

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

Introduction

Imagine two scenes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Henry David Thoreau said,

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

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

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

¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*.

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

In other words, the quiet desperation that Thoreau says “most” people feel about their day-to-day lives does not exclude most Christian people, nor even those we might call seriously committed disciples. Despite giving verbal ascent to the notion that the meaning in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, most Christians continue to have deep struggles with the meaning of what they do day-to-day in comparison with what they do on Sundays or in activities typically associated with the spiritual, the ministry-oriented, or the “eternally” important.

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

My audience, scope and approach are as follows. First, I am speaking mostly to the church not the broader world, and specifically to the evangelical church. Second, most of what I have to say will not be new to most of you. I will mention a few things not often considered when this subject is dealt with. The following is my approach.

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

- First, I will review briefly two broad views (distortions) held and often taught in the church that contribute to the problem of work – and I will show that even today, despite some very good recent work done on an integrated theology of work & business, the church continues to use rhetoric that contributes to rather than helps solve the problem.
- Second, I will seek to explain why I believe the evangelical church in particular has such a hard time with a theologically integrated view of work and business.
- Third, I will then review three salient points of a good theology of work in an attempt to re-infuse the message of the church on this subject with a robustness that moves toward a solution rather than perpetuating the problem.
- Fourth, I will provide an example of an orthodox, cross-disciplinary, practical and intellectually robust Christian view of economics and business. This is presented not as the best and final answer on this subject, but is intended to spur additional new work in this area especially by evangelicals.
- Fifth and finally, I will briefly take up calling as the ultimate pastoral answer to an integrated, ontologically meaningful life, and business as a calling specifically as the answer for business-people to see their day-to-day lives as integral with the very acts of worship & service that so often cause them to separate life into two distinct spheres, one full of meaning and the other meaningless, leading to a constant questioning of purposefulness and an unwarranted demeaning of their work relative full-time ministry.

The Church's Contribution to the Problem of Work

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

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

This contribution to the problem typically occurs through **two broad distortions**, both under the umbrella of a dualistic view of reality. The most typical in the Catholic and the evangelical church is the elevation of spiritual/eternal matters above fleshly/temporal matters – or if you will, by maintaining a marked separation between the sacred and the secular. Os Guinness calls this the **Catholic Distortion**.⁴ The second broad distortion, more typical in the liberal Protestant church is by so focusing on the work-a-day world that there is hardly any recognition of God’s involvement any longer.⁵ Guinness describes this **Protestant Distortion** as simply a different form of dualism, where the “secular is elevated over the spiritual.”⁶ I will deal more with the consequences of this distortion in the next section. But for now, I wish to focus mostly on the first kind, the Catholic Distortion.

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

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

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

⁶ Ibid. p. 39.

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

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

One would expect that with most people spending most of their time doing day-to-day, ordinary kind of work and with the tremendous heritage of theological thinking and reflection on this subject to help the average Christian understand the meaning of their work in light of the Christian faith, that the church would get it. But for the most part, it still doesn't – at least in terms of its practices and rhetoric.

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

Let me illustrate this subtle shift away from the meaning of work itself to making the workplace an occasion for doing the really important spiritual or eternal work. This is a quote from a recent sermon given on this past Labor Day Sunday:

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

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

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

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

Secondly: Get a new mission statement for your career...your job. Why do you go to work? To make money? To acquire status? To punch a clock? To put bread on the table...cause it seems it's a neat thing to do? Well, change your mission to catching people for Christ. That's what Jesus wants to do for you and me. Evangelism is a form of worship outside of these walls.¹⁰

Overall the sermon was excellent, and it offered real possibilities to speak to the intrinsic value and meaning of work, especially “Radical Way # 1”. But, as all too often occurs, right at the end the message subtly declared that the truly important thing about work is the *workplace* as a context to do evangelism. It is very true that “evangelism is a form of worship.” However, without any ontological meaning to work, work will always be understood *primarily* if not only as a *place* to win people to Christ.

Of course Bible studies, prayer communities and evangelism are good things. But they say nothing at all about the work itself. More often than not, the church offers little to no discussion or acknowledgment of the work itself. In other words, what the church most often suggests by omission is that it’s not the work that is important. What is really important, *truly meaningful (and obedient)*, is the spiritual activities we do at work. The implication is that the work itself is incidental, little more than a contextual tool for doing sacred work.

Let me explore a bit further how the church contributes to the problem of work.

Doug Sherman and William Hendricks fully analyze the problems associated with a bad theology of work in Part I of their book. Sherman and Hendricks are writing to an evangelical audience. Here’s a summary of the problems they cite: “Some people view their work in purely secular terms [This is the Protestant Distortion.]; work and God are mutually exclusive; Others have adopted what [is] call[ed] a Two-Story view, in which

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

work has no intrinsic value. And others regard work as merely a platform for evangelism.” They continue, “[T]hese [views] are sub-biblical; they are not completely at odds with Scripture, but they are not wholly in line with it either.”¹¹

The dualism which the church allows to stand and sometimes promulgates comes in several forms. Sherman and Hendricks point out four: “(1) God is more interested in the soul than the body; (2) the things of eternity are more important than the things of time; (3) life divides into two categories, the sacred and the secular; and (4) because of the nature of their work, ministers and clergy are more important to God’s program than the laity.”¹² Let’s look quickly at each of these.

First the **Body-Soul Hierarchy**: the idea that the body is somehow less important than the soul. Few perhaps would consider that theology of work distortions might have any relation to classical doctrinal problems but the Body-Soul hierarchy distortion raises a series of philosophical ideas and doctrinal problems that the church has dealt with through the centuries. Examples of these include various schools of Platonism and Stoicism, and numerous Gnostic sects, such as Docetism, Cerinthianism, Manichaeism, and others.¹³ To elevate the soul above the body is really more akin to some non-Christian religions, such as Hinduism, which treats the soul as the important, eternal thing and the body as a vessel relatively unimportant in the scheme of things.¹⁴ Among the most serious problems with this distortion is the damage it does to the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. At Nicea I (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431) and particularly Chalcedon (454), after great pains the church was finally able to articulate the teaching of Scripture about what happened when God became man in Jesus Christ. In the wake of these struggles, the church confirmed that the corporeal world is fundamentally good – in strong contrast to prevailing aberrant Platonic worldviews that saw it as something to be disdained with little meaning and value. Even the church’s

¹¹ Sherman and Hendricks, p. 23.

¹² Ibid, p. 46.

¹³ See F.L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

¹⁴ See Norman Anderson, *The World’s Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 144-148; and Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1958), pp. 24-25. For this discussion, I realize that no evangelical Christian would harbor teachings that foster a Hindu understanding of the soul. But in today’s world of postmodernism and religious pluralism and syncretism, doctrinal precision becomes all the more important.

understanding of creation came into clearer view as it explicated and articulated the meaning of the incarnation.¹⁵ The Body-Soul Hierarchy distortion problem leads to a disdain or demeaning of day-to-day life. Ordinary work is seen as bad or meaningless. The Body-Soul Hierarchy distortion is quite problematic.

Next is the **Eternal-Temporal Hierarchy**: The fundamental problem with this view is again its dualism. The nuance here is a metaphysic that separates the permanent or unchanging from the fluctuating and changing. Christianizing this idea, the notion is that eternal reality is more real than temporal reality. Sherman and Hendricks rightly point out that “the Bible declare(s) that both time and eternity are very real and very important to God. The natural universe is just as real as the supernatural universe. One is not ‘ultimate reality’ while the other is ‘just reality.’ Both exist with absolute certainty.... An eternal God exists and creates a time-space universe. The eternal God is real; the universe He creates is just as real. The universe is not a ‘shadow’ of eternity. It is a completely real dimension called the time-and-space universe.” They go on to make a helpful and appropriate qualification: “There is a sense, of course, in which eternity is the ultimate reality, in that it will be our final destiny. In this sense ultimate means ‘the last in sequence’ or ‘eventual’.”¹⁶ In many ways this is the heart of the problem. If eternal matters are truly more important than temporal matters, the logical conclusion would be that to lead a meaningful life every Christian should be in fulltime Christian ministry. But if this is so one has to ask, what was the purpose of creation originally? Was it just a cosmic game by God that ultimately would lead to the redemption plan that in turn would lead to Christians living and working for eternal matters? This is a very demeaning view of creation. It makes no place for the vast, vast majority of people in the history of the world, and it really doesn’t allow for making much sense out of the vast majority of the lives of the people in the Bible. In the Eternal-Temporal distortion there is no room for an ontological meaning to temporal life at all. In this view one has a very hard time making any real sense out of even those verses regarding “doing whatever we do as unto the Lord.” The Eternal-Temporal distortion is quite problematic.

¹⁵ See St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Press, 1996) p. 25-30.

¹⁶ Sherman and Hendricks, pp. 49-50.

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

Finally, the **Clergy-Laity Hierarchy**: This distortion is directly related to work or career distinctions. It is the classic Catholic Distortion. This distortion may in part remain so strongly because of the hierarchical governance structure of some parts of the church (e.g. Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, and Methodist). But it is certainly not exclusive to the hierarchy ecclesiastical churches. Despite John Calvin's reforms in ecclesiology which dramatically shifted to a plurality of elders (the session), comprised of both ordained clergy and laity holding equal authority, this distortion continues even within the Reformed evangelical church. The evangelical church has made a special effort over the last 30 years or so to break down some of the barriers between the clergy and laity. Take for example Ray Stedman's ground-breaking book, *Body Life*, back in 1972, which started the trend within non-charismatic churches of gifts discovery and practice among the laity in the church.¹⁷ Or for example, Gareth Icenogle's, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, which provides the foundations for mutual lay care ministries

¹⁷ Ray Stedman, *Body Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1972).

within the church.¹⁸ Or, consider the classic, *The Layman in Christian History*, by Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber.¹⁹ And, most recently Miraslov Volf's new book, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, which sees Spiritual giftedness as the proper framework for understanding common everyday work.²⁰ Despite efforts to break the barrier there remains a practical hierarchy of vocations between the clergy and laity. The breach between clergy work and laity work lies deep within the church's self-consciousness. A big part of the reason why is because the church continues to practice an inadequate theology of work.

The church contributes to the problem of work in both a direct and indirect way. Directly, by teaching or allowing bad theological ideas to stand; and indirectly by omitting serious discussion about the ontological meaning and place of work within Christian theology. Both perpetuate obfuscation of the meaning of day-to-day work for laypeople that sit in the pew on Sunday and go to the office on Monday. This confusion contributes to the practical, pastoral problem of lives lived in quiet desperation. The overarching problem that continues to plague the church's theology of work is various forms of a dualistic view of reality. The result is either the classical Catholic distortion or the Protestant distortion. These are very much evangelical distortions too. But, as Os Guinness says, the truth is "[i]f all that a believer does grows out of faith and is done for the glory of God, then all dualistic distinctions are demolished."²¹ Why can't the church get over dualism in its practical theology of work? Why does the evangelical church in particular have such a hard time deploying a good theology of work? This is the question to which I shall now turn.

Why Do Evangelicals Have Such Difficulty with Work?

In many ways it's quite ironic that the evangelical church has such difficulty crafting, holding and deploying a good theology of work. As I previously mentioned, we have a good heritage to work with on this subject: the Reformation, John Calvin's

¹⁸ Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

¹⁹ Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber, *The Layman in Christian History* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1963).

²⁰ Miraslov Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²¹ Guinness, *The Call*, p. 43.

ecclesiology and theology of calling²², Puritanism, Abraham Kuyper’s sweeping integration of Christian theology with the whole of life²³, more recently the work of evangelicalism’s patriarch Carl F. H. Henry²⁴, and in our own day the work of Sherman and Hendricks, Charles Colson and Jack Eckerd, and Os Guinness. With such a heritage, why does the evangelical church have such difficulty applying a good robust theology of work?

I have come to believe it is directly related to who evangelicals are as an outgrowth of two dominant characteristics and strengths related to our heritage. I believe that the old maxim that one’s greatest strengths are often one’s greatest weaknesses, applies here – because of the blind spots created.

Characteristic One: Evangelicals are well known for seeking to re-center the church in solid Biblical theology in a manner that thoroughly engages the broad culture and world of ideas rather than retreating into separatist enclaves, which is more characteristic of fundamentalism.²⁵ The specific historical moment that evangelicalism grew up in was the lingering legacy of nineteenth century theological liberalism and twentieth century neo-orthodoxy. In many ways evangelicals can be characterized as theological warriors, fighting for the truth against error.

Characteristic Two: Evangelicals are also known for being highly evangelistic, and of a specific kind whose dominant characteristic is “convertive-piety”, a phrase coined by Stanley Grenz²⁶. This convertive-piety fosters a noticeable change, which begins with verbally inviting Christ into one’s heart, typically through a prayer of faith, in response to the verbally proclaimed or shared Gospel, and which results in marked change in the covert’s life more and more away from worldly ways and concerns toward Godly ways and concerns.

²² Alistair McGrath, “Calvin and the Christian Calling” (*First Things* ([Copyright \(c\) 1999 First Things 94 \(June/July 1999\)](#))) pp. 31-35.

²³ David K. Naugle, *Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 16-25.

²⁴ See Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964).

²⁵ See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), Mark Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), and Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

These two characteristics tend to dominate the ethos of evangelicalism. They are our greatest strengths but when it comes to the articulation and practice of a good theology of work they both inhibit us. I will explain what I mean.

First, however, let me qualify what I will say. My thoughts here are not easily documented. I haven't read them anywhere. They are my thoughts, and you might even say they are more intuitions than well-considered arguments. As such, they may be dismissed out of hand by some, and they may be proven wrong upon scrutiny. Second, I present these as broad indicators not nuanced arguments. Like the characteristics of evangelicalism described above, these thoughts rest upon certain characterizations of broad theological movements and reactions to them. Nevertheless, that being said let me begin.

Cognitive Dissonance: The Legacy of Theological Warriors

Cognitive dissonance is a psychological phenomenon where if “someone is called upon to learn something which contradicts what they already think they know — particularly if they are committed to that prior knowledge — they are likely to resist the new learning.”²⁷ I believe evangelicalism's first characteristic of having a legacy made up heavily of theological wars creates a form of cognitive dissonance when it comes to theological ideas that affect a good theology of work. Let me explain.

A fundamental part of evangelicalism's self-understanding is made up of the Reformation battles it has had with Catholicism (which have only recently begun to change somewhat²⁸). This self-understanding is heavily influenced by the battles it has always had with theological liberalism of the nineteenth century and its legacies in the twentieth. More recently evangelicalism's self-understanding has continued to be enforced by battles with mainline Protestantism's embrace in the nineteen sixties of an

²⁶ See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, p. 42; and for an explanation of the influence of the historical shift more to conversion over against an emphasis on baptism, see William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

²⁷ “Cognitive Dissonance is a psychological phenomenon that has two major effects on learning: (1) if someone is called upon to learn something which contradicts what they already think they know — particularly if they are committed to that prior knowledge — they are likely to [resist the new learning](#); (2) if learning something has been difficult, uncomfortable, or even humiliating enough, people are not likely to admit that the content of what has been learned is not valuable.”

<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/~jamesa/learning/dissonance.htm>.

²⁸ e.g., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT). See Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995).

ad-mixture of liberalism and Marxist-Socialist socio-economic liberation theology and, even more recently, with new forms of socio-political theology such as radical genderism, sexual identity-ism, and environmentalism. The specific theological battles fought in this evangelical warring legacy often make it difficult for evangelicals to even broach the ideas that are imbedded in many of these battles. In many cases it avoids the subjects latent within the battles altogether or it has great difficulty thinking differently about matters that were key battle-fronts of the wars. The result is cognitive dissonance as to the ideas and subjects involved. This cognitive dissonance affects evangelical's view and practice of its theology of work.

Let me illustrate this by describing particular doctrinal disputes and categorical ideas of two broad battles: First with Catholicism during and in the wake of the Reformation; Second, the battles with 19th and 20th century liberalism and their contemporary derivatives. The battles I will mention relate directly and indirectly to the theology of work and business.

- **Battles with Catholicism during the Reformation:** The most notable doctrine among the early Reformers is, of course, justification.²⁹ However there were many other issues of particular importance to the Reformers. Others include the debates over transubstantiation and sacramentalism in general. One that Calvin stressed that is related to these and that indirectly affects how we think about work is his argument against icons.³⁰ Calvin took on the Catholic Church for employing the use of icons in worship spaces. Calvin's argument is against the use of icons because he views icons as a clear violation of the admonition against idol worship. My point here is not to re-open the Second Council of Nicaea (787). But I wish to show that sometimes within historical debates there are important underlying issues that never get fully debated but nevertheless get swept along in the settlement of the primary debate, and are rarely explored anymore. In the argument over icons there are two theological subjects involved. The first and obvious is whether the church should allow the use of icons in worship. This has nothing to

²⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 26-28.

³⁰ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, "The Knowledge of God the Creator", chapters 10-12, <http://www.thevine.net/~phillipj/calvin/indxbk1.html>. For an Orthodox Church response to

do with work. The second subject, which rests under the surface of the icon question, is the more general question of the relation between the spiritual and material. Or, what is the proper understanding of corporeal reality? This is core to the question of everyday work. My point here is that the Protestant evangelical church's present views on the relation between physical, corporeal reality and God, which are related to how we tend to think about the routine things of this world such as work, are somewhat enmeshed with this long ago debate over icons. Though it certainly wasn't Calvin's intention, the settlement of the issue of the use of icons in worship served to further cement a Protestant chasm between the physical and the spiritual, especially when coupled with the debates over transubstantiation and sacramentalism generally. As the evangelical church rejected these and increasingly came to treat the debate over icons in worship as settled by Calvin, it subtly foreclosed substantive conversation about the proper relation of spiritual and physical – especially in worship but by extension to other more general subjects like day-to-day work. I'm not suggesting that the debate over icons (or transubstantiation and medieval sacramentalism) be reopened. Rather I'm suggesting that to overcome the dualistic distortions which inhibit our understanding of the ontological meaning of work, the evangelical church must be willing to wrestle seriously with meaning and significance of corporeal reality. To wrestle with this subject ultimately is related to the full meaning of the incarnation as it informs us about the meaning of creation and extent of redemption.³¹ Most would acknowledge I believe that the Catholic and the Orthodox churches generally have a fuller appreciation of corporeality than do most Protestants and most evangelicals.³² But evangelicals have not been silent on such subjects. Some of our finest evangelical minds have not been struck by the cognitive dissonance on this subject which I'm trying to illustrate, however. Consider, for example, the

this argument, see "Issues and Questions: Calvin VS. The Icon",
<http://www.liturgica.com/html/litPLitCalvin.jsp?hostname=liturgica>.

³¹ Naugle, *Worldview*, p. 35, quoting Lawrence S. Cunningham, *The Catholic Faith: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist, 1987): "Catholicism is at its best when it is most openly world affirming, sacramental, iconic, and earthy."

³²Ibid., pp. 34-35 in reference to the contribution of the Catholic Church on the general goodness of creation and "the world as the proper sphere of human activity ... given to man and woman as a gift, and as such, ... to be received with gratitude and pursued as a stewardship."

famous evangelical F.F. Bruce on the incarnation, the matter-spirit question, and dualism:

“In the first three or four centuries, the major obstacle in the way of doing full justice to these data [i.e. regarding the full son-ship teaching of Scripture about the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ] was the dualistic presupposition of much contemporary Gentile thought. This dualism involved a complete antinomy between spirit and matter, spirit being essentially good, and matter essentially evil. This meant that any direct contact between the spirit world and the material world was impossible. In consequence, people whose thinking was based on this kind of dualism could not accept, in the proper sense, the biblical doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God...”³³

My major point here is that though the evangelical legacy includes major battles with Catholics over many subjects, sometimes embedded within these very battles remain topics we need to explore again to rightly grasp the truest and fullest theology of work.³⁴ And we must listen closely to and learn from and not ignore our own best thinkers, such as Bruce, who are not stricken with the cognitive dissonance that so many of us are.

[As a side note, though this point is focused on matters to be explored which are embedded within previous conflicts with the Catholic Church, it is no less true with the Orthodox Church. This is particularly true when it comes to the relation of the material dimension and the spiritual dimension of reality.³⁵ Consider, for

³³ F.F. Bruce, “The Person of Christ: Incarnation and Virgin Birth”, in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. by Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, rpt, 1971), p. 126. And Bruce further sounds almost like an Orthodox churchman when he says, “the son of God became partaker of our nature so that we in Him might become ‘partakers of the divine nature’, p. 130.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53, David Naugle’s comment about learning from each other with respect to our worldviews: “... the better part of wisdom would suggest that we capitalize on each other’s strengths in order to shore up the weaknesses in our own attempts to construct an authentic Christian vision of reality that will inevitably be limited in scope and balance.” I would suggest this need to learn from one another is also true with respect to a robust theology of work.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-52.

example, Alexander Schmemmann's comments, in David Naugle's, *Worldview*, on exactly what it means for Christ to offer us abundant life:

Two basic responses are typically given to this query.... First, some believe the life Christ offers is the distinctively religious and spiritual life that is associated with the church but cut off from the ordinary life of the world. Second, others believe that the life Christ offers is distinctively human and cultural life associated with the world, the renewal of which is the primary business of the church. Both are representative of the "church of the extreme".... [N]o where in the Bible do we find these standard dualistic categories that are so prevalent in the Western (if not world) religious consciousness. Whether we "spiritualize" our life or "secularize" our religion, whether we invite men to a spiritual banquet or simply join them at the secular one, the real life of the world, for which we are told God gave his only-begotten Son, remains hopelessly beyond our religious grasp.... Christ did not die for the *spiritual* life or the *secular* life, but for the total *sacramental* life of the world.^{36]}

- **Battles with 19th Century Liberalism and its Legacies in the 20th:** This is the second example of cognitive dissonance in the evangelical church. You'll notice that I paid very little attention to the Protestant Distortion in the section above. That's because I am convinced this distortion and the theological winds that gave rise to its dominance in the mainline Protestant church and some sectors of the Catholic Church are one reason why evangelicals have such a hard time applying a well thought out, robust theology of work. My point is this. The struggles against theological liberalism that evangelicalism is known for cause it to avoid even the appearance of association with the same theological terrain. There are three categories of such theological terrain that impinge particularly on the theology of work and business that I believe are stumbling blocks for evangelicals: 1. Theological Anthropology, 2. Politics & Culture Studies, and 3. Economics. Of

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 47-48. Italics in the original.

these theological anthropology is the most important. From theological anthropology the other two flow, especially as it turned into “anthropology as theology” in the nineteenth century. This gave rise to the Social Gospel movement early in the twentieth and culture-studies as theology in the nineteen fifties and sixties.³⁷ The radical theology of Ludwig Feuerbach is the fountainhead in many ways.³⁸ Ever since he turned theology on its head making it an internal projection of man rather than the supernatural revelation of God³⁹, radically naturalistic and materialistic theories of man and socio-political and economic philosophies emerged. Standing on Feuerbach’s shoulders are Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, who in turn influenced countless others down to our day in the form of political and liberation theology⁴⁰. For many in the liberal Protestant church, theology has simply become politics and economics, as evidenced in so many of the contemporary identity theologies. The Protestant Distortion which fosters a baptized secularism view of work, particularly as expressed in the form of theology as political-economics, in many ways draws its source ultimately from Feuerbach. He allowed the church to all but eliminate God from the discussion. As Feuerbach and his psycho-social and economic heirs are coupled together with the other major trends of liberal theology as expressed in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s human experience based apologetic and Paul Tillich’s theology as primarily a dialogue with culture, serious theological reflection on anthropology and socio-

³⁷ For example, see Friedrich Schleiermacher, Horace Bushnell, Ludwig Feuerbach, Albrecht Ritschl, Walter Rauschenbusch, Adolf Von Harnack, and, particularly, Paul Tillich. On each of these figures see Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); and particularly on Tillich’s view of theology as “a conversation between human culture and Christian faith”, pp. 234 and 334-335.

³⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 230-231; 525-526.

³⁹ Feuerbach “turned Hegel’s theology upside-down, declaring God to be humankind in the condition of self-alienation. He thereby transposed theology into anthropology, seeing all talk about God as actually talk about the human state of affairs. Karl Marx (1818-1883), while agreeing with Hegel’s conception of history as a self-activating totality, rejected the Hegelian spiritualism that treated empirical fact as the manifestation of a logical process. In its stead, he [Marx] explained human self-alienation in sociopolitical and economic terms.” Stanley J. Grenz & Roger Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.). Also see, McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, pp. 526-528.

⁴⁰ Liberation Theology is most often associated with the Catholic theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, tagged “against his will” as the father of liberation theology. See “Latin American Liberation Theology: Immanence in Liberation”, pp. 210-224 in Grenz & Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age*.

political and economic theory largely became almost solely the domain of theological liberalism. For evangelicals, quite correctly I should say, the debates over anthropology and socio-political and economic theory were really secondary not primary in the battle against liberalism. The core of the debate was over the proper authority for theology (God's revelation in the Bible vs. human imagination: Theocentric vs. anthropocentric) and over the content and meaning of the Gospel. However, because anthropology and socio-political and economic theory were enmeshed in these more fundamental debates the evangelical church tended to back away from any discussion on the secondary categories of anthropology, culture and economics. In doing so evangelicals viewed themselves as establishing a proper distance from any ideas that would fundamentally change or reduce the Gospel to some form of "salvation by society"⁴¹ rather than through Jesus Christ. At the time, this silence which relegated key theological categories to the ghetto of theological liberalism is quite understandable. However it has left evangelicals weak on these subjects today. This has had an enormous effect on the evangelical church's ability to craft and practice a robust theology of work.

So, a big reason that the evangelical church has a hard time articulating a robust theology of work, economics and business is because it has largely ignored many of the theological categories and cross-disciplinary dialogues that will help it do so. It has ignored these categories because of hard fought battles against those whose proposals were less about theologies of work and proper socio-political and economic theory but more about redefining theology itself and the nature and substance of the Gospel. Therefore for many evangelicals, ushering from a kind of cognitive dissonance, forays into such earthy things as economics and work are simply a slippery slope to liberalism. With some notable exceptions referenced in this paper, the evangelical church simply hasn't put too much effort into the theology of work, economics, and business. Part of the consequence is that it doesn't practice with natural ease much of what it already knows and believes. I would contend that evangelicals have a lot to contribute to a robust theology of

⁴¹ Peter F. Drucker, *The New Realities* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers. 1989), pp. 10-17.

work, economics and business in a Biblically faithful way. Evangelicals must overcome their cognitive dissonance when it comes to reflecting seriously on such categories as anthropology, social philosophy and economics. We must do so to realize a good theology of work and overcome the Catholic and Protestant distortions, in our own house and in the church at large.

Evangelicalism, Evangelism and the Problem of Work

The second dominant characteristic within evangelicalism that contributes to practicing a distorted view of ordinary work is its laudable focus on evangelism. I realize it's strange to even cite this as a problem. What greater and more obedient characteristic could there be for the church than evangelism? There is none. Thus, I do not want to say anything that would dilute this focus in any way. In fact the predominant problem with the Protestant Distortion is just the opposite. One of the major problems in the mainline churches is their virtual elimination of evangelism.⁴² Evangelicalism's emphasis on evangelism serves as a great counterbalance to the predominant problem of the mainline churches. Nevertheless and with trepidation I want to make a few observations about how the evangelical church's particular practice of evangelism serves to maintain a distorted view of the ontological meaning of ordinary work. And then I will challenge us to consider briefly how we might be more precise in our articulation of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment⁴³ to maintain a proper integration of the call to evangelism and the call to ordinary work.

Sherman and Hendricks (themselves evangelicals) describe how the evangelical church contributes to the problem of work through evangelism in what they call "The Mainstream Model." They say, "[t]he Mainstream Model argues that Christians participate in the mainstream of the culture to set up strategic opportunities to share the

⁴² "Over the past decades ... the mainline Church in America has lost its emphasis on mission, concentrating instead on its members. ... The Great Commission of Jesus Christ to 'make disciples of all nations' has been lost as an essential part of the Christian faith, impoverishing the Church, reducing its membership, and leaving it isolated from the very society it seeks to help." Claude E. Payne and Hamilton Beazley, *Reclaiming the Great Commission* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), pp. x-xi.

gospel message with friends and associates.”⁴⁴ “Those who hold the Mainstream view of work and life base their worldview on the Great Commission.” They say those who hold the Mainstream view “feel that all of life should be ‘keyholed’ through this command. In other words, *everything* should be seen in light of how it contributes to evangelism. Anything that takes away from evangelism is an enemy of God’s work, anything that contributes to it is an ally.” (emphasis in original) “Hence, according to this view, your work could be an ally if you see it as an evangelistic opportunity. However, your work itself is of only secondary importance.”⁴⁵

Before critiquing this view and out of an abundance of caution that I am not misunderstood, let me interject a statement by two men in the mainline Protestant church, Bishop Claude Payne, Episcopal Church Bishop of Texas, and Hamilton Beazley, who are trying to call the mainline churches back to the importance of evangelism.

Evangelism is not a program of the Church; rather, it is the essential work of the Church. It is not an option for Christians but an obligation, a fundamental commission to their Christ. Mission infuses all that the Church does. No person living richly and fully in his or her faith can ignore the call to make disciples of others.⁴⁶

Now to the critique of the Mainstream view. The problem with evangelism as the keyhole for all of life is not that it shouldn’t permeate everything we are as Christians. It is with what we mean by evangelism and the place we give it relative to the most important thing. Let me explain. William Abraham, in his book, *The Logic of Evangelism*, says “if we define evangelism in terms of the proclamation of the gospel [which is so common within the evangelical tradition], our primary focus in strategy will

⁴³ Matthew 22:36-40.

⁴⁴ Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, p. 63.

⁴⁵ Ibid. pp. 63-64.

⁴⁶ Claude E. Payne and Hamilton Beazley, *Reclaiming the Great Commission* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), p. 19. Further to this point, See William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 167: “Where this passion [for evangelism] does not exist, we can be sure that a vital dimension of apostolic Christianity is missing. . . . If the church does not evangelize, it has forfeited the right to be called apostolic, and apostolicity is an ineradicable mark of the church’s identity.”

be to get the word out to as many people as possible, as efficiently as possible.”⁴⁷ With such an understanding of evangelism coupled with any of the dualistic distortions, the workplace becomes primarily a strategic venue. Abraham goes on to explain that the fuller, more Biblical way to understand evangelism is fundamentally “to see people introduced to and grounded in the kingdom of God.”⁴⁸ This of course includes proclamation but the proclamation is not the primary task of evangelism – initiation into the Kingdom is.

This is where the world of corporate worship and daily life come together – living in the Kingdom of God begins even now⁴⁹, here on this earth and it encompasses everything we do, even our daily work. Evangelism is the initiation into God being Lord over all of life.

With this understanding, our work whatever it is in our daily lives takes on new meaning. The proclamation of the gospel – the verbal declaration, explanation or witnessing to it through recounting our own story of faith – is recognized to be a component of evangelism, a natural part of the conversation of those who are actively living all of life under the Lordship of Christ, in the Kingdom of God. Or as Abraham says regarding to the priority of evangelism:

First, evangelism, like all else the church does in her ministry, is a subordinate activity. Second, evangelism has a unique relation to everything else the church does, which at once makes it more important and less important than the church’s other important ministries depending on the angle of vision.

Evangelism cannot be the primary activity and preoccupation of the church as if everything revolved around it like the earth revolves around the sun. This coveted position belongs to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God must be the

⁴⁷ William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 164.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁹ See an excellent interpretation of this in Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998, pp. 26-33. For example: “So when Jesus directs us to pray, ‘Thy Kingdom come,’ he does not mean we should pray for it to come into existence. Rather, we pray it to take over all points in the personal, social, and political order where it is now excluded: ‘On earth as it is in heaven.’ With this prayer we are invoking it, as in faith we are acting it, into the real world of our daily existence.”

primary, unconditional priority of the church, which exists for coming under the rule of God in history. ... Evangelism is important only because the kingdom is important; it is subordinate to the kingdom. ... To make evangelism the primary concern of the church is to give it a misplaced and exaggerated position in our lives. The first task of the church is worship: to bow down before the Lord of glory, to celebrate God's love and majesty, and to invite God to rule over the length and breadth of all creation.⁵⁰

So what about evangelicalism, evangelism and the problem of work? We absolutely must cling to our great heritage of focus on evangelism. However, we must make sure that what we mean by evangelism is correct and is subordinate to the primary call of all of life to worship and bow down to the triune God: Father, Son and Spirit. Thus, as Sherman and Hendricks say, we must see the Great Commission as broader than evangelism, life as broader than evangelism, and work as more than just a platform for evangelism.⁵¹

In summary, to avoid contributing to the problem of work the evangelical church must avoid inadvertent but significant theological oversights and noble but confused insights. First we must recognize that cognitive dissonance sometimes causes us not to deal thoroughly and seriously with some important ideas categories and disciplines. One key idea we must reconsider is the theological significance of corporeality. And we must not leave the key categories and disciplines anthropology, social and cultural philosophy and economics to the liberal wing of the church. How we think about each of these dramatically affect how we see daily work. Second we must come to see that allowing evangelism to become the keyhole through which we see all of life reduces everything but evangelism to a utility and leaves no room for inherent meaning in day-to-day life. It diminishes the Scriptural admonition of the Great Commandment regarding all of life as an exhibition of the Kingdom of God, which renders meaningless the idea that all of life can be an expression of our worship. The effect of this is that daily work becomes completely utilitarian and therefore ontologically meaningless. Only as we avoid these

⁵⁰ Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, pp. 181-182.

⁵¹ Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, pp. 66-72.

oversights and confused insights will we be able to overcome the dualistic distortions of reality which foster a confused understanding of daily work. Only then will we be able to practice a fully integrated view of our church life and work life.

Cornerstones of a Theology of Work & Business

It is impossible in our short time today to develop a full and thorough theology of work. I will instead lay out a brief framework in the form of three key cornerstones. In doing so I will point out some areas for future, more detailed exploration that I believe the evangelical church needs to take up in earnest.

The seat of a good Christian theology of work rests on three-legged stool: the theology of creation, the theology of anthropology, and the theology of the incarnation. The common theme that runs through these that reveal a good theology of work and business is who we are as human beings. I will make a few brief comments on each and then try to weave them together.

The Theology of Creation

Initial Creation: In God's creation of all things we see Him working.⁵² "Genesis 2:2 calls this activity 'work'" ... [which is] "the same word that is used for man's work in the Ten Commandments."⁵³ Work is therefore a part of the character of God himself and by extension is part of the nature of man. God declares his work good⁵⁴ and this therefore by extension means that the work of man, in terms of it being a part of our nature, is fundamentally part of who are and good.⁵⁵

Humans Have Dominion Over Creation: As a part of the first blessing of God upon human beings, He gave them dominion over creation.⁵⁶ At least two messages regarding our work arise out of this: 1. work even before the fall was part and parcel of who human beings were – this is as God's creation was originally designed it to be, not

⁵² Genesis 1-2.

⁵³ Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, p. 78.

⁵⁴ Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31 (After creating man and commanding them to work, it was "very good".)

⁵⁵ I must briefly disabuse a common misunderstanding about the Fall, the Curse and Work. It is commonly thought that work is part of the curse of God for sin. In fact that's not so. God curses the ground, which resulted in a greater burdensomeness of our work. (For a fuller explanation on this point and more generally on the effect of sin on work, see Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, specifically on this point, p. 99; and on the effect of sin on work, pp.97-107.)

⁵⁶ Genesis 1:28

an aberration after the fall; 2. human work is an act of stewardship to help manage the limited resources of the earth, to meet human needs and to foster the perpetuation and maintenance of His creation. In this work man is a participant in the creative and maintenance work God. From this we again see that human work, like God's work, continues. The routine of continual daily work is part of who we are created in the image of God.

The Continuing Work of God: In addition to the creation *ex nihilo* by God, from which he rested on the seventh day, he also does the work of sustaining his creation. "Jesus declared to the Pharisees, 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.'"⁵⁷ Sherman and Hendricks rightly point out that God's continuing work includes four dimensions: 1. He upholds creation (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3); 2. "He meets a broad range of needs that his many creatures have" (Psalm 104:10-30); 3. He is working out His purposes in history (Deuteronomy 11:1-7); and 4. He accomplishes the great work of redemption in Jesus Christ and will ultimately fulfill this work in the final consummation (John 4:34; Psalm 111). Through our work we participate in God's continuing work.

The Theology of Anthropology

The *Imago Dei*: Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that God created human beings in His image. This is the core teaching on theological anthropology. I must say at this point, this is an area of theology that I believe needs a lot more exploration specifically in terms of what it means with regard to man's work. As I mentioned above the cacophony of noise around this subject in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially from the more liberal wing of the church, has been a stumbling block for evangelicals. Nevertheless, it is core to our understanding of human work. In the mid to late nineteen eighties there were several excellent works that should contribute to new work in this area especially in reference to work.⁵⁸ Be that as it may, the fundamental teaching in regards to this passage

⁵⁷ Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, p. 78.

⁵⁸ See Anderson, Ray S. *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*. Grand Rapids, ILL: William B. Eerdmans. 1982; Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Packer, J.I. and Howard, Thomas. *Christianity: The True Humanism*. Waco, TX: Word Books. 1985; Pannenberg, Wolfhart. Translated by Matthew J. O'Donnell. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Edinburgh: T&T

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

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

Pope John Paul II⁵⁹

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

John Calvin⁶⁰

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

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

Clark Ltd., 1985 (Primarily an anthropological apologetic.); and here are two excellent bibliographies on the subject: Human Dignity: http://www.acton.org/research/reading/human_dignity.html; McGrath, Alistair. "Updated Bibliography" to Chapter 14, 3rd Edition, of *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers. <http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/mcgrath/textbook/chap14bib.htm>.

⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II. *Laborem Exercens*. September 14, 1981, p. 1.

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

⁶⁰ Chuck Colson and Jack Eckerd, *Why America Doesn't Work* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991), p. 31.

mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature.⁶¹

“Set within us from the beginning, this purposeful nature drives us to work hard, to be productive, to create, and to accumulate the results of our labor.”⁶²

Theology of the Incarnation

The third and final leg of the theological stool of work is the incarnation of the Word of God. A theme that has run through this paper is the two-story or dualistic view of reality, which when allowed to stand, as we have seen, distorts our view of work. The Incarnation is the definitive statement against this view. The eternal Logos of God confirmed once again the goodness and importance of His material creation when he came to dwell with us in human flesh. (John 1:14) St. Athanasius, in many ways the architect of the Nicene formulation, says “He sanctified the body by being in it. ... He gives all things their being and sustains them in it.”⁶³ This is a reiteration of Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:16-17. Further, he says, “the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning.”⁶⁴

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

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

⁶¹ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Excersens*, p. 1.

⁶² Chuck Colson and Jack Eckerd, *Why America Doesn't Work* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991), p. 32.

⁶³ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, p. 46.

within the evangelical tradition. It tends to be stressed much more so with the sacramental Christian communions, most especially the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Now, again I do not wish to create misunderstanding. I am not suggesting that everyone here should become a sacramentalist, nor a member of the Orthodox Church. As I mentioned previously in my discussion about cognitive dissonance, what I do believe is this area of Catholic and Orthodox thought is another area of theological opportunity for evangelicals. In so doing I believe we have an opportunity to realize a more profound theology of work.

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

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

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

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

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

[There is an] intrinsic sacredness of the earth – created good by God, corrupted through the fall, but redeemed in Christ ...⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶⁵ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new edition (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 234-135.

I am not completely endorsing the full Orthodox meaning of these assertions. But I am suggesting that the Incarnation has something very deep to teach us about the role of the human activity we call work in reference to the everyday life of the sub-creative, stewardship and maintenance work which is a part of our call in this present world. The classical Reformation teaching that we should be about participating in the transformation of life, so that it conforms more and more into the likeness and to the order of Christ as Lord is not too far from such ideas. A robust understanding of the Incarnation gives our daily human work new meaning, even our business work which has a great deal to do with performing and enabling the stewardship of the limited resource we call creation.

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

Resting on a good theology of work in general, we can now turn explicitly to that subject of business work in a discussion of “An Example Christian Theory of Economics & Business.”

An Example Christian Theory of Economics & Business

It is obviously impossible in our short time to deal in detail with the subject of economics and business. So, let me make just a few general comments before we take a look at a specific example of a new Christian theory of economics and business.

Business is of course just one kind of work. It is that specific kind that is involved with economics and commerce. For many Christians business work typically raises

several questions that go to whether it is legitimate and reconcilable with the Christian faith.

- What about Jesus' teaching that we cannot serve God and Mammon?; and
- Isn't the pursuit of money the root of all evil?
- Isn't business at its core the pursuit of money; thus isn't it basically bad?; and
- Isn't capitalism fundamentally oppressive and therefore ungodly?

I suppose it goes without saying that since I'm a businessman and a Christian that I don't believe there is a conflict between Christianity and business work, when rightly understood. This paper is to foster a proper Christian understanding of work and business. There has been much written on this subject, some pro and some con. With the demise of the Soviet Union, much of the more radical, con side of the debate has gone silent. So in deference to time, rather than actually dealing with the above questions let me point to some recent works which positively address them in a compelling way:

- Regarding the God and Mammon conflict, see Sherman and Hendricks' "You Cannot Service God and Mammon: A Two Story View of Work", pp. 43-62.
- Regarding money and evil, the pursuits of money being basically bad, and capitalism being ungodly, see Sherman and Hendricks' "The Problem of Gain", pp. 171-198; and Michael Novak's book, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*,⁶⁶ his articles, "How Christianity Created Capitalism" and "The Moral Heart of Capitalism",⁶⁷ and his book, *Business as a Calling*.⁶⁸

The fundamental problem of business work from a Christian point of view rests with whether we see this kind of work as linked to or separated from our relationship with God. This of course is the bigger problem of work itself, which we dealt with above. "[W]ith no transcendent values, no goals other than pleasure of work for work's sake, traditional restraints on behavior collapse."⁶⁹ The idea of "traditional restraints" in this proposition reveals where most of the problems related to business work reside. All

⁶⁶ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Madison Books, 1982).

⁶⁷ Michael Novak, "How Christianity Created Capitalism": *Religion & Liberty* (May and June 2000, Volume 10, Number 3), <http://www.acton.org/publicat/randl/article.php?id=344>; and, "The Moral Heart of Capitalism": A Speech on August 16, 2002. 9:00 a.m., *National Review Online*. <http://www.nationalreview.com/novak/novak081602.asp>.

⁶⁸ Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

work but especially business work must sit on a foundation of morality. In their book *Why Americans Don't Work*, Colson and Eckerd quote Perry Pascarella from *The New Achievers: Creating a Modern Work Ethic*:

Work presents moral issues. But we have not attended to them. [We] ignore the moral considerations having to do with work. We allow people to work only for money. We offer endless tasks for those who would try to escape confrontation with life, and we encourage their being distracted or pacified through the consumption of goods and services.⁷⁰

Morality cannot exist without God.⁷¹ So the key to a Christian theory of economics and business work is how well it integrates Christian morality into the theory of economics and business.

In the past attempts at this have mostly come from the more liberal side of the church, exemplified in liberation theology and various Marxist and Socialist theories baptized as “Christian” theories of economics and work. Most often what happened with these, as we saw above, is that the Christian Gospel became disfigured and reconfigured into something other than in its classical, orthodox expression. Only recently have there been some serious attempts at crafting a Christian theory of economics and business that emerge out of orthodox Christianity and include but do not merely replace the Gospel with economics and social justice. The most laudable examples of this today, I believe, are coming from the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty.⁷² Economic Personalism, to which we now turn, is a good example of such an attempt.

⁶⁹ Colson and Eckerd, *Why America Doesn't Work*, p. 54.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷¹ See Nietzsche on this in Os Guinness, *The Call*: “A hundred years ago Friedrich Nietzsche rightly scorned those who said, ‘God is Dead’ and went on living exactly the same as before. ... ‘They are rid of the Christian God,’ he wrote in *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘and now believe all the more firmly that they must cling to Christian morality ... When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one’s feet.’”, p. 42.

⁷² See Acton Institute in the attached bibliography or their website: <http://www.acton.org/>.

Economic Personalism

I will not comment on this theory myself but will simply let its founders speak in summary fashion to present this example. Therefore the following is a lengthy quotation from material found in publications by the Acton Institute.

What is Economic Personalism?

Economic personalism is an approach to the social order inspired by the centuries-old tradition of Christian reflection on the ethical character of social, political, and economic life. It is particularly concerned with developing a deeper understanding of the moral dimension of economic, political and civil activity in the Third Millennium. For this reason, it is actively engaged in developing a meaningful dialogue between Christian social thought, the natural-law tradition, and the best insights of free-market economics. On these grounds, economic personalism may be described as a method for thinking through the moral, economic, and political dilemmas posed by modern political economy. As a philosophical position, however, economic personalism draws upon the Christian humanist tradition, and is consequently defined by its desire to help to actualize a free and humane economy within a free and virtuous society. It thus functions as a means for bringing the intellectual resources of the Christian moral tradition to bear upon the public square.

Economic personalism acknowledges the contribution made to the development of the free society by the tradition of constitutionalism, limited government, free trade, economic liberty, private property, and rule of law that began to assume concrete form in the West during the seventeenth century. It holds that these institutions can be beneficially integrated into a variety of cultural settings.

Economic personalism insists, however, that all such institutions must be grounded in an anthropology that accurately reflects the human person's full dignity as a creature made in the image of God. One of its primary goals is therefore to illustrate that these traditions—which themselves draw upon the heritage of early and medieval Christian civilization—are more likely to endure when they eschew the utilitarian, relativist, and rationalistic premises upon which institutions such as limited government have become increasingly based.

In this regard, economic personalism seeks to complement the free economy with a distinctly Christian anthropology that draws upon the resources of faith and right reason. It recognizes the natural-law tradition as one way of communicating these insights within pluralist societies, which are often characterized by significant differences in foundational belief.⁷³

The following “Statement of Principles for Economic Personalism”, published by the Academic Research Center of the Acton Institute, is another lengthy quotation.

Statement Of Principles For Economic Personalism

1. [Dignity of the Person](#)

⁷³ See: “What is Economic Personalism: Brief Introduction”, <http://www.acton.org/research/ep/>.

2. [Social Nature of the Person](#)
3. [Importance of Social Institutions](#)
4. [Human Action](#)
5. [Subsidiary Role of Government](#)
6. [Creation of Wealth](#)
7. [Economic Liberty](#)
8. [Economic Value](#)
9. [Priority of Culture](#)
10. [Significance of Interdisciplinary Work](#)

Dignity of the Person - The human person, by virtue of being created imago Dei, is an independent substance, individually unique, rational, the subject of moral agency, and a co-creator. Accordingly, he possesses intrinsic value and dignity, implying certain rights and duties with respect to the recognition and protection of the dignity of himself and other persons. These truths about the dignity of the human person are known through revelation, but they are also discernible through reason.

Social Nature of the Person - Although persons can find ultimate fulfillment only in communion with God, one essential aspect of the development of persons is our social nature and capacity for action directed to disinterested ends. The person achieves fulfillment through participation in moral goods that are at the root of human flourishing, and interaction with other persons. There are voluntary relations of exchange, for example, such as market transactions that fundamentally realize economic value. But these relations of exchange may also give rise to moral value as well. There are also voluntary relations of mutual dependence, such as promises, friendships, marriages, and the family, which fundamentally constitute moral goods. But these, too, may also coincide with the realization of other sorts of value, such as religious, economic, aesthetic, and so on.

Importance of Social Institutions - Owing to the social nature of the person, various social institutions have developed within human societies. The institutions of civil society, especially the family, are the primary sources of a society's moral culture. While these social institutions are neither created by nor derive their legitimacy from the state, government must both respect their autonomy and provide the support necessary to ensure the free and orderly operation of all social institutions in their respective spheres.

Human Action - Human persons are by nature acting persons. Through human action, the person is able to actualize his potentiality by freely choosing the moral goods that fulfill his nature.

Subsidiary Role of Government - The government's primary responsibility is to promote the common good, that is, to maintain the rule of law, and to preserve basic duties and rights. Although the government's role is not to usurp free actions, it must attempt to minimize those conflicts that may arise when the free actions of persons and social institutions result in competing interests. This responsibility should be conducted according to the principle of subsidiarity. This principle has two components. First,

jurisdictionally broader institutions must refrain from usurping the proper functions that should be performed autonomously by the person and institutions more immediate to him. Second, jurisdictionally broader institutions should assist individual persons and institutions more immediate to the person when these are incapable of performing their proper functions until such time as they can resume these proper functions.

Creation of Wealth - Material impoverishment undermines the conditions that facilitate human flourishing. The most effective means of reducing poverty is to protect private property rights by means of the rule of law. This will give people the opportunity to enter into voluntary exchange circles in which to express the creative dimension of their nature as persons.

Economic Liberty - Liberty, in a positive sense, is achieved by fulfilling one's nature as a person by virtue of having freely chosen to do what one ought. Economic liberty is a species of liberty so-stated. As such, the bearer of economic liberty has not only certain rights, but also duties. An economically free person, for example, must be free to enter the market voluntarily. Hence, there is a duty on the part of those who have the power to interfere with the market to remove any artificial barrier to entry in the market, and also to protect private property rights as well as shared property. But the economically free person will also bear the duty to others to participate in the market as a moral agent and in accordance with moral goods. It is crucial, then, that the law guarantees private property rights and voluntary exchange.

Economic Value - In economic theory, economic value is subjective because its existence depends on it being felt by a subject. Economic value is the significance that a subject attaches to a thing whenever he perceives a causal connection between this thing and the satisfaction of a present, urgent want. But the subject may be wrong in his value judgment such that he attributes value to a thing that, in fact, will not or cannot satisfy his present, urgent want. The truth of economic value judgments is settled by those facts about the thing that make it the case that it can satisfy the relevant want as expected by the agent. While this does not imply the realization of any other sort of value by virtue of its economic value, the latter is not incompatible with the simultaneous realization of moral value in the thing by virtue of its objective moral goodness.

Priority of Culture - Liberty flourishes in a society supported by a moral culture that embraces the truth about the transcendent origin and destiny of the human person. This moral culture leads to harmony and the proper ordering of society. While the various institutions within the political, economic, and other spheres are important, the family is the primary inculcator of the moral culture in a society.

Significance of Interdisciplinary Work - The fundamental task of every discipline is to seek truth. Although each discipline is confined to a specific area of investigation, the truths discovered by any one discipline cannot contradict those discovered by another. This assertion is itself founded on a truth of logic called the Principle of Non-Contradiction. According to this principle, if it is the case that something is, then it cannot simultaneously be the case that it is not. Nonetheless, reconciling the claims of

different disciplines is a difficult project. But if the claims are valid and sound, they must be ultimately compatible and thus broaden our understanding of the world. Herein lies the significance of academic cooperation among scholars who specialize in areas pertaining to different disciplines.⁷⁴

The theory of economic personalism, as is readily noticeable, rests on several foundational ideas that not all evangelicals agree with. The ideas behind “the centuries-old tradition of Christian reflection on the ethical character of social, political, and economic life”, upon scrutiny, are admittedly heavily influenced by Catholic social thought. Another is the “natural-law tradition” which rests largely on the thought of Aristotle.⁷⁵ The idea of personalism philosophically⁷⁶ relies heavily on Polish personalism and traditional philosophical realism. The “best exponent [of this] is Karol Wojtyla”⁷⁷ (Pope John Paul II). And there’s natural theology which of course not all Christians agree upon. I believe, however, there is much for evangelicals to gain from the deep reflections on these matters, especially in the area of moral philosophy.

Despite hesitations that may arise in some evangelical minds about associating too closely with so many Catholic thoughts, some of the best Christian thoughts these days on the relation of business, economics and commerce are coming from the Acton Institute. And to be clear, the Institute is not made up exclusively of Catholic thinkers. It includes several Reformed Christian thinkers as well, particularly focused on bringing to bear some of the best thoughts of Abraham Kuyper. For example, Dr. Ronald Nash, professor of philosophy and theology at Reformed Theological Seminary is on the board of Acton. Another recognized evangelical thinker who follows closely in the tradition of realist, Thomist philosophy is Norman Geisler.

My whole point in presenting this example is to illustrate what kind of thinking is going on these days in the area of social philosophy, economics and business. In doing

⁷⁴ See: “Statement of Principles of Economic Personalism”, <http://www.acton.org/research/ep/principles.html>.

⁷⁵ See Heinrich A. Rommen, *The Natural Law: A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy*, trans. By Thomas R. Hanley (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998.)

⁷⁶ For a detailed understanding of the philosophical context of Economic Personalism, see “The Context of Economic Personalism” in *Markets & Morality*, Volume 4, Number 2, Fall 2001. http://www.acton.org/publicat/m_and_m/2001_fall/schmiesing.html.

⁷⁷ Gloria L. Zúñiga, “Personalism: What Does The Person Have To Do With It?”, in “What Is Economic Personalism? A Phenomenological Analysis”, *Markets & Morality*, Volume 4, Number 2, Fall 2001, http://www.acton.org/publicat/m_and_m/2001_fall/zuniga.html.

so, I wish to encourage and challenge the evangelical church and their Christian universities to take up this mantle too and become a part of this dialogue in earnest. Only in doing so can the proper intellectual foundation for a solid theology and practical theory of economics, business and commerce be laid.

Finally, let me go back to my original quest: to enable us to see common day-to-day work, business and commerce in a more theologically integrated and therefore ontologically meaningful way. To enable us to see the fabric of reality as one sheet of cloth so that what is done in the day-to-day can be reconciled with the profound and meaning-filled feelings of the divine encounter we experience in corporate worship on Sundays and in what we call spiritual activities and ministry kinds of work. Is there a single notion that can tie things together? I believe there is. It is the subject of calling.

Calling: The Pastoral Answer to an Integrated Life

The ontological key to maintaining the right perspective on work, economics and business is a renewed sense of calling. Calling is that Christian idea that ensures that when we are doing day-to-day work, what I'll call for practical purposes horizontal work, we maintain a clear sense of the vertical dimension wherein our ontology resides. As Os Guinness points out calling is two-dimensional in character: there is a caller (God himself) and there is the called (human beings, of course). God's call is *primary*, man's callings are *secondary*. (Emphasis mine) Making this point Guinness says, "[h]umanness is a response to God's calling. This is far deeper than an exhortation to write your own script for life."⁷⁸ "Responding to the call means rising to the challenge, but in conversation and in partnership—and in an intimate relationship between the called and the Caller."⁷⁹ Further he says, "Calling is the premise of Christian existence itself. Calling means that everyone, everywhere, and in everything fulfills his or her (secondary) callings in response to God's (primary) calling."⁸⁰ In contrast to much of contemporary radical postmodern theology, cultural practices and psychology-as-religion⁸¹, Guinness

⁷⁸ Guinness, *The Call*, p. 24.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

⁸¹ Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2nd edition, 1994.).

says, “[i]n contrast to ‘constituted to be’ and its sense that life is fated and predetermined, ‘calling to be’ stresses freedom and the future. ‘Who am I?’ is not simply a matter of ‘reading back’ early recollections that intimate and announce a later destiny. ... Following [God’s] call, we become what we are constituted to be by creation. We also become what we are not yet, and can only become by re-creation as called people.”⁸² Calling is the pastoral answer to an integrated life.

The ontological foundation of our work and business is the same as it is for our very being: It is that we are called and named by the Creator Himself; our identity and meaning in our day-to-day lives rests in and is found in the agent and sustainer of creation itself, Jesus Christ the Word, the Logos of God. He defines us and our work. We are His sub-creators and we are the custodians and stewards of His creation. By virtue of the infinite-personal nature of the Trinitarian God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and by virtue of the incarnation of the Logos of God, the whole of creation is both good and personal. Our work is but an outgrowth of our being called into existence and being sustained by God. In a sense, therefore, it is nothing less than part and parcel of the sacred activity of worship in our day-to-day lives. The difference in the work of worship on Sundays, in personal prayer times, in Bible studies, etc. and that of our day-to-day lives is not a difference of kind. It is a difference of concentration, of quantity. When the church gathers together in worship there is a concentration of the light (the light of God Himself, incarnated in the gathered Body of Christ, the church). When the church is scattered to the four corners of the world in day-to-day work activity, it is no less the light; rather the light is simply refracted. There is no *real* difference at all. The distinction we make in our day-to-day lives is a matter of perception not reality.

Because the true picture of reality is as a single cloth not two⁸³, all of our activities in life can be “done unto the Lord” truly. This is why Os Guinness encourages us to think of the whole of our living as being “unto the audience of one.”⁸⁴

With the idea of calling as the ontological basis for all of human life, and keeping in mind that all of life is (or should be) an act of worship (Romans 12:1-2), living life

⁸² Ibid., 24.

⁸³ This is not to suggest pantheism in, for example Hegel and Spinoza; nor is it to suggest panentheism as in Process Theology.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

unto the audience of the one and only almighty God is what we do all the time. Not only ministry or spiritual work has calling associated with it. Business work and all work does because all work is done by human beings acting personally in a personal world as sub-creators, providers for ourselves and others, and as stewards and co-laborers with God almighty in sustaining His creation.⁸⁵

In this light, calling to business work is on par with calling to other kinds of work, including full-time ministry work. Business activity is integral to being sub-creators, providers for our own sustenance and for others, to being stewards and co-laborers with God in sustaining His creation. Business truly creates things and wealth. An important note is that the human product of business work is fungible not fixed. Though it may seem so sometimes, and though it can be abused, an economy is not a zero-sum reservoir. It is not a fixed amount in which those who can grab the most win, leaving less for the rest. Businesses can actually expand or create a bigger economy enabling greater wealth for more. Businesses create jobs and livelihoods. Businesses can enable community. Businesses create technology, which though it can be abused⁸⁶, can also enable higher productivity and lessen the burdensomeness of life. Businesses can be the instigator of but is certainly crucial to navigating major social changes, such as the Industrial Revolution and today's technology revolution. But, as in all work to do this well it must do so with serious, deliberative reflection, which all too often does not occur – This is one area where Christians called into business can and should play a major role. And though business can abuse creation, it can also serve as one of the great positive instruments to subdue and manage the natural calamities of this world; and though it can abuse the environment it can also contribute to solutions for sustaining this world through good environmental policies and practices. "... [B]usiness has a special role to play in bringing hope—and not only hope, but actual economic progress—to the billion or so truly indigent people on this planet. Business is, bar none, the best real hope of the poor. And this is one of the noblest callings inherent in business activities; to raise up the

⁸⁵ John D. Beckett, *Loving Monday: Succeeding in Business Without Selling Your Soul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 96-97.

⁸⁶ This is an important point but really for another discussion. Nevertheless, let me point to two good works worth reading to maintain a proper point of view and avoid another common distortion, the uncritical embrace of technology. See Jacques Ellul, *The Technology Society*, trans. by John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964) and Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993)

poor.”⁸⁷ Business is both an ontological expression of who we are created in God’s image and a utilitarian means for realizing the Great Commandment.

Calling is the ontological key to our work and it is the moral rudder in the water. Without a sense of calling, all work including business work will founder and bob with the winds. This will lead to a sense of desperation sometime, if only on the deathbed. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p. 37.

⁸⁸ Matthew 16:26

Conclusion

In conclusion let me review my key points. By our own experience it is very common to perceive reality as two separate pieces of cloth, one sacred and one secular. It is not, however. Created reality is a single piece of cloth, which finds its source and sustenance in the one and only God: Father, Son, and Spirit. Despite the Church's historical struggle to properly articulate this reality and despite history's firm declaration of it in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, The Logos, the church itself too often continues to foster a bifurcated reality at least in its practice and rhetoric. The evangelical church tends to do this in part because of its legacy of truth-defender evidenced by its many battles with Catholicism during the Reformation and with Liberalism and Naturalism that flow from the Enlightenment. This legacy of being a warrior causes a form of cognitive dissonance within the evangelical church so that it has a hard time taking up the core theological categories of anthropology, culture and economics. This must change. Only by rediscovering these crucial theological categories will we be enabled to properly craft a good theology of work. Further the evangelical church's appropriate emphasis but distorted "keyhole" view of on evangelism militates against it forming and maintaining a proper theology and practice of work. The Christian doctrines of creation, anthropology and the incarnation, properly understood, confirm that reality is one whole not two and enable us to see work in its proper light. A good theology of business work is an outgrowth of a good theology of work and economics, as exemplified in the recently developed theory of Economic Personalism. This example should spur evangelicals to enter this fruitful dialogue on Christianity and commerce by plying its highest quality cross-disciplinary thinking. In the end, we must re-embrace the unifying ontological principle of calling. This Christian notion serves as the proper integrative principle which will allow us to see work in general and business work in particular as the valuable and meaningful activities of human life that they are. Integral to the notion of calling is that each of us find our identity and purpose only in our personal relationship with God. God calls us to Himself and the He calls us to particular work in life. Our daily work is imbued with ontological meaning because our human beingness resides in God Himself. Understanding this allows even the lowliest of tasks to become part of our worship. And

even the earthiest tasks, such as business work, can be ennobled and become instruments of our worship.

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

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

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Acton Institute, a website (<http://www.acton.org>) –

The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty is named after the great English historian, Lord John Acton (1834-1902). He is best known for his famous remark: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Inspired by his work on the relation between liberty and morality, the Acton Institute seeks to articulate a vision of society that is both free and virtuous, the end of which is human flourishing. To clarify this relationship, the Institute holds seminars and publishes various books, monographs, periodicals, and articles.

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The Acton Institute's academic investigations are conducted at the [center for academic research](#), called the Center for [Economic Personalism](#). The work produced at the Center includes the disciplines of philosophy, economics, theology, and history, among others, and it includes the contributions of both in-house research fellows and of invited scholars. The principal goal of the Center's investigations is to seek truth by means of the examination and clarification of ideas. The investigations produced at the Acton Institute are delivered widely at conferences with the goal of reaching the academy at large. The papers and monographs produced by the Center's fellows take final form as books published by mainstream academic publishers and as articles accepted in refereed academic journals.

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