Von Bismark's essential quote "If you want to respect law or sausage, then don't watch either being made,"<sup>138</sup> to highlight that Christians today, in a post 9/11/01, world cannot just burry their heads and work without asking how it plays a part in greater global consequences. He also points to the Nuremburg trials when Nazi soldiers were tried for their war crimes. Men like Adolf Eichmann defended their actions by stating they were simply doing their jobs, obeying orders. That trial is a reminder for

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<sup>137</sup> In John Schneider, *Godley Materialism: Rethinking Money and Possessions*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press 1994). 174.

<sup>138</sup> Steven Garder, *Visions of Vocation*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014). 21.

contemporary Christians that we cannot separate our moral convictions from our day to day work because our daily work contributes to a larger result with moral consequences. Christians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seeking to apply a theology of vocation, are forced to ask themselves questions regarding their involvement in their work and the rest of humanity they are interconnected to. These questions go beyond Luther and Calvin's treatment of the issue in their time. For Calvin all jobs were acceptable, except jobs that were clearly immoral. For example, Calvin calls out the job of being a prostitute or a pimp specifically as being unacceptable for Christians to consider because they clearly violate the Seventh Commandment against adultery. In those specific cases, the connection of the work and sin are pretty clearly visible, but today a position in an electronics company may supply the technology to deliver weapons of mass destruction, which is not so obvious. The collective effort of civilians engaged in supporting the war effort during World War II showed how every day actions (rationing or working for the war effort) effect life for other people on a global scale. As Garber notes, Thomas Friedman points out in his *The World is Flat*, "From chocolates to computers, we are profoundly interconnected."<sup>139</sup>

Garber asks several important questions for Christians to consider for their vocation. What will we do with the knowledge we have? If we know, must we act, or can we know and not bear any responsibility for our response? There are multiple practical approaches one can take, and it draws back to the distinction between the Anabaptist approach and Reformed approach to vocation.

Anabaptists that draw themselves out of engaging with the global issues in order to serve the Lord in simplicity through economic and political asceticism. In a sense they employed a

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 174.

modern form of Stoicism. The Stoic approach to life states that one can know but chose not to care. Their response is *apatheia*, which is a way of knowing that does not require one to respond. It is where the current term apathy originates from. Garber points out that B.B. Warfield understood the message of the Gospels as being a response to the Stoicism of the time of Jesus. The Gospel's response was that "knowledge if most fully seen in love."<sup>140</sup> He takes this one step further and points out that God's model for love is not to know how sinful humanity is and turn away, but rather, even while knowing man at his worst, he still engages with love. As Paul writes in Romans 5:8, "While we were yet sinner, Christ died for the ungodly." N.T. Wright understood this challenge in vocation and related it to Christ's own vocation and purpose, pointing out that any follower of Jesus will likewise understand their vocation is terms of remarkable joy at times and remarkable sorrow at other times.<sup>141</sup> Garber writes of a Hindu scholar who made a poignant observation after reading the Bible for the first time regarding its implication of man's vocation into God's larger presence as creator, sustainer, and redeemer of his creation. He writes:

I have finally read your holy book, the Bible, and is it a completely unique book. It is unique in its vision of history, setting forth a meaningful story from beginning to end, and it is unique in its vision of the human person as a responsible actor in history. The two go together.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 220.

Unlike the modern stoicism of Anabaptists, the Reformed position unequivocally expresses man's duty to engage with the world as co-workers in redemptive history as it unfolds, rather than sitting it out and waiting for him to work.

To answer these larger questions of vocation in action, one's eschatological view must be taken into account. For one can implicate themselves into the story of their own sanctification through a vocation, as the Reformers pointed out, and even as Anabaptists and Catholics would agree in their own way.

### Vocation's Relationship to Eschatology

Miroslav Volf points out John Calvin's inclusion of common good into his understanding of vocation drawing on implications of Ephesians 4:28 he writes, "It is not enough when a man can say, 'Oh I labor, I have my craft,' or 'I have such a trade.' That is not enough. But we must see whether it is good and profitable for the common good and whether his neighbors may fare the better for it."<sup>143</sup> This conception of work as service to others applies today in a more global context as Volf notes; it applies to all Christians. This is more than saying every Christian has a general obligation to help the poor among them. This is explicit in both Old and New Testaments in too many verses to list, but to comprehend this in a global and eschatological sense is truly radical. It is not just a call to help the poor, when you have the means to do so, but "to explicitly labor strenuously (*kopiao*) in order to have the means to do so."<sup>144</sup> This is not only at odds with the secular capitalistic or materialistic desire for self-interest, but to be consciously interested in the intended and unintended consequences of man's actions and activity. As God

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<sup>143</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, (New York, NY: Oxford, 2001). 189.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

works through people to develop other people, this social nature of human life draws the necessary Christian conclusion that self-pursuit can only be morally good in practice when it is accompanied by the pursuit of the good of others also.

Volf adds, “My own good and the good of the whole human family are both included in the *shalom* of the new creation.”<sup>145</sup> Moving beyond Calvin, Volf’s pneumatological understanding of work revolved around God’s special gifts he bestowed to believers in his call for people to live in community and use those gifts to bless the greater group. It is not enough for Volf that one simply stay in their station in life and do their best at where they are. Christians must assess and find their spiritual gifts and then actively use them in vocation to work for the redemption of the world. Knowing one’s gifts, is a part of finding one’s vocation since God does not give these gifts to be left unused, nor does he expect one to have responsibility for satisfying community needs for which he did not enable someone with the gifts to do so. Volf expands the Reformed position into the current situation of expanded knowledge of the world that is relevant for the information age.

### Differing Views about Future of the Earth

Christian history is replete with interpretations of end time scenarios before the consummation of all things. Beginning with the earliest confession the Apostle’s Creed, which affirmed the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting to more elaborate explanations about the details and order of events that came later. What transpires with all the material

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 192.

creation (earth) has been disputed among the various traditions and its impact on vocation is worthy of discussion. The first concern is whether the world will survive the consummation.

Since every human endeavor has been building on the prior generation's work, all the way back to Adam in the garden, we are connected back to the original work that God blessed in the garden. Will God redeem and restore, or destroy all that man has worked to establish in attempt to fulfill his cultural mandate? 2 Pet 3:10 states, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." This draws some parallel to Jesus' own words that Peter witnessed personally in Matthew 24:35 when he says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." The Greek word used by Peter for "shall be burned up" is *katakaisetai*, which scholars have been interpreting as representing a disappearance, or something not being found. However, it is worth noting that Scripture has examples of burning as being a tool for refining not just destroying.

Albert M. Wolters in his commentary on 2 Peter 3:10 writes, "In Malachi's vision of the Day the fire will burn until the purification is accomplished, until "right offerings" which are "pleasing to the Lord" are found at the end of the purifying process."<sup>146</sup> After consideration of other examples of fire in God's presence in a smelting process, Wolters concludes,

Textual criticism seems in this case to have read into Peter's text features of a Gnostic worldview which looked on the present created order as expendable in the overall scheme of things. The text of 2 Pet 3:10, on our interpretation, lends no support to this perspective, but stresses instead the permanence of the created earth, despite the coming judgement.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Albert Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10." (*Westminster Theological Journal*, no 49, (1987). 405-413.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

Calvin's understanding of the consummation and future world most certainly must have contributed to their positive view of earthly work. To understand the distinction in his eschatology from competing worldviews, one must look beyond his doctrine of the end times (or last things) and seek to understand his doctrine on the kingdom of God against the Catholic theology of church and kingdom, the Lutheran two kingdom view,<sup>148</sup> and the Anabaptists' approach to politically realize the kingdom in the present.

In Calvin's commentary on Romans 8:21 he writes the following on his position toward the renewal of the earth:

God will restore to a perfect state the world, now fallen, together with mankind. But what that perfection will be, as to beasts as well as plants and metals, it is not meet nor right in us to inquire more curiously; for the chief effect of corruption is decay. Some subtle men, but hardly sober-minded, inquire whether all kinds of animals will be immortal; but if reins be given to speculation where will they at length lead us? Let us then be content with this simple doctrine, that such will be the constitution and the complete order of things, that nothing will be deformed or fading.<sup>149</sup>

Luther agrees that the future state is one in which vanity will cease to subject man's efforts and his work will be free from the bondage of corruption.<sup>150</sup> If Calvin understands all things to be renewed, including man's work, then it follows the Christian who wishes to sanctify his work must look towards that future model as a basis for present vocation. It one believes that

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<sup>148</sup> For more on contemporary issues and a Reformed response to Luther's Two Kingdom view read John Frame *The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology*. Responses to Frame's argument should also be considered for a balanced insight to the major issues. Michael Horton's "A Response to John Frame's The Escondido Theology, Friday, 10 Feb 2012 available at <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/2012/02/a-response-to-john-frames-the-escondido-theology/> as well as W. Robert Godfrey's Feb 7, 2012 "Westminster Seminary California Faculty Response to John Frame" available at <https://wscal.edu/blog/westminster-seminary-california-faculty-response-to-john-frame>. Internet, accessed on 12 December, 2017.

<sup>149</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009). 308.

<sup>150</sup> Luther. *Commentary on Romans*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervon, 1957). 125

all of earth will be destroyed and completely re-created, then the value of one's contribution to build up the things on this earth is diminished as can be seen in other approaches.

### Eternal Perspective of Earthly Work

The fundamental question underlying the entire life project asks what the final destiny of man's physical and spiritual life will be. Darrell Cosden's work, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* (2006) argues that man's work today offers a contribution for eternity. In Romans 8 he sees all of creation participating in glorification, through resurrection. Revelation 21 and 22, anticipates work where once the curse is eliminated, in the new heavens and new earth, labor will no longer have the constraints of sin and curse attached to it. The story of the man, Cosden argues is that in his sin he wanted to work, but not as co-workers with God. In a modern context, man has decided, Cosden writes, to abandon God and relocate heaven to earth through hard work, in what he calls "Babel revisited."<sup>151</sup>

Cosden breaks down the two views of the future state of man's work on earth between the annihilationist view and the transformational view. In the annihilationist view, God's judgement is punitive and totally destroys the earth, replacing it with a new earth that he again creates *ex nihilo*. Contrary to this view, the transformational view reflects on the resurrection of the body, which retains its original essence while being fully restored. Practically speaking, more than asking simply is a vocation appropriate or not for a Christian morally, one must also assess its eternal contribution in God's mission of restoration of his creation for its eternal use to give Him the glory he deserves.

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<sup>151</sup> Darrell Cosden, *Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006). 109.

Christians throughout their history have responded to the enduring theological question of Christ's relationship to culture. Within this first question of Christ's relationship to culture lies the heart of the second question, of the Christian disciple's relationship to culture as they strive to live *in* the world be not be *of* the world.<sup>152</sup> Christians living in communities have successfully created cultures as they sought to fulfill their vocations. These cultures then reinforce the approach to vocation and labor for future generations, even after many have moved beyond the underlying theological assumptions. H. Richard Niebuhr carefully examines the ways Christians have related their understanding of Christ to culture in his 1951 book *Christ and Culture*. Comparing different perspectives such as Christ against culture, the Christ of culture, Christ above Culture, Christ and Culture in Paradox, and Christ the Transformer of Culture, he shows how Western Christianity has struggled to find consensus in how the two should relate, and the practical implications of the varying positions. It is in this larger context of relating to culture as a member of Christ's body that a theology vocation also exists.

If a Calvinist understands their vocation as part of God's transformation of the broader culture, their method to approach culture will be different than the Anabaptist who believes Christ is in contrast to culture. John Calvin's influence over cultures has been well documented and defended in Abraham Kuyper's 1898 Princeton presentations recoded in his *Lectures on Calvinism*,<sup>153</sup> Henry Van Til's *Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (1959).<sup>154</sup> Douglas Kelly's *The*

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<sup>152</sup> John 8:22-24; 17:16; 15:19; 18:36;; Romans 12:1-2; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17; Philippians 3:20;

<sup>153</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*. (New York; Cosimo Classics, 2007).

<sup>154</sup> Henry Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959).

Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World (1992)<sup>155</sup>, and many other recent editions that celebrate his contribution five hundred years later.

## Chapter 5 For Ongoing Discussion

Reformed Christians today should not consider the matter of a theology of vocation a closed matter. Calvin's influence, building on Luther's foundation, was substantial and world changing. The emergence of liberty throughout the world as a result of his theological positions; the expansion of Capitalism as an economic system that raised millions of people out of poverty and provided dignity to basic labor are all praiseworthy. However, they are insufficient for the

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<sup>155</sup> Douglas Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World*. (Philipsburg: P&R, 1992).

questions Christians encounter in the world today. The modern world is different than it was for Calvin and it is different than it was when Kuyper was praising his influence on Western culture one hundred years ago.

The rise of the information has provided a sea change to the interconnectivity of people's throughout the world. The information revolution connects people to their history in opening up knowledge that is now more accessible and affordable than ever in history. More and more people are being exposed to what is going on in the third world through a non-stop barrage of news from various media outlets and gadgets that stream an unending list of insights. Ghosts of the past are exposed and people are sharing information quicker, raising the exchange of ideas to a global level. All of this exposure to information forces Christians to continuously reconsider their calling and response in light of what they know about the world and how they contribute towards building one another up and contributing consistently to their eschatological expectation for God's consummation of history.

As Roman Catholic and Anabaptist positions have moderated toward secular work, the Reformed position must also now adapt to a scenario where more and more Christians are forced to reconcile what they do from 8am-5pm (or usually much later) with what they see on the nightly news and see in their social media feeds. Kuyper's concept of "Sphere Sovereignty"<sup>156</sup> distinguishes clearly between what the church is authorized to do as an institution and what Christians are authorized to do in various callings. The speed at which Christians are expected to respond and defend positions to emerging global issues is instantaneous in a context of constant

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<sup>156</sup> Abraham Kuyper's concept of "sphere sovereignty" is also referred to as differentiated responsibility. This view posits that each sphere of life has its own created integrity. Institutions such as family, state, church, business have their own spheres of influence for which they should not try to take one another over.

communication. Responding in real time to the issues of the day via social media is a real phenomenon that requires more than Luther's position to stand in their place and do one's best. The expectation is to know your position, be prepared to defend it, and know the historicity of the argument related to it. People may not be expected to give a formal defense for their social media comments, but a defense for their choice in occupation in an endless ocean of options will be critiqued. This can be a moment of sharing the gospel and explaining God's use of the person in God's larger plan of redemption. This next era will be replete with integrating one's theological system into an arena where people are concerned with authenticity and "the why"<sup>157</sup> of existence, especially concerning the calling one feels called to pursue through their life.

This paper has attempted to contribute to the Reformed Christian community's understanding of Luther and Calvin's contribution to the theology of vocation, showing how it interprets key biblical concepts and verses, and how this concept has evolved in the history of the church and how it must continue going forward. In the contrast explored against Roman Catholic and Anabaptist interpretations, it should be applauded that these positions have mediated to respond to new challenges their constituents faced in the evolution of new economic structures and lifestyle demands. Reformed Christians should likewise not rest on the past, but continue to seek answers for interpreting and applying a Biblical theology of vocation to all of life as economies, technology, and culture change.

Many churches often experience "a disconnect" between theology formally held by the church and what is actually believed by the membership. Even in Reformed churches, the idea

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<sup>157</sup> The popularity of Simon Sinek's book "*Start with Why*" (NY: Penguin Books 2011), and his subsequent *Ted Talk* lectures continue to contribute to the zeitgeist of people in business seeking to understand and explain that "why" is the most important question to find significance. Found in [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF\\_VuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF_VuA). Internet, accessed on Dec 14, 2017.

that one earns money in “the world” and gives it to the church for them to do “God’s work” is prevalent today despite the library of theological literature that teaches otherwise. There exists an opportunity to instruct Christians in the value of understanding how their daily vocation contributes to the larger Reformed worldview and they can experience a greater sense of devotion to their calling and purpose to their hard work. While Reformers over the years have contributed greatly in this regard, work needs to continue at the local church level to dispel the myths that every day callings in labor are a lesser calling in their contribution to God’s work of redemption and restoration. I hope this paper contributes to that effort in showing the various contributions, Biblical interpretations, and contrast to the other major views, but there is much work that can be done.

Further inquiry can help expand this research by studying the Baptist and broadly evangelical movements’ contributions to this field against the backdrop of American capitalism. Also, it would be interesting to consider why farming in Anabaptist communities is held in such high regard against other work. In my experience and observation they view farming not as labor per se, yet still a type of calling and lifestyle. In these communities where clerical hierarchies were deemphasized, perhaps the life of farming and artisanal craft received a sort of higher regard or provided a greater opportunity for contemplation or avoidance of temptations to sin.

Another interesting foray to consider would be laboring during war time and how one’s work contribution should be considered when the country is engaged in unconscionable acts. The works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and Miroslav Volf on this topic would offer interesting insights and present day applications. In conducting my research I found that this

topic can be a never-ending mission of both discovery and practical application and I pray its contents bless the people of God interested in these concerns.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

At the outset of this research I was sincerely concerned with offering a body of work to the church that would provide an insight into something of great concern to most Christians, their calling. While the term vocation is not necessarily top of mind for the average Christian, the question of one's calling is at the forefront of most decisions people make regarding their daily work and stewardship of their resources. Christians seeking to be faithful to their primary calling to respond to God in faith must also figure out how their daily tasks integrate with that great call. Moreover, as Scripture expresses the many gifts Christians are endowed with, the desire to recognize those gifts and use them for God's glory is endemic to the Christian experience in this life. Drawing on the current reality that most Christians labor in secular professions I sought to show that God's call can be answered right where people are, and I sought to show from Scripture that God can be glorified in ordinary work and service, not just clerical ministry or ecclesiastic efforts. Starting in Genesis with God's creative work, affirming the material world, and empowering man with dominion to image God, I then described the fall and its effects. Examples from the renewal of God's call to be fruitful and multiply, laws about money during the time of Moses' leadership, and the structures laid out for living in godly community in the Promised Land showed God's concern for ethics in business relationships and reveal his attitude towards labor and possessions. The wisdom literature and selections from various Prophets further described God's displeasure when his ways are ignored. I led the reader through key

texts from the Gospels and early Church period that emphasized the value of serving God through secular work and how this began to change as the Church was oppressed by Rome.

This paper introduced key developments in theology related to how vocation was understood from Eusebius, Augustine, Aquinas and pre-reformers that ultimately led to the development of the Roman Catholic position. This theological position which isolated vocation into the walls of the church was one of the positions Martin Luther and John Calvin argued against as they developed distinctly Reformed positions concerning soteriology, common grace, ecclesiology, and eschatology. This paper looked at how vocation was addressed in the subsequent faith statements which clarified Scriptural interpretation about calling over the centuries and how Calvin's position was a major force in the formation of Capitalism and civil freedoms. Anabaptist positions as a response to the Reformed were also considered and shown that, in time their position moderated, as did the Roman Catholic, to embrace some parts of the Reformed position regarding personal calling in the secular sphere.

I closed by showing that while the Reformed position may best fit to the Scriptural truths expressed in the first chapters of this paper, it is something that should continually be reassessed as social structures and economies present new challenges. 20<sup>th</sup> century perspectives offered critiques of parts of Western culture and the Reformed position, which revealed the need to continue to go back to the Bible to understand how we can work with God to bring about his eschatological consummation. As new questions are being asked in a changing social landscape, new opportunities for research and inquiry abound. I pray this research provides a contribution to the ongoing joy we have as Christians to seek out our place in God's created order and to serve him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

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